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Police oversight entity determines that evacuation of East Precinct did not violate law or policy

Seattle — Today the Office of Police Accountability (OPA) released its [investigation](#) into the June 8, 2020, evacuation of Seattle Police Department (SPD) property and personnel from the East Precinct, which preceded the establishment of the autonomous zone known as CHOP/CHAZ. The investigation examined whether the then Chief of Police and one of her Assistant Chiefs violated law and/or policy as these events unfolded. OPA ultimately found that no such violations occurred on the part of either individual.

After the killing of George Floyd, there were nightly protests around SPD's East Precinct. These protests were unprecedented in scope and directed at law enforcement. For over a week, SPD closed off street access with fence barricades to maintain a perimeter around the East Precinct. This decision was motivated by several factors, including intelligence from the FBI that government buildings would be targeted by protesters. SPD was also concerned because of the recent burning of the Minneapolis Police Third Precinct, the potential risk of fire to the East Precinct and surrounding structures, and the presence of weapons, evidence, and computer systems inside the building. Ultimately, the street fencing was ineffective and repeatedly dismantled by demonstrators. Contentious, frequently violent encounters between protesters and SPD members ensued. By early June, there was significant political pressure for SPD to change tactics and de-escalate tensions.

On June 8, the Mayor's Office directed the Chief to remove the barricades and permit demonstrators to pass along the street. The Chief did so and delegated the specifics of maintaining continuous police operations within the confines of the East Precinct to her Assistant Chief. Ultimately, the Assistant Chief, in consultation with other commanders, ordered all police personnel to evacuate the East Precinct facility. OPA found this to be a reasonable decision based on the information available and the Assistant Chief's need to protect both the East Precinct and the physical safety of protesters and SPD officers under his command. According to OPA Director Andrew Myerberg, "To find otherwise would be to engage in hindsight analysis divorced from the immense pressures and time constraints that the Assistant Chief faced at the time. No one can definitively say that any alternative strategy—even if one were feasible—would have produced better results."

Following the evacuation, OPA received complaints alleging the Chief failed to take responsibility for her command by ordering—or allowing through her designee—the evacuation of SPD personnel from the East Precinct. That the Chief delegated to her Assistant Chief, who opted to de-escalate by withdrawing personnel to a safer location, was not a violation of law or SPD policy.

Complaints further alleged the evacuation led to the establishment of CHOP/CHAZ and a subsequent period of lawlessness in the area. OPA found no consensus within SPD command or the Mayor's Office that opening the streets around the East Precinct—and the ensuing evacuation of personnel—would result in the

establishment of CHOP/CHAZ. "Rather," said Myerberg, "evidence indicates that the Chief and Assistant Chief made the best decisions they could under high-stress, unprecedented circumstances."

SPD continued providing police services after the evacuation to the best of their ability and began planning for how to resecure the East Precinct. However, given the number of protesters in the area and the clear presence of armed resistance, OPA found it reasonable that SPD waited to resecure the area in a coordinated manner.

While OPA found the decision making surrounding this case to be reasonable and consistent with policy, Director Myerberg ultimately recommended that SPD communicate certain details regarding decisions of public concern in a more transparent and timely fashion going forward. "In this case, the public and media were forced to speculate as to what occurred," said Myerberg. "In OPA's estimation, this created a sense of distrust and a belief that there was something nefarious at play, when, in fact, there wasn't."

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