

CITY OF NORWICH
Police Reform
Community Advisory Board (“CAB”)
Meeting Minutes
October 28, 2020
3:00 p.m.
Norwich Fire Department

PRESENT

Police Chief Rodney Marsh
Assistant Police Chief Scott Burlison
District Attorney Michael F
First Assistant District Attorney Christine Rudy
Aldерwoman Nancy Allaire
Police Officer Brandon Clarke – PBA President
Pastor Jen Westervelt
Dave Jennings
Melody Girgenti
Adrienne Zornow
Missy Beers
Lynn Murray

Meeting intro, Agenda – Public Comments

Lynn started out the meeting with a couple of comments, PO Brandon Clarke, PBA President will be joining the committee. Faith Vavra wanted to let the committee know that once we have a plan in place for mental health, she will identify grant funding and get letters of support written. She noted that we should talk with Senator Akshar. Friends of Recovery will be at the next common council meeting on November 17, 2020 at 6:30 pm to discuss their program with the City.

Police Chief Marsh has been in contract with Catholic Charities, he signed a letter of commitment for the grant that they are putting together. This grant will take about a year to process. The Grant will assist with mental health calls, once a police officer’s picks up a mental health patient they would transfer that person to the hospital to undergo a telemedicine visit with a physician or mental health worker, once that is complete it will be decided whether to release the person or take them to MCAT.

Adrienne reached out to MCAT, they directed her to another person. They have returned her call, but she was not available, she will work on returning the call. Reached out to Ruth Roberts, will be using her as a resource now that she has another email address to communicate with.

Dave Jennings did a ride-a-long with Detective Sergeant Rueben Roach, he stated he had an overall positive experience. Got to ask questions. He noted that most of the calls were for mental health. He wanted to encourage everyone in the committee to go on a ride-a-long.

Previous Meeting Minutes

Minutes were approved for the October 21, 2020 meeting. Previous minutes can be located on the City of Norwich website.

Discussion – Community Engagement/Community Policing

Today our discussions are about community engagement and community policing.

The video that Melody added to the google drive was discussed. The video is of a Police department for the City of Tuscon Arizona. It talks about how