Seattle Community Police Commission

VIA EMAIL

June 7, 2021

RE: Police Accountability Recommendations Tracker (PART) development and collaboration

To the Seattle Community,

On April 21, 2021, the Seattle Community Police Commission (CPC) released the Police Accountability Recommendations Tracker (PART), an interactive dashboard that consolidates all recommendations issued by the Seattle Police oversight system since 2018, as well as their implementation status. While this was the first time that these recommendations were all publicly tracked in the same place, this project has long been in the making and was developed in collaboration with all other agencies that comprise the Seattle accountability system. This letter provides more details on how we got here.

The 2017 Accountability Ordinance created Seattle's three-part civilian oversight system to hold the Seattle Police Department (SPD) accountable to its community. Among other functions, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), the Office of Police Accountability (OPA), and the Community Police Commission were all charged with issuing recommendations to the Seattle Police Department on its policies and practices, as well as to one another. While SPD is not required to accept and implement recommendations, the Ordinance states that "An accountability system requires a strong, effective Chief to *implement oversight recommendations* and to create the culture change from within the police department that is necessary to support lasting reform." The success of the system therefore relies on SPD's ability to implement the recommendations put forth by its civilian oversight partners.

The Ordinance also calls on the CPC to "compile and maintain a database of all recommendations and their status." Already in 2017, the CPC began work to build a database that could be regularly updated and eventually shared with the public. In 2018 the CPC and Seattle IT created a SharePoint[1] database that was shared with OIG, OPA, and SPD staff. Since then, and as mandated by the Ordinance, representatives of these four agencies have met quarterly to discuss updates to the recommendations. The agencies would also send CPC staff spreadsheets containing status updates, which the CPC would incorporate into the SharePoint database.

In the Fall of 2020, the CPC was finally able to dedicate staff capacity to advance the final stage of this mandate and create a platform to make the information in the recommendations database public via the Police Accountability Recommendations Tracker (PART), which takes the form of a Tableau[2] interactive dashboard. Over the eight months between September 2020 and April 2021, CPC staff worked with OIG, OPA, and SPD to clean data, add missing recommendations, ensure statuses were up-to-date, and adapt the language and features of the Tracker to contemplate the diversity of work and processes in each of these agencies. OIG, OPA, and SPD thus had multiple opportunities to both update the data (recommendations and status updates) and suggest edits to the public Tracker. Here is an overview of some of these steps:

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[1] SharePoint is a web-based collaborative platform used by the City of Seattle that integrates with Microsoft Office.
[2] Tableau is an interactive data visualization software used by the City of Seattle.

- In October 2020, after some revisions to the SharePoint database, the CPC shared spreadsheets with OIG, OPA, and SPD for their review, ahead of the 2020 Q4 Quarterly Partners Meeting. At this time CPC and SPD staff also discussed SPD concerns about navigating the tables and SPD's policy review schedule. At this point, partners already had access to the full SharePoint database and continued to request access for more members of their teams.
- Between December 2020 and February 2021, the CPC received recommendation status updates from SPD and incorporated them into the database. During this time, staff from all agencies worked together to locate original documents and make sure all recommendations and status updates could be documented and traced.
- In February 2021, the CPC once again shared the full database for partners' review of the data, ahead of the 2021 Q1 Quarterly Partners Meeting. During this meeting, the CPC discussed the next steps for the public-facing tracker. CPC staff also introduced the public-facing tracker project at a public CPC meeting, which partners regularly attend.
- In March 2021, the CPC team shared the first version of the Tracker with OIG, OPA, and SPD (ahead of publication), and worked with their staff to understand their concerns and incorporate their feedback (more details below). The CPC continued to work with partners to incorporate their edits through the April 21 release and since then. CPC also shared the Tracker with community members during a CPC Community Engagement Committee meeting and incorporated their feedback.

Besides providing the actual data that populates the tracker (new recommendations and status updates on existing recommendations) through two quarterly update cycles and many other communications between teams, our system partners – OPA, OIG, and SPD – raised several concerns and provided feedback on how information was displayed. Here are high-level examples of some of their concerns and how the CPC addressed them to ensure that the final product met everyone's needs.

- **OIG** highlighted the need to differentiate between audit recommendations (which follow the Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards) and non-audit suggestions, and mentioned that it would be helpful to have a separate category for OPA recommendations.
  - o After consulting with OIG, CPC staff created a "Type" variable in the database that contemplated these categories, re-coded each recommendation, and added a Tracker filter for type. CPC also re-wrote category definitions using language from OIG and OPA communications and website.
- **OIG** raised a concern about distinguishing between implemented recommendations that OIG has been able to verify from those that OIG has not yet verified.
  - o CPC and OIG worked together to come up with plan for OIG to review all recommendations and add the new status "Reported as implemented" to the recommendations that have not been verified. CPC then created the new status in the database and tracker and updated the data according to OIG's review. CPC also added a definition for this status and an FAQ about whether agencies verify implementation of recommendations. CPC also decided to incorporate this status for our own recommendations so that CPC is transparent about the recommendations it has or has not verified.

- **SPD** expressed concern with the tracker not showing which partner provided which update on a recommendation.
    - The CPC explained that, to this point, all updates had been provider by the agency that received a recommendation. Still, to address the concern, CPC added the name of the partner after each update ("[SPD]") in the entire database and displayed that information on the tracker (in the tooltip). CPC also added an FAQ and definition explaining that overall, to this point, updates have come from the receiving agency.
- **SPD** and **OPA** were both concerned that the status of some of OPA's Management Action Recommendations (MARs) did not match those on the OPA website. This is because, after its initial review, the CPC had found that OPA's status "Active" was too broad and not sufficiently transparent. As a result, based on updates that SPD had provided, CPC differentiated recommendations between the ones that had gotten no response ("No response") and those that had had some action ("Pending" or "In progress").
    - However, after further conversations with SPD and OPA, the CPC created a new "Active (OPA)" status and changed the status of every MAR that said "Active" on the OPA website to also say "Active (OPA)" on the Tracker. The CPC also defined this status using the language on the OPA website.

Beyond all the edits that the CPC team worked on to address partners' concerns, the CPC also reserved the right to disagree with partners' input at points, always prioritizing clarity and transparency. For instance, SPD expressed concern with its quarterly update tables being publicized, since they are long, clunky spreadsheets that were not designed for public consumption. While the CPC agreed that these documents are not accessible, we believed documenting where updates came from was paramount. We thus made several edits to mitigate this concern and help navigate the tables, while choosing to keep them public. Finally, SPD and OPA at several points expressed that some information, such as due dates or recommendation updates, should not be shared because the CPC does not always have the latest information. To that point, the CPC only has the information that we are sent by partners and we thus believe that the solution is for updates to be exchanged more frequently.

While publicizing this Tracker was a tremendous step in increasing transparency in Seattle's Police Accountability System, the work does not stop here. First, the last few months shed light on several process-related flaws that the accountability agencies can work together to address and improve our lines of communication and updates. The CPC is thus kick-starting a workgroup with staff from different agencies to collectively improve how we issue, respond to, track, close out, and verify recommendations to one another. Second, all the work put into issuing and tracking recommendations is meaningless if recommendations are not turned into real, tangible action to improve Seattle Police policies and practices. We are hopeful that this tool, as well as the partners' ongoing collaboration to remove hurdles that are process-related, will serve to catalyze this effort and these recommendations into implemented change.

Sincerely,

The Seattle Community Police Commission