

CITY OF NORWICH
Police Reform
Community Advisory Board (“CAB”)
Meeting Minutes
October 21, 2020
3:00 p.m.
Norwich Fire Department

PRESENT

Mayor Shawn Sastri
Police Chief Rodney Marsh
First Assistant District Attorney Christine Rudy
Assistant Public Defender Rosemarie Richards
Pastor Jen Westervelt
Adrienne Zornow
Dave Jennings
Melody Girgenti
Adrienne Zornow
Missy Beers

ALSO

Lynn Murray
Scott Burlison

Meeting intro, Agenda – Review Relevant Ground Rules

Pastor Jen went over reminders to apply from “Ground Rules for Meeting”. She discussed specially Rule #5: Listening with an open mind, Rule #7: Stay on point and on time and Rule #9: Close decisions and identify action items.

It was noted that there will be a lot of action items that will need to be taken care of by committee members and that all members will need to step up and assist with any action items deemed appropriate by the committee.

Guest Speaker – Mental Health

Faith Vavra, Deputy District Director for Congressman Anthony Brindisi. What she discusses will be because of her current position and some of what she discusses is from her prior positions.

Faith worked for South Carolina law enforcement for 5 years and was a public information officer for Acron PD. The agency did outreach when dealing with mental health patients. They had a couple of different models. She has had multiple people reach out to her from Chenango County about mental health services in regards to financing and school districts. During COVID phone calls increased so the need for mental health has increased. Her experience working with the Congressman is searching for funding, she will continue to help in this aspect with whatever direction the committee decides.

Law enforcement in other communities and around the country are taking a couple of different models and building them for their communities. In Acron they had a model where there was a trained crime victims’ person that would provide victim services at the point of the arrest. They also brought in a MSW that could provide mental health services at the time of the arrest.

Being in a rural community this could pose a challenge; however, we may be able to attract college students that are studying in fields like social work. Then police department and others could train them on how to respond to mental health crisis.

Pastor Jen asked what recommendations can you make for the committee to consider for our Police Department when those calls come in?

Find an organization that will provide a crisis center in Chenango County. There has been resistance from Chenango County residents regarding duplication of services, however Faith feels like a crisis center would not be a duplication of services.

For individuals in schools she suggests putting someone either on call or in the school such as an MSW.

Currently if a resident of Chenango County has a mental health crisis law enforcement either takes them to Binghamton or detains them.

Adrienne asked: how does that interfere and interface with the homeless population?

Faith said that the ideal is to get to the homeless population before it is a problem. Some counties use crisis counselor that go out to the homeless population to help them get services before they become homeless.

Updates

Mayor Sastri talked about making sure that the committee remains on task and addresses all the topics in the Governor's Police Reform book. He noted that we have professionals in the group that have been in those positions for several years and that we have citizens who are learning the process as we go along. Just wanted to remind everyone that there has to be change in the police department or we will lose funding and we can't say "this is how it has always been done" or "it will cost the taxpayers too much money". Members of the committee spoke up and talked about keeping an open mind, people should be able to say their ideas without being afraid, we should not rush into suggestions because we are learning as we go. Pastor Jen discussed Phase II and Phase III of the manual and that the committee has merged phase II and phase III together. It was also noted that the committee has come to a conclusion on some new positions that the common council will need to review.

Lynn discussed that this committee is part of the open meeting law and that everything that is discussed, written, or emailed can be FOILED. Any notes that are taken during the meeting will need to be copied and provided to Lynn. She also talked about having specific agenda items and staying on topic. Once a topic has been resolved or tabled then we need to move on to the next topic and not circle back to an item that has been resolved or tabled.

Review Previous Minutes

No changes were made to the minutes.

Purpose/Product update, Work time and Action items

Discussion started out with where we are at currently and that we need to evaluate on a monthly basis the progress that has been made and see if this current approach will work for the committee.

Determining the Role of the Police Department:

What role does the police currently play in our community? What are appropriate areas for law enforcement in our community? Should police be involved in non-criminal conduct? What are examples of non-criminal conduct in our community that could potentially be done by another entity. What function should 911 call centers play in our community? Should you deploy Social Services personnel instead or in addition too Police Officers in some situations? Should some aspects of the police department be civilized? What are staffing needs to make that happen? Should law enforcement be involved in the school district? What grievances has the community had with the police department and what can we learn?

