



Morgantown Police Department

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NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

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Morgantown Police Respond to Riot on North Spruce Street

At approximately 2:57 p.m. on February 1, 2019, officers of the Morgantown Police Department responded to a request for assistance from West Virginia University Police on North Spruce Street, in the “Cooperative Zone” near the campus of West Virginia University. A large crowd had gathered and was consuming alcohol openly, sledding, snowboarding and blocking the roadway. The crowd was ordered to move from the street by West Virginia University officials so that the roadway could be treated.

The City of Morgantown Public Works Department could not run the snow plows or treat the streets in the area. Officers of the Morgantown Police Department attempted to escort the plow down the street in order to clear the street of pedestrians. While attempting to plow the street, members of the crowd and people that congregated on the porches began throwing beer bottles, liquor bottles, rocks and other projectiles at the officers and the Public Works crews.

Officers sought cover behind a snow plow and three officers deployed pepper ball munitions in order to cover the retreat of other workers and officers in the area. Those officers fired at the buildings where the projectiles were being thrown from. The officers targeted the building above the people throwing the projectiles causing the pepper balls to disintegrate on the building and the powder to fall onto the crowd to disrupt their activities as the officers and workers were able to retreat to a safe area.

Morgantown Police declared the incident a riot at approximately 3:50 p.m. and ordered the crowd to dissipate after retreating. The officers requested all available mutual aid units to respond to the area and deputies from the Monongalia County Sheriff’s Office and every on-duty unit for the Morgantown Police Department and West Virginia University Police Department responded to the scene.

Officers issued a second notice to disperse from the area, which again was refused by the crowd. Officers of the Morgantown Police Department deployed a Long-Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) and attempted to disperse the crowd using loud noise. An LRAD is a directional loud speaker that

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emits a steady annoying noise. The crowd then set a fire with debris in the area in the middle of the street.

Officers then deployed into strategic areas and gave additional instructions to disperse from the area and clear the street. The crowd continued to refuse to comply. Officers then redeployed the LRAD in a different direction to the crowd. A large portion of the crowd then began to disperse when the LRAD was turned on. After about five minutes, more than half of the crowd dispersed and the remaining people were confrontational and continued to add items to the street fire and throw objects towards the officers.

After the remaining crowd failed to disperse following the use of verbal commands and the use of the LRAD, officers were given permission to fire two (2) smoke grenade rounds onto the street towards the crowd. The rounds were deployed on the street and not fired into the crowd and the smoke filled the area. After the use of the two (2) rounds, the crowd then dispersed quickly with no further action needed. Officers remained in the area and spoke with several people on porches of the houses.

Public Works crews moved into the area and cleared the streets and the fire was extinguished with the snow plow and snow from the area. Officers and Public Works personnel cleared the scene at approximately 5:00 p.m.

No one has been charged currently since the officers did not have to engage in physical contact with any of the people involved in this incident. One person was reported to have received a contusion during this incident but did not require emergency medical treatment. No officers or workers were injured as a result of this incident.

Staff of the Morgantown Police Department will be reviewing all the body camera footage, statements and surveillance video of the incident as part of the review of the use of force. The Morgantown Police Department reviews all use of force incidents for legality as well as compliance with department procedures and training. Additionally, officers of the Morgantown Police Department will be working with the West Virginia University Police Department, Monongalia County Sheriff's Department, West Virginia University staff and, where appropriate, charges will be filed following the review of body camera, surveillance video and social media posts.

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Ed Preston

Ed Preston
Chief of Police

*The Morgantown Police Department is committed to its goal of eliminating crime in our city. Citizens are encouraged to become a **“Partner in Policing”**, by reporting suspected criminal activity to Morgantown Police Department Switchboard at (304) 284-7522. If you need immediate Police attention or a crime is in progress call 911.*