

**Valencia Association of Local Elected Officials
(VALEO)
Tuesday November 19, 2019
6:00 p.m.
Belen City Hall Council Chambers
100 S Main Street, Belen, NM 87002
Meeting Minutes**

CALL TO ORDER:

Belen Mayor Jerah R. Cordova called the VALEO meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF Allegiance:

Mayor Jerah R. Cordova led the pledge of allegiance.

INTRODUCTIONS:

Mayor Cordova invited all present to introduce themselves and state their affiliations. The following members introduced themselves. (Sign In Sheet attached)

Bill Brown, Rio Communities
James Harris, Belen Police Department
Roseann Peralta, City of Belen
Chris Ortiz, Village of Los Lunas
Bernard Saiz, Valencia County
Victor Rodriguez Police Chief, City of Belen
Gregory Martin, Village of Los Lunas
Jerah R. Cordova, Mayor, City of Belen
Megan Morgan, First Lady City of Belen
Charles Griego, Mayor, Village of Los Lunas
Jim Winter, Rio Communities
Peggy Gutjahr, Rio Communities
Charles Files, Los Lunas Police Dept. /NM DRE Program
Nancy Stemo, FBI
Buster Whitley, Los Lunas Police Dept.
Leisa Haynes, Rio Communities
Frank Ortega, City of Belen
Wayne Gallegos, City of Belen
Alec Saunders, City of Belen
Rose Mary Sandoval, City of Belen

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mayor Cordova asked for a motion to approve the August 20, 2019 minutes. Frank Ortega made the motion; Wayne Gallegos seconded. Motion carried

NEW BUSINESS:

Mayor Cordova introduced the topic:

DRUG RECOGNITION: DISCUSSION, PREVENTION, STRATEGIES

Belen Police Chief Victor Rodriguez

Chief Rodriguez addressed the group. He stated that he had been in law enforcement for several years and had worked closely with local, state and Federal agencies. He stressed that partnership is critical in the war against drugs; he stated, "Each agency may be confined by its jurisdiction but sadly... crime has no jurisdiction." He is pleased to report a working partnership with Valencia County Sheriff's Dept., Village of Los Lunas, Bosque Farms, Rio Communities, Socorro, and Isleta Police Departments, New Mexico State Police, FBI, Secret Services and DEA. He stated that the community has to understand that drug investigations take time, and have to be handled carefully. He welcomed the next speakers.

SWAT Team Commander for Village of Los Lunas- Detective Buster Whitley and FBI Special Agent Nancy Stemo (Power Point Attached)

They began their presentation stating that there are currently ongoing undercover investigations. For the safety and protection of all involved they requested no photos or videos be taken.

Detective Whitley and Special Agent Stemo shared a power point presentation, they reviewed definitions to familiarize the audience with terms they would be using.

Det. Whitley noted that most of the drug activity currently being investigated originates in Mexico. They stated that the cartels are an active element in our area dealing with drug trafficking, manufacturing and shipping in substances. It was noted that the cartel are a well-funded organization and are blending into the community, some are local business owners. They also stressed that narcotics crimes blend over into other crimes such as homicides, burglary, larceny, auto theft, shoplifting and sex crimes. That is why partnerships with other law enforcement agencies is critical.

The FBI and other Federal and State agencies assist in all areas of crimes from low-level offenses to international levels. HIDA (High Intensity Drug trafficking Area Program provides recognizance/observations at every level. All information is intertwined and the impact is huge. Many law enforcement agencies have a staff shortage making partnerships more important. Sharing information adds a layer of safety, and ensures that other agencies are not looking into the situation and could prevent a potential disaster.

Detective Whitley was asked what should constituents be told when they report a known drug house; they claim that the city officials do not act on it. He stated that even though police are sharing information, the "druggies" also have a network for sharing. He stated that patience is the most important element in these investigations, noting that several steps have to be taken to ensure safety and to ensure that they do not botch up the investigation.

Detective Whitley mentioned that there have been many changes in NM laws that affect the outcome of these crimes. He stated that medical marijuana is out of control. He suggested that we contact our local and Federal partners to encourage them to strengthen drug laws, fund treatment centers, provide early intervention and address the core issues; addiction is a sickness and needs treatment. Otherwise, we will continue to have revolving offenders.

Recently 40 warrants were served in Valencia County based on information received from neighbors, confidential informers, wiretaps, emails, and Facebook. Several warrants met the Federal level criteria for prosecution. These investigations require extreme attention to detail because there are sensitive parameters and civil rights that need to be addressed.

He again reiterated, "Strong partnerships are our best defense."

The program was then turned over to our final speaker.

Charles Files Los Lunas PD and NMDRE Program = New Mexico Drug Recognition Expert (Power Point Attached)

Lieutenant Charles Files introduced the Drug Recognition Program, which deals with impaired driving. The Drug Recognition Expert Program was developed in 1990. It is a designation certified by each State, and is sponsored by the National Highway Traffic Administration. New Mexico currently has 72 experts and 10 instructors; We currently have 8 in Valencia County.

Currently 33 states have legalized the use of medical marijuana and 11 have legalized the use of recreational marijuana. He noted that since marijuana was legalized in Washington State fatalities have doubled. There was a recent survey conducted where 69% of people responding reported that they had driven while impaired. This has created a new category for DWI issues. There are concerns regarding how to legally hold a drug impaired driver accountable. Unlike alcohol, that has a standard .08 limit and a science to back it up, by either blood test or breathalyzer, Marijuana stays in the blood system for a longer period without distinction as to how long it has been in the system. Therefore, it is a complicated process to determine the level of impairment. The fact that there are so many variables poses a challenge to roadside officers. Judges need evidence to hold suspects accountable beyond a reasonable doubt. The program has been presented at several Municipal Judges Conferences. Many judges have received training and are on board with this process, others are hesitant to accept it.

Often times a medical condition mimics a drug impairment. A roadside officer will contact a DRE to conduct an extensive interview to determine if the subject is impaired and to rule out a medical condition.

The DRE Program conducts 1 annual training. The classes are grant funded. The classes are very intense; it is a 3-phase process. The main drawback is the fact that it is such an extensive process; many departments are already short staffed and cannot spare an officer for that length of time. Recruits travel to other states to experience hands on training with different types of drugs and drug users. This portion usually runs for 3 weeks. Some agencies do not see a need for this program; others do not have the manpower.

DRE will be hosting 18- 2-day awareness trainings throughout the state. This training covers signs and symptoms to look for, fieldwork and drug categories.

Q & A's were ongoing throughout the presentations.

The proposed 2020 VALEO meeting dates and Host Communities Schedule was reviewed.

February 18, 2020 – Peralta

May 19, 2020 – Rio Communities

August 18, 2020 – Valencia County

November 17, 2020 – Los Lunas

Mayor Cordova thanked the presenters for their great presentations. He also thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:39 p.m.