Plan Documents in shared drive:

Committee feels that appropriate areas for the police department are protecting property, prevent and deter crime, apprehend suspects and traffic control in some situations.

Non-criminal aspects that should be provided or supplemented by another entity include parade and public events, like closing streets, no parking signs being placed, animal control, traffic control, parking violations and data entry.

Action steps for the above non-criminal aspects of the police department would be: A new position for animal control, traffic control and parking tickets. A new position for data entry specifically in the DEMS system.

Mental Health

Discussion continued with mental health issues and Faith Vavra was asked to stay and give advice.

The committee's intention is to develop a plan our police officers can and should be doing in mental health crisis.

What function should 911 call centers play in our community? How would a mental health counselor be notified?

Faith stated that in one model the MSW is at police department and the 911 dispatcher sends the MSW with the Police Officer, the MSW would wait in the patrol car until the scene is safe for them to enter. She said that this is not the perfect model.

The Chief was asked how he felt about a MSW on staff?

He stated that we would need someone 24 hours a day 7 days a week. He likes the idea of bringing the person into the police station and conducting a virtual (telemedicine) screening. He thinks that during that screening the MSW/Doctor could either release the person or have them sent to Binghamton.

Scott thought that a virtual interview at the police station and having a professional sign the 941 then the Police Department could call an ambulance to transport that individual. Sending an officer to Binghamton for a nonviolent case is a waste of resources. Scott also said that maybe a matrix could be created and if a person falls below a certain criterion then an ambulance or a mobile crisis vehicle could transport that person to the crisis center in Binghamton. He noted that Binghamton General currently covers all of Chenango County for MCAT.

Pastor Jen thought that creating a matrix was a good idea and that we should have a mental health professional assist in creating the matrix.

Faith asked if there were any issues with the ambulance service for Chenango County. It was noted that the ambulance service will not take a violent person to Binghamton.

Telemedicine was discussed as a potential item to add to the Police Reform plan. Faith stated that we need to be careful with Telemedicine because of the lack of broadband services in Chenango County. She stated that we will need to have a centrally located place in order to provide Telemedicine.

Adrienne asked how many Social workers would Norwich need to have to be on-call or at the Police Station? Chief Marsh said that there were not enough calls to have a full-time Social Worker on duty 24 hours 7 days per week. Assistant Chief Burlison wanted to remind the group that there were other agencies like the NYS police and the Sheriff's Office that are doing the same transports. We should investigate having a central hub for all agencies to use.

To sum up Mental health: These are the plans that the committee thinks could help.

1. Having joint services with other police agencies in Chenango County.
2. Telemedicine with an MOA that is available through Binghamton General for off hour calls.
3. A mental health expert that is on call to either accompany a police officer or meet the police officer at the scene.

The committee agreed that we need assistance from mental health, we need to know what resources Chenango County can provide.

Adrienne brought up welfare checks and that she does not believe they should be the role of a police officer. Pastor Jen discussed that Mental health, drug abuse, welfare checks and homelessness would be discussed as one topic.

Pastor Jen stated that we need to know what MCAT is providing to the county. Adrienne will be researching this topic.

Faith will be looking into Binghamton General and Bassett Health for telemedicine. Faith also stated that we needed community awareness for these issues.

Other action steps

The police survey was discussed, members should go to google drive review the police survey and let Pastor Jen know if there are any changes or additions that need to be made. She would like to bring this to the Police Union by Wednesday, October 28, 2020. She noted that the best approach would be to distribute the questionnaire, have the officers give them back to the union president and then she would type their responses so that there is anonymity in the process.

The community survey was discussed. Melody will do research to see if there is a community survey that has been distributed so we are not duplicated are resources.

Pastor Jen would like both surveys to go out by November 1, 2020.

Determine Leader for Next Meeting

Adrienne would be leading the next meeting. The group decided that Pastor Jen and Adrienne would be in charge of leading meetings.

Meeting was closed at 4:32 pm.

Next meeting October 28, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.