

Committee on Police Reform and Reinvention

Meeting: November 18, 2020

Meeting Minutes

Recorded by Susannah Amiteye

Attendees:

- Mayor Larry Woolbright
- Police Chief David Bush
- Lori Acee (Chairperson)
- Susannah Amiteye
- Kelly Gregory
- Ray Otten
- Joe Stapf

Not in attendance:

- Lori Riggs

Observers: Liz Kormos, Gina Marozzi

Proceedings

Lori Acee: The task tonight is to conclude our review of any functions of the police, and discuss resources needed for the Ballston Spa Police. Pages 19-21 in the Reform and Reinvention guide.

Lori reviews the charge for the committee:

- Review the needs of the community served by its police agency
- Evaluate the department's current policies and practices
- Establish policies that allow police to safely and effectively conduct their duties
- Involve the entire community in the discussion
- Develop policy recommendations resulting from this review
- Offer a plan for public comment
- Present the plan to the local legislative body to ratify or adopt it
- Certify adoption of the plan to the state budget director on or before April 1, 2021

Chief Bush has sent Police Procedures:

- Mental illness or in crisis
- Bicycle Patrol Policy

- Use of Force Policy
- Electronic Control Weapons
- Also, Incidence Report

Mayor also sent NYCOM Survey on Police Reform and Reinvention

We should review staffing levels, budgeting and equipping the police department.

Resourcing

Next set of questions is about resourcing. Chief Bush answered questions:

- What are the staffing needs, and should components be civilianized?
 - Only have Crossing Guards and the Enforcement Officer, who is not a police officer
- Any functions performed by non-uniformed officers?
 - No
- How should the police get involved in crowd control?
 - Normally without the pandemic, we're attached to the Saratoga County fairground. 5K-15K people per day can attend the fair
 - We handle it when it needs to be handled, and we don't have a lot of that here
 - Big talk is the demilitarization and military surplus gear. We don't have any of that. The most we have is a protective vest. We have a non-lethal force shotgun (currently out of service)
 - We react to the crowds and determine:
 - 1. Public safety
 - 2. Participant safety (protest or demonstration)
 - 3. Officer safety
 - Ratio of police officer to crowd: probably 1 police officer to 500 people
- Larry: Police presence was there over the summer during the recent "gatherings" (demonstrations) in town. No situations, smooth. Police officers stand back and observe
 - Susannah: Spoke about the police at the Black Lives matter demonstrations over the summer. Tensions were high, but police were completely appropriate and supportive
- Issues at the Fairground?
 - Normally the events run really smoothly. The only thing is the beer tent during the fair which can become unruly. There are always police at the beer hall
 - Fair also performs their own security to work the gates and crossing gates, but they are not officers
 - State police and County police are at the fair; they have a booth. Usually manned by corrections officers or police dispatchers, not playing an enforcement role
- De-escalation efforts?
 - Chief would like something on de-escalation in the handbook. De-escalation training is handled at the police academy. It needs to be ongoing

Incidence Report

- Chief: The statistics are not reflective of "normal." In the beginning of Covid, there was not a lot to report on. That's very unusual. Half or less of the normal number of calls

- Mental Health is a huge topic right now.
 - We have a core of officers that handle the situation very well. There was an incident with a machete, where an officer could have used deadly physical force but have not resorted to that. Chief is proud of the officers
- Mayor: Looking at the statistics, Jan 2020: 7 MHU calls. Oct 2020: 11 calls.
- Chief: Mental Health is reflective of the community and society, and long winter months. There could be a long stretch with no calls, and then a month with 12
- Acronyms
 - PDMVA—property damage motor vehicle accident
 - PIMVA—personal injury motor vehicle accident
- Domestic/MHU cross-over: Sometimes mental health crosses over into crime (murder-suicide)
- Have you seen any models in other departments where outside MH professionals collaborate with police?
 - One of the issues is that this happens spur of the moment. Not enough time to make a phone call, you have to go.
 - We need to determine: is this person a danger to himself or to anyone else? This needs to be decided quickly
 - Must try to coax that person into mental health voluntarily
 - If they do not go voluntarily, a MH professional must sign an order to take them in involuntarily
 - May not be practical to partner. Decisions are being done quickly

Training

- Should there be refresher training on mental health for police officers?
 - Chief: Would be helpful. These things cost money.
- Mayor: We can afford training. We have made an effort to increase training in all aspects across the Village. Hiring personnel would be another thing.
- Chief: He is a police instructor who can instruct all of these courses. It's hard to get everyone together and pay them. Firearms training needs to be done over 4 days
- NYMIR—insurance company, has online training that officers can do
 - Chief: Does not replace classroom training with role play and feedback, but does serve a purpose
 - Extensive training is available online
- Lori: May be able to do Zoom training in addition to online training
- Lori: Training is available on mental health, domestic violence, autism. Any training can be helpful. Sometimes nice to have a MH professional give feedback. We may have to dig a little deeper to support the police department
- Chief: Online is not enough but may be enough to support

Police Procedures

- Bicycle Patrol
 - We never have 2 road patrols to allow for a third on bicycle; must not be much
 - A lot of times bicycles are deployed during parades or at the fairgrounds. There used to be more of this on bicycle or on foot

- Mayor: Would like to see more of this, interacting with the community or with local businesses
 - Mayor: It's important for us to have a Village Police Department, to have people who know you, who know the community, who are out there on the streets. Would think that that's what we are looking for in a small village
- Kelly: Was always thrilled to see a police officer interact with the kids, left a memorable, positive influence on the kids. Her kids have good memories about this. May not be as available now that resources are tighter.
- Mayor: If you're going to have community who knows the police and vice versa, you need a larger force. It's harder for the part-time officers to develop those relationships. Looking at the budget, the difference is overtime and benefits—both of which only apply to full-time officers. Benefits probably add up to \$25K-\$30K per full-time person. That would be the cost of switching to a more full-time force
- Ray: What would that mean in terms of taxes per year?
 - If we spend \$15K, taxes go up 1%. If we hired 2, that would be 2%
- Chief: Some part-time officers will work up to 20-25 hours/week, others will work 1-2 shifts. Variable. A lot are 300, a lot are 500-600 hours/year
 - Currently have 3 retired officers who work part-time with us (great asset), as well as Sheriff's deputies who work part-time (limited hours)
- Mayor: Does the committee want to recommend more police officers?
 - Joe: It would be nice to have more police officers. But this village should be commended for doing as much as they're doing with limited resources
- Chief: The 101-year old lady would call 911 and request a specific officer and a special coffee
- Chief: The County police (Sherriff) and State police are also reviewing the police procedures in the same way as the committee. All the municipalities are doing this too
- Policies: Should the committee help revamping/updating the current documents?
 - Committee could make recommendations to the Chief about revisions, but not actually write policies
 - Chief: Use of Force Policy: Has to change. In the past, there were things that have been used that are not acceptable anymore. No knee on the back of the head, no chokehold. No use of excessive force—liability for officer and witnesses. The state has come out with a model policy and we should model our policy after theirs. **Mayor will send this out.**
 - The Chief's deadline for updating policies is essentially now.
 - Mental Health policy is up to date
 - Logistically: policies need to be made electronic and consistent formats
- Chief: Need a very detailed manual with policies about everything, protection for police and municipality. In the past, there were no policies or procedures. We are starting from scratch
- Mayor: Working on implementing a plan to allow the chief to spend more time on policy and procedure issues
- Considerations for how our policies would differ from larger municipalities
 - Example: sexual assault falls into felony. Our officer handles from beginning to end. The county officers will not handle from beginning to end, they turn it over to other staff members. We don't have supervisors and investigators to turn it over to

Community involvement

- Lori: The state is pushing for community involvement. As a group, we could think of ways to improve the relationship.
 - Library Community Meeting on Zoom, discussed on Library Board Meeting. Positive connection. The Library Board Members thought it would be great. Something to try. If it helps 5 or 10 people, could be worth it. It's free
 - Chief used to do talks for business association. Preventing robberies, burglaries, what happens if you get held up. Was helpful but need people to come to him to ask
 - Lori: Very helpful for the community to get to know the police force
- Police Station
 - Facilities are humble
 - Library: Facilities refresh made a difference for the library. Could work for the police force as well. Volunteers could paint or help in other ways
 - Joe: No money for improvements in the police department budget
 - Chief: Not complaining about the facilities, and probably new things coming. We came from a tough spot a couple of years ago. It's a work in progress.
- Mayor: We need a comprehensive plan. There are many opportunities for improvement in the Village. Getting our finances fixed has been our first priority. Not sure if we are going to keep the police in that building long-term. Facilities piece is on the minds of the board members
- Mayor: Should we get public input from the larger community?
- Lori: Proposes a basic survey. What would they like to see in the Community? How would they like to connect with the police?
 - Susannah agrees. School has been sending surveys throughout the year. Gives the community an opportunity to contribute. Seems like a good starting point. We could share the information and let the Village know we are conducting this effort
 - Village Board sent a link to Economic Development Plan survey, made it available in hard copy too. Got over 400 replies
 - Lori: Combination of questions from committee and from the Chief/police
 - Susannah: Keep it short, 5-10 questions. Multiple choice and open ended. Draft over the next couple of weeks
 - Send any ideas to Lori in the next 10 days; regroup on 12/2
 - Liz Kormos offered to help with the survey, fielding it, analysis, create the report, include graphs, etc.
- Mayor: Consider public Zoom? Invite the community. Publish the meeting ID and password
- Ray: Steve, 911 dispatcher could come to the next meeting on 12/2 or 1/6, he could speak at the very beginning. Ray will follow-up regarding his availability

Public Comment

- Gina Marozzi: Out of an abundance of caution, having a village official run a questionnaire, might be an issue. Might need a third party to run it
 - Liz has experience with surveys, the data is the data. She has offered to help
 - Lori clarification to Gina: A village official should maybe not do the analysis of the questionnaire?

- Gina: it's a village official checking data and analyzing results
- Liz Kormos question for the chief: How many hours can an officer work before it kicks to full time and is eligible for benefits? NYS: 19.5 hours. Saratoga County, which we fall under: 32 hours/week, but not on a continuous basis. No annual number. We don't run into that problem
- Liz: It seems like we have a lot of police officers. Could that number be reduced if we give them more hours? Is it hard to get the continuity?
 - Chief: Part-time people are working because they don't want to work full-time
 - If part-time officer cannot work a case, Chief will reassign it to someone who can come

Meeting was adjourned.