



City of Graham Police Department

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Graham Police Department Media Release

For Immediate Release

Contact:

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On 10/31/2020 Reverend Greg Drumwright organized a march to the downtown historic courthouse. When the Graham Police Department learned of this we reached out to Mr. Drumwright in order to plan the event. He was originally directed to the Graham City Council to petition for permission to have a temporary road closure to accommodate the march. Mr. Drumwright missed the deadline to get his road closure on the agenda for the city council meeting on 10/13/2020. He was directed by the council to meet with Chief M.K. Cole to coordinate the event due to the lack of a picket/demonstration ordinance for the City of Graham. A meeting was scheduled with Mr. Drumwright on 10/20/2020. At that time the Graham Police Department provided several possible options that detailed route and rally points. None of our options included a road closure for the duration of the event due to its proximity to the voting poll located at 201 W. Elm St. A road closure where he requested, Courtsquare, would have limited access and available parking for the polling site. An agreement for road closure was not made at that meeting and Mr. Drumwright was directed to the Alamance County Sheriff's Office for the issuance of a permit to use county property at the historic courthouse as a rally location. Once we confirmed the permit was issued the Graham Police Department made provisions to provide traffic control and public safety to those participating in the march. We made arrangements to utilize sidewalks on the North East and North West corners of courtsquare, to include sesquicentennial park, to accommodate any overflow participants in the march. We also created a section to keep counter demonstrators separated from the group by creating a zone away from the rally point. Mr. Drumwright was provided a copy of our public safety plan so he would be aware of the route and expectations. Those plans detailed that the blocking of a roadway by participants was a prohibited activity that would be strictly enforced. During the march the participants were allowed to stop several times so that Rev. Drumwright could address the group. Once they arrived at courtsquare they paused in the roadway for approximately 8 minutes and 40 seconds. After approximately 9 minutes traffic began backing up in all direction around courtsquare causing a traffic and safety hazard to include march organizers pulling vehicles into courtsquare in the wrong direction. At this time the crowd was given the command to clear the roadway and to move to the permitted area on courthouse property or one of the two areas designated by Graham Police. When the crowd failed to disperse, after several verbal commands, officers with the Graham Police Department utilized a crowd control measure that consisted of spraying a pepper based vapor onto the ground. At that time the crowd began moving to the designated areas and the rally resumed. As a result of actions that occurred within the rally, on courthouse grounds, the assembly reached a level of conduct that led to the rally being deemed unsafe and unlawful by unified command. The order to disperse was given to the crowd with a 5 minute warning. Warnings were issued at the 3 minute mark, the two minute mark and a final warning was provided after five minutes had passed. The warnings included that if they failed to disperse force would be used and you would be subject to arrest. Several people remained after the final warning and officers again deployed a pepper based vapor onto the ground to assist in the dispersing the crowd. At no time during this event did any member of the Graham Police Department directly spray any participant in the march with chemical irritants. The crowd then dispersed and vehicular traffic around courtsquare resumed.

During the rally the Graham Police Department made 8 arrests for different offenses to include Resist Delay and obstruct, Failure to disperse, and one count of assault on a law enforcement officer. Demographic details will be released on a later date.

Prior to this march the Graham Police Department initially had contact with the organizer. However, the organizer failed to establish viable communication with our department for the planning portion of the rally.