

## Emails, texts detail discussion of Danville - Danville Register & Bee (VA) - April 26, 2018

April 26, 2018 | Danville Register & Bee (VA) | John Crane

It was about 2 a.m. when Danville City Manager Ken Larking got the call about the officer-involved fatal shooting of 25-year-old **Juan Markee Jones** on April 8.

Larking was asleep in Charleston, South Carolina, where he was visiting family.

"I was pretty tired, but when I heard about it, I was very concerned about everyone involved ... the suspect and also our officers," Larking said Thursday.

Deputy Chief Dean Hairston was the one who called both Larking and Police Chief Scott Booth, who was in the Northern Neck of Virginia for a family medical emergency.

"Whenever there is an officer-involved [shooting], there is concern for the safety of the officers" and what has happened in the community, Booth said.

"I got called very shortly after it happened," Booth said, unable to recall the exact time.

Through a Freedom of Information Act request, the Danville Register & Bee obtained copies of communications between city officials, including emails and text messages, in the hours following the shooting.

Police shot an unarmed Jones shortly after 1 a.m. at a wooded area along Sunset Drive following a call from a woman complaining of a domestic assault at a North Main Street business. Police body-camera video shows officers firing at Jones as he abruptly whirls toward them with arms outstretched by his chest.

Discussion in the officials' messages involve the atmosphere at SOVAH Health-Danville where Jones was transported, use of grammar as a news release on the shooting was being prepared and reasons for releasing the police body-worn camera video of the shooting.

"The suspect has passed away," Hairston wrote in a text message to Larking at 2:13 a.m. "Family at hospital irate and making threats. Pitts. Co. [Pittsylvania County] deputies at hospital assisting."

At 9:25 a.m., Booth sends a copy of a draft new release to Larking, who responds at 10 a.m.

"There is a switch to passive voice in the sentence about him [Jones] being shot by officers," Larking writes to Booth. "Perhaps it should be an active voice, like ... 'In response to the perceived threat, officer(s) shot the suspect.'"

Larking told the Register & Bee the recommendation was just for grammar purposes.

"I'm an English major," the city manager said. "It's one of those ... when I see it, I try to correct it."

However, Larking said he left it up to the Danville Police Department and had no input as to what information would be in the final version of the press release.

There are few differences between the draft Larking saw and the version released to the media nearly 13 hours after emergency dispatchers received the first calls for help.

The main difference lies in the description of Jones' sudden turn toward officers already poised with pistols aimed at him.

The final version describes the failed attempt to subdue Jones with a Taser and states "The adult males suspect then suddenly turned on the officers in a threatening manner."

It was a description that left many unanswered questions.

The draft version offered more description of Jones' sudden movement: "After the unsuccessful Taser attempt, the man suddenly turned pulling his hidden hand from his waistband as if he was pointing a firearm at the Officers."

Larking informed Danville City Councilmen of the shooting by text message between 9:30 and 10 a.m. Sunday, after calling them.

If it's a matter of public interest that will cause council members to be questioned about it, Larking said, then he will pass that information to them.

"It's my job to make sure the City Council is as informed as possible on things we're dealing with," he added. "It's to keep the council informed so they can speak to their constituents in the best way possible."

Booth said the news release was approved by the Virginia State Police, which is investigating the shooting, before it was released to the public.

The release, Booth said, was much more detailed than others he has seen during his career.

"We're trying to be as transparent as possible," Booth said.

As for the release of the body-cam video of the shooting, Larking emailed the mayor and other council members at 2:10 p.m. that Tuesday to let them know the video would be released to the public that afternoon.

"The reason is because there is a growing false narrative that the person who was shot was not posing a threat and we want to be as transparent as possible," Larking wrote.

He had sent a statement to councilmen at 10:42 a.m. Monday letting them know that Booth spoke to Jones' mother and planned to visit her and possibly show her the body-cam video.

It also told them Booth had planned to meet with the Danville Ministerial Alliance to discuss what happened and show footage of the video, if he were able to show it to Jones' mother first.

When video was released to the public Tuesday afternoon, Larking asked Booth about it via cellphone text at 3:17 p.m.

"How did the video release go?"

"Doing it now," Booth responded. "So far so good. Family is upset. Black Panther party is in town and was visiting w family."

"All media represented?" Larking said.

"Yes."

At 4:32.p.m. Wednesday, Larking informs council members by email of a protest happening at City Hall.

"There is currently a small protest occurring at City Hall on the Court Street side," Larking wrote. "If you would like to have access to the building through another door, let me know and we will make arrangements."