

Mayor Justin Bibb names his 5 Cleveland community police district commanders a day after city council

Written by Kathy

Thursday, 08 December 2022 00:12 - Last Updated Monday, 12 December 2022 04:38



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CLEVELAND, Ohio-Cleveland Mayor Justin M. Bibb, Public Safety Director Karrie D. Howard and Police Chief Wayne Drummond on Tuesday announced changes to the Cleveland Division of Police command staff, including naming the mayor's selected five community police district commanders, two of whom replace two demoted police district commanders who were appointed by the mayor's predecessor, former mayor Frank Jackson. Both Jackson and Bibb are Black.

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None of the announced police department leadership appointments include women.

The new police district commanders, who earn roughly \$120,000 annually, and other police leaders were sworn in Tuesday afternoon.

The command changes took effect immediately, Mayor Bibb, 35, said in a press release on Tuesday.

"We are pleased to appoint these outstanding leaders to the office of the Division of Police and to further the mayor's vision for modern policing," Public Safety Director Howard said at the swearing in at city hall "Each individual appointed today is committed to the mission of the city of Cleveland and brings a wealth of experience to the command team."

Police Chief Drummond added, "Every staffing change we make is strategic and purposeful. The Division of Police is focused on proactive efforts to keep our residents and our neighborhoods safe."

The city of Cleveland remains a party to a court-monitored consent decree for police reforms along with the U.S. Department of Justice that was implemented in 2015 behind an entourage of police complaints and the police killing deaths of several unarmed Blacks, including "137 shots" victims Timothy Russell and Malissa Williams in 2012, and 12-year old Tamir Rice and 38-year old Tanisha Anderson in 2014. The city and the Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association reached a collective bargaining agreement this summer that provides for an unprecedented 11 percent raise by 2024 for rank-and-file police officers.

So who got promoted and who got demoted by Mayor Bibb's administration regarding the five community police district commanders?

In short, former fifth district commander Sammy Morris is now deputy police chief of field operations over all five police districts, and the respective commanders over those five districts

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as of Tuesday are Jarrod Schlacht (District 1), Thomas Stacho (District 2), Robert Tucker (District 3), Maurice Brown (District 4), and Johnny Johnson (District 5)

Schlacht replaces demoted former first district commander Michael Butler, Stacho remains on as second district commander, and Tucker replaces former third district commander Dorothy Todd, now deputy police chief and second in command under Chief Drummond. A former lieutenant, Brown replaces the reassigned former fourth district commander Brian Kuntz, now an assistant to Chief Drummond, and Johnson replaces Morris to lead the fifth district.

Johnson and Brown are Black.

It really was not a shakeup other than the demotion of former third district commander Brian Kuntz, who is White, from a line position as a police district commander to a staff position as commander and assistant to the police chief, which follows the demotion last week of former first district commander Michael Butler to lieutenant, Butler also White.

Morris was the only Black district commander during Jackson's fourth term and last year as mayor, Jackson, 75 and the city's longest serving mayor, opting not to seek reelection last year and instead retiring after 16 years as mayor. While the five district community police district commanders remain majority White after Tuesday, two of them are now Black, commanders Johnson and Brown.

The Cleveland Division of Police is largely White and its patrol officers are overwhelmingly White. Cleveland is a largely Black major American city of some 372,000 people and most of the residents live below the poverty line.

A former banker and non-profit executive who interned when he was younger under Barack Obama when Obama was junior U.S. senator, Bibb officially became mayor in January of this year after winning a nonpartisan runoff election in November of 2021 over then city council president Kevin Kelley, a Frank Jackson ally and judge-elect whom he beat with 63 percent of the vote, though he had never held public office before.

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As to the city's five aforementioned police district commanders and the communities they serve, Cleveland Police District 1 includes the neighborhoods of Park-Fulton, Edgewater, Tremont, Ohio City, Gordon Square and Lorain Denison., District 2 Park-Fulton, Edgewater, Tremont, Ohio City, Gordon Square and Lorain Denison and District 3, downtown, Central, Hough, Fairfax and Little Italy. The Fourth District encompasses Buckeye-Shaker, Larchmere, Lee-Harvard, Slavic Village, Mt. Pleasant, and Warner-Turney, and Union-Miles neighborhoods, and the fifth district, Collinwood, Glenville, Lakeshore and Waterloo.

The police departmental changes come as the new mayor is crafting his cabinet and administration and making other changes and were issued just a day after city council, on Monday approved a 13-member commission selected by the mayor and city council under ballot police reform initiative Issue 24. Issue 24 is a charter amendment crafted by family members of people killed by police and pushed by the Ohio ACLU. It was approved last year by Cleveland voters and created a 13-member civilian police oversight review dubbed the Cleveland Community Police Commission. The mayor appoints 10 commission members per the charter change and city council, led by Council President Blaine Griffin, who is Black, approves the other three

The community police commission is not new but what is different under Issue 24 is the broadened power it has to investigate police conduct and to recommend policy changes and recommend police discipline, not withstanding any applicable or conflicting provisions of the police union's collective bargaining agreement that might negate such authority.

Those commission appointments, which were approved by city council at its regular meeting on Monday, have been steeped in controversy as the framers of Issue 24 and Black Lives Matter say grassroots activists in the trenches of police reform matters and Black victims of crime were left off the commission in place of suburbanites, and some corporate types. They also say that victims of excessive force and previously incarcerated people who have changed their life around were excluded.

Issue 24 framers further complain that the commission appointments, all of them somehow made by the mayor and city hall under the charter amendment changes, do not comply with the requirements of the charter relative to community involvement and the required backgrounds of the 13 largely Black commission members, something the mayor and city law director deny.

Members of the new community police commission do include a few community advocates and

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were sworn in at city hall Monday evening. They are Dr. John Adams, Shandra Benito, James M. Chura, Charles Donaldson Jr., Pastor Kyle Earley, Alana Garrett-Ferguson, Cait Kennedy, and Gregory Reaves, Jan Ridgeway, Piet van Lier, Audrianna Rodriguez, Teri Wang, and Sharena Zayed. Several of the members do not even reside in the city and one of them lives in Berea.

The mayor calls the new police community commission diverse and a reflection of the community and said that Black Lives Matter and some of the framers of Issue 24 who are upset over the appointments to the commission and who picketed him on city hall steps last month as he made the announcement and introduced commission members to the media had input regarding the selection process.

The mayor said that their picket was poorly organized.

"They had four people," Mayor Bibb said in a subsequent television interview in response to the protest, though the mayor actually campaigned for Issue 24 when he was running for mayor and promised community inclusiveness and police accountability if elected.

Activists in general say that they were not included as to the crafting of the language of Issue 24 by the framers of the successful ballot initiative.

"They did not include us at all," said activist Alfred Porter Jr, president of Black on Black Crime Inc.

Those activists who say they were left out of the planning of Issue 24 say that they question why all 13 commission appointments come from city hall and are not inclusive of appointments from groups like the NAACP and ACLU. They said the charter amendment crafted by Cleveland attorney Subodh Chandra, a former law director under former mayor Jane Campbell who settled the Tamir Rice case for \$6 million in 2016, rather than a seasoned Civil Rights attorney, is not community oriented, and that Black Cleveland activists and the Black community got the shaft. A reputable Civil rights attorney, say community activists, would have likely been more inclined to draft charter amendment language that protected activists and the Black community in terms of community inclusiveness and other police reform measures.

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We interviewed former president Barack Obama one-on-one when he was campaigning for president. As to the Obama interview,

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