



MEDIA RELEASE

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City of Burlington Selects Next Police Chief

Burlington, NC – The City of Burlington announces the selection of George “Rich” Austin, Jr. to the position of Chief of Police. Austin was selected from a pool of 32 applicants which drew interest both locally and nationally. The selection process included rigorous assessment and screening by both outside assessors and internal teams. Austin will step into this role following the retirement of J. Jeffrey Smythe, who served as Burlington’s Police Chief for eight years.

Austin comes to the City of Burlington from Milton, GA where he has served as Police Chief since January 2017. He has 32 years of experience in municipal policing, including 24 years of service with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department.

During his time in Milton, Austin initiated several innovative initiatives including revamping the department’s use of force policy, restructuring policies to ensure professional accountability and departmental efficiency, creating a Chief’s Advisory Board, enhancing community engagement, and spearheading and maintaining the department’s state and national accreditation.

While serving in Charlotte, Austin held many command-level roles including Area Commander, Watch Commander, Executive Officer of Field Services (Patrol), Executive Officer of Administrative Services, and Internal Affairs Commander. As an officer, Austin served on a team that led the CMPD from traditional policing to the community-oriented policing for which the department has been nationally recognized. This included many years working as a neighborhood officer in the historic Grier Heights community located just outside of downtown Charlotte. While serving in that capacity, Austin was recognized with the City of Charlotte Community Relations Award.

Austin has had significant law enforcement leadership training, including the Police Executive Research Forum’s (PERF) Senior Management Institute for Police and the Northwestern University School of Police Staff and command. He has also completed extensive training through the FBI Law Enforcement Executive Development Association (FBI-LEEDA).

Austin also holds a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, a master's degree in Criminal Justice from University of Cincinnati, a master's degree in Public Administration from University of North Carolina at Pembroke as well as a doctorate in Public Administration from California Baptist University.

“After hearing feedback from many audiences in our community we were able to develop a profile for Burlington’s ideal candidate that led us to Chief Austin. These feedback sessions were comprised of approximately fifty members of the community through in-person and virtual feedback sessions, 163 anonymous online surveys submitted by the public, virtual & in-person feedback from Burlington Police Department staff members, and feedback sessions with members of the public safety profession in our county, region and across the state. He is a dedicated, transformational leader that is highly motivated, well-trusted by his colleagues and the community he serves, and is solution-oriented. He has demonstrated the ability to motivate teams to pursue excellence, including noticeable crime reduction utilizing fair and impartial policing practices,” says City Manager Hardin Watkins.

Austin is a native of Charlotte and plans to relocate to the Burlington area over the coming weeks. “I am so excited to join the Burlington Community and look forward to being back in my home state. It is such an honor to be chosen to lead the exceptional men and women of the Burlington Police Department. The department has a national reputation for excellence, and I am thrilled at this great opportunity to serve in such a wonderful community-engaged city.” says Austin of his new role. “My family and I are looking forward to moving to Burlington and immersing ourselves in the community,” he adds. Austin will be joined by his wife, Ashley, and their eleven-year-old daughter, Claire.

Austin plans to begin his new duties at the Burlington Police Department on September 27, 2021. An announcement including details of a swearing in ceremony for Chief Austin will be forthcoming.

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Our Mission:

“The City of Burlington is dedicated to providing high quality municipal services within our diverse community in a friendly, professional and efficient manner in order to promote the safety, health, and quality of life of residents and employees.”

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