



Fife Police Department PRESS RELEASE

12/30/20

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On 12/30/20 the Fife Police Department responded to the Travelodge in Fife to address an on-going issue with a group that was illegally occupying rooms they did not pay for.

While this group's cause, providing homes and wrap-around services for the homeless, was worthy and noble, their actions victimized a local business owner. They created a situation where the business owner was at risk of going out of business and having to lay off 10 employees. Additionally, this group potentially exposed each other, staff members, and others to the COVID-19 virus.

This group's actions and the means they used to achieve their goal was criminal in nature and completely unacceptable to the City of Fife, the Fife Police Department, and our residents and business owners. To resolve this issue, the City of Fife engaged in a deliberate approach that took several days to implement. Procedures have now been put in place to ensure that if something like this were to occur in the future, it would be met with swift and certain actions reaffirming the position that Fife is not a city that is welcoming to criminals or people engaging in criminal activity, no matter how noble or important the underlying cause.

Predicated on conditions, resources, and a desire to resolve this issue without making arrests or having to use force to effect arrests, the City of Fife and the Fife Police Department took a measured approach for a number of reasons that are important to understand.

1. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of jail beds, and issues with booking people into jail, the Fife Police Department, in consultation with our City Attorney and City Manager, drafted a police response regarding unwanted subjects at hotels that were being asked to leave for non-payment. This procedure was established prior to the Governor's order clarifying the moratorium on evictions and how that applied to transient accommodations. Once the order was clarified (identifying 14 days as the point where the eviction moratorium applied to the transient accommodations), we adjusted our response procedure accordingly. This adjustment took into account a lack of ability to book people into jail, the local and national outcry for police to deescalate situations, and the desire to approach homeless issues as a societal problem and not criminal activity.

2. At the time of this event, the procedure was for officers to respond to the scene and ask for voluntary compliance to leave the premises if the person was at the hotel/motel for less than 14 days. If the subject refused to leave, the officer would issue the subject(s) a criminal citation for Trespass, but would not use force to effect an arrest. The purpose was to refrain from escalating incidents necessitating use of force and to allow the process to move through the court system to be adjudicated. This procedure was designed for events involving one or two people. The Fife Police Department did not foresee a circumstance where a large group would take over a large number of rooms with the intent of defrauding the business owner.
3. During the Christmas holiday, the department had a limited number of officers on duty. Coupled with the lack of jail beds, the scenario of a mass arrest situation was untenable and would potentially place officers in the position of having to use force against people for a minor criminal offense. These types of events have been frowned upon by local courts and the public, and have increased liability for the officer, the department, and the City.
4. Information was relayed that the organizers were soliciting protesters to come to the Travelodge to protect them from "eviction" in an effort, in my belief, to force a confrontation between protesters and the police.

It is reported that Fife police officers did not respond appropriately. I have looked into those allegations. Responsibility for the initial response lies with me and not the outstanding men and women of the Fife Police Department. Our procedure at the time was well thought out and based on legal advice, available resources and the conditions that exist due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is clear from this incident that those procedures were inadequate for a group set on criminal behavior to hold a business and a City hostage.

Early on the morning of 12/28/20, City of Fife leadership believed it was likely we could resolve the issues peaceably, without a confrontation or arrest, while protecting the business owner's interests and providing housing and services to those in need. The City secured the approval of the business owner prior to deciding not to take enforcement action. The Fife Police Department called in additional personnel to assist with removing the subjects in case the business owner did not agree to provide the City with time to relocate these individuals. Concurrently, the Fife Police Department was coordinating resources to ensure we would enforce the law, if necessary, safely and with the minimum amount of force necessary.

On 12/30/20 at approximately 1100 hrs, members of the Fife Police Department responded to the Travelodge and, at the request of the business owner, gave lawful orders for all subjects staying at the Travelodge that had not paid for rooms, to leave the property. I am pleased to report that all subjects illegally occupying the Travelodge have voluntarily left the site. Along with Public Health Officials on scene that provided assistance to subjects that identified as Covid-19 positive, the City of Fife also worked

with regional resources to provide a bed, shelter, and alternative housing opportunities.

Additionally, the criminal investigation is ongoing for the subjects who illegally occupied the property, which could include felony level charges.

We are committed to ensuring that this does not happen again and that Fife businesses and residents are not subject to criminal behavior or illegal occupation. Within the confines of the law, public health order and the constitution, similar incidents will be dealt with swiftly and with the criminal justice system's full impact.

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For records requests, please email policerecords@cityoffife.org