

CITY OF NORWICH
Police Reform
Community Advisory Board ("CAB")
Meeting Minutes
October 7, 2020
3:05 PM
Norwich Fire Department Meeting Room

PRESENT

Mayor Shawn Sastri
Police Chief Rodney Marsh
District Attorney Michael Ferrarese
First Assistant District Attorney Christine Rudy
Public Defender Zack Wentworth
Pastor Jen Westervelt
Tamara Cobb
Adrienne Zornow
Dave Jennings
Melody Girgenti
Assistant Police Chief Scott Burlison
Alderwoman Nancy Allaire

Mayor Sastri started the meeting by informing everyone that the meeting will be recorded and that some items on the agenda may actually be a role of the Common Council and while those items may be addressed to an extent, the Common Council, not this committee would be charged with making any changes.

The meeting began at 3:05 and Pastor Jen Westervelt addressed the members by referring to the Agenda that was sent along with a copy of the results of the survey sent to committee members regarding prioritizing the topics that are to be addressed per the Resource and Guide for Public Officials and Citizens put out by the Governors office.

It was noted that Detective Sergeant Rueben Roach was not able to come to this meeting and his request to address the committee would be postponed until the next meeting that he is able to attend.

The minutes of the previous meeting were sent prior to this meeting. Members were reminded that the format of this meeting does not require

that meeting minutes be approved by the committee but will be sent to members prior to each meeting for members to peruse.

Members were asked if there were any questions about the previous meeting minutes. No-one had questions.

Pastor Jen asked everyone to continue to the Agenda and asked for ideas on organizing google drive into folders where minutes, agendas, reports, and questions could be placed for review prior to each meeting. Two community members stated that they felt that would be an easy way to access the documents, rather than searching through emails, all information will be on the idrive file and therefore easily accessible.

The Police Department annual reports and information on Lexipro that were sent previously by email will be moved to the idrive file for future reference.

There was discussion regarding the use of idrive, some members are familiar and others have not used it before, nor do they have google on their computers. Lynn Murray stated that Agnes uses a laptop for other meetings, Lynn will see if she can get the laptop for the meeting next week so the use of idrive can be demonstrated.

Returning to prioritizing the topics, they were rated from highest priority and which topic had the most number of votes down to the lowest priority and least number of votes by committee members. Eventually, all topic will need to be discussed by the committee.

There was a discussion about how the committee is to move forward with the agenda – are we to split into sub-groups to tackle a larger number of topics in each category and if so if each co-chair would run a sub-group. Concerns were brought up about the amount of time it would take for members to be attending sub-groups and if everyone that needed to be on each committee would be able to be part of the discussion if we were in sub-groups.

Pastor Jen explained that her idea was that the sub-groups meet during the time set up for the weekly meetings, and each group would then do a report to the full committee each week.

Members stated that they felt everyone should be part of all discussions and keeping the topics prioritized, discussing the highest prioritized items first and working down the list into those items placed as lower priorities.

Adrienne Zornow asked if the idrive platform would list what would be discussed during the next meeting and what questions committee members would like answered during those meetings.

Pastor Jen state that if members could submit the questions ahead of time, that those questions may be able to be answered during the meeting. She stated that the meeting scheduled for next week, October 14, 2020, Police functions would be the highest priority item to be discussed. If members would review that section of the documents of the guide and send questions prior to the meeting.

A committee member agreed that asking questions prior to the meeting would be helpful as people would be able to gather the information needed to answer the questions and for the committee to formulate suggestions.

Pastor Jen suggested that by taking high priority items first, the members would know what sections of the guide to read and be prepared to address. A member commented that it makes sense, if the committee runs out of time, at least the most important issues will be taken care of. Another member stated that not all of the items listed would actually need to be addressed by the committee, some items, such as budget would actually be addressed by Department heads and Common Council. Another member stated that everything should be addressed by thee committee members, this maybe the only time the community would have input. The member with the opposing view stated that anyone wanting to discuss budget items go to Common Council meetings. The mayor suggested that while things like budget may be discussed, that it would actually be the role of the Common Council to approve a budget and suggestions would be forwarded to the council for the next budget.

Pastor Jen wondered if Determining the Role of the Police should actually be addressed prior to items such as training and education. A community member stated she was a little confused by this because she felt the role of the police was already determined. A different member stated that some of the items listed on the guide started out broader and led to narrower topics.

Pastor Jen asked if the committee wanted to add determining the role of the police to next weeks meeting. Public Defender Zack Wentworth stated he felt some topics would take more than one week to get through.

Community Member Melody Girgenti said so #1 is determining the role of the police and #2 would be training and continuing education.

Zack stated he thought that would be the biggest item and then other categories would be addressed after that.

Pastor Jen stated that next week the topic would be determining the role of police, and asked all members to review that section of the guide and asked Police Chief Marsh if questions were submitted in iDrive by Monday, if that would give him time to research answers to submit at the next meeting. Chief Marsh stated he would try, but depending on depth of research it may take more time than that.

Adrienne asked if everyone could please submit questions by Monday morning in order to give time for those questions to be researched before the meeting.

It was agreed that all questions will be submitted in the iDrive file, so that everyone can access those questions and submit their own questions if different from what has already been asked.

Pastor Jen stated she could create a file tomorrow, Thursday, October 8th, in iDrive for everyone to submit their questions.

Zach Wentworth stated the last three annual reports already submitted by the Police Chief would be a good starting place for asking the questions regarding roles of the police.

Pastor Jen was reviewing the guide and asked if all sectors suggested in the guide were being represented in this committee. Community member, Dave Jennings, suggested that we may learn more from people who had bad experiences/interactions with police. Adrienne suggested that we don't want to exclude any segment of our society and maybe we should engage people who had been the subject of police calls. Melody Girgenti stated that she thought that it would be beneficial to talk to people who had those types of interactions as well. Tamara Cobb stated she thought that the actions/attitudes of those interactions may be dictated by the community member, not by the police officer. Public Defender Wentworth stated we might receive insight from someone with a different perspective, what they were experiencing during the contact with the police. DA Ferrese suggested that maybe watching body cam recording would be a better determining factor as that will tell the true story and not have someone telling "their side" of the interactions.

Ferrese also stated that as far as the role of the police goes, that is determined by NYS Criminal Procedure Law and asked Chief Marsh to send a copy to all committee members. He stated that we will see there are roles that have been put upon our police that the CPL states are not part of their role, such as mental health roles. He also stated that he feels the guide book does not apply to this community in many ways, the diversity is not in this area, and therefore those being arrested are not overwhelmingly minority, but overwhelmingly they are drug users or those of lower socioeconomic status. He felt that the point that Adrienne brought up when it she stated what she would like to see is a friendlier face from the police department.

Community member Dave Jennings stated that just because Norwich is not diverse does not mean we don't have a problem here.

Pastor Jen went back to the list of suggested participants to see if there was any segment of society that was not represented. Lynn Murray from the City stated they were trying to obtain someone from the business community to be on the committee. Adrienne suggested someone from academia to present, someone else stated there was someone from SUNY Morrisville present. Zach Wentworth stated due to time restraints not everyone from suggested segment of society might not be able to attend meetings, but maybe they could be asked to some meetings to share their perspective.

Pastor Jen asked if the PD contract would allow a survey of Police on such items as staffing, budgeting, equipment, etc. Assistant Chief Burlison and Chief Marsh explained that before officers went to other agencies, they needed to get permission from the Chief first. Nothing would preclude their input in a survey as to what they feel might be needed if Chief Marsh could see the survey first.

DA Ferrarese asked if officers have ability to obtain counseling if needed, regardless of if it is personal issues or job issues that could effect performance. Lynn Murray stated that all employees of the City were able to receive help from Employee Assistance Program. Pastor Jen also stated that there are talks of engaging a chaplin for both the Fire Department and the Police Department. DA Ferrarese also stated that some of items listed in the guide may need to be addressed with the state, that they can't be changed at this level. Adrienne stated that was an important point. Pastor Jen stated that could be an addendum that was attached to any report done by this committee.

DA Ferrarese also stated that if Joseph Angelino wins the election, he may be able to have input on grants that would be able to assist the City in obtaining some of the changes needed, but are not possible due to funding issues. He also gave an example of personnel from City Judge, Public Defender, Department of Social Services and others that were called out last evening due to a juvenile that needed to be placed, but due to no openings because of closing juvenile facilities, these personnel had challenges as to how to handle the situation. Ferrarese stated these types of issues need to be brought to the public so that they can be educated on the problems within the system as well.

A community member asked if the situation was resolved. Wentworth stated that an alternate solution was found so the juvenile was not waiting for extended period of time.

DA Ferrarese also stated that there was a notice about millions of dollars being cut from the Court budget which impacts all of these things as well.

Pastor Jen asked the Co-Chairs if anyone was willing to run the next meeting. Adrienne stated that she would be willing to run the next meeting, the other co-chairs agreed. Also to reiterate on what to do for next meeting, Lynn Murray will check on availability of a laptop to present presentation on idrive, questions to be submitted no later than Monday morning regarding Roles of the Police. Refer to the annual report, it had great information.

Adrienne asked if there was any problem sharing that she was participating in this committee and getting community feed-back. Assistant Chief Burlison stated we are all stakeholders, we all represent different segments of our community and that true transparency is the only way to go.

Melody Girgenti asked if it would be appropriate to reach out to the community on a different platform such as face-book. Pastor Jen responded that she felt that social media was hard to administer and that sometimes people made awful, hurtful or untruthful comments which can be difficult to monitor. A survey for both PD/community may be a better way to go which can be added to goggle docs in idrive.

Pastor Jen asked if there were any other items for the next meeting? No-one had anything.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:31 PM.

Respectfully Submitted: Tamara Cobb, Secretary