

KKK Rally/Protest – July 8, 2017

Thank you Mr. Mayor and Members of Council. I just wanted to take a few minutes to talk about the events of July 8th. And to give you some background on the planning and work of the City and our community in advance of the KKK rally.

The Charlottesville Police Department spent a significant amount of time preparing for the rally at Justice Park. From the beginning the department was committed to protecting the safety of everyone who came to Justice Park that day. They worked closely with our regional partners and the Virginia State Police. While the police were finalizing the preparations for the event, the City was working with our community partners to host Unity events at the Jefferson School, the Ix Art Park and the Sprint Pavilion. Hundreds of people attended those activities in an effort to celebrate our diversity and to send a powerful message to members of the KKK who came to Charlottesville to preach hate and intolerance.

As the day wore on most of the attention was centered on Justice Park.

- A lively and largely peaceful, crowd began gathering in the Park at around noon. It grew in size in the next couple of hours.**
- Due to the increasing size of the assembled counter-protest crowd, additional Charlottesville Police (CPD) and Virginia State Police (VSP) resources were brought out to the park site. The purpose of the additional resources was to secure access for all to the park and to ensure the safety of all parties in attendance. We had to delay the arrival of the KKK because of the blocked entrance to the park.**
- The officers escorted the KKK members into their permitted area at 3:45 p.m.**
- Although the KKK had been granted an hour on their permit, police ordered them to discontinue their rally and depart a little more than 30 minutes after they began their rally. The members of the KKK complied and, with the assistance of CPD and VSP resources, left the park at approximately 4:25 p.m., and made their way to their vehicles**

in the parking garage behind the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court.

- **A large number of people (approximately 200) followed the KKK and law enforcement to that garage and proceeded to impede the exit of the KKK members' vehicles from the garage. Despite being advised to clear the street, the assembled crowd refused and at least one item was thrown at the officers. City of Charlottesville Police made a decision at that point to declare an "Unlawful Assembly." Additional officers responded to this location to clear the road and the garage driveway of the protesters, so the KKK members could depart the area and leave our City. The law enforcement response was to open the road and to prevent any protestors from being injured by exiting vehicles.**
- **Soon after, the KKK members exited the garage, law enforcement officers stood down and began walking back to the park. A large number of the crowd did not disperse, but instead grew more aggressive towards law enforcement, both verbally and physically.**
- **At one point, a protestor began spraying the VSP troopers on the front line with pepper gel, a variant of OC spray. An empty canister of this substance was later discovered on the ground.**
- **Despite being advised repeatedly to disperse, the crowd continued to get more aggressive towards the law enforcement personnel staged at the park. As a result, the state police and CPD command staff began discussing the need to deploy a dispersion irritant (more commonly known as tear gas) as the most effective non-physical, non-violent means of dispersing the crowd.**
 - **VSP Tactical Field Force troopers were advised to put on their gas masks, which was done in full view of the protestors.**
 - **The CPD made public announcements asking the protesters to disperse and advising that tear gas would be deployed if the crowd did not begin to leave.**

- About 200 protestors remained in place many of them locking arms in an effort to keep the police from clearing the street. At that point three canisters were deployed and the crowd quickly dispersed. And the police returned to the park.
- Deployment of the gas prevented physical confrontations with the protestors; safely diffused the situation; quickly dispersed the crowd; and prevented additional arrests.

No one from the city or the Virginia State Police came into the day with a goal of using the chemical irritant. It was only used to help disperse a group of folks who had been asked numerous times to leave the immediate area. When it became obvious that they were not going to leave, the police felt this was a much better option than physically removing the crowd from the street.

Despite some of the criticism we have been hearing during the last week or so I believe our police officers did an impressive job in exceptionally difficult circumstances. We had over 1,000 people in and around Justice Park, passions were running high - and only three people suffered injuries that warranted trips to the hospital – two were heat related, the other alcohol. There were only 22 arrests that day, the great majority of which were misdemeanor charges.

I credit most of our residents who came out to the park that day for making it a safe event and for standing up to the hate of the KKK. But I also give credit to Chief Thomas, his staff, the Virginia State Police and our regional partners for working together to ensure everyone's safety. The Chief and his team have been reviewing the events of that day and are committed to learning from it as we prepare for the next event that will come our way.

Thank you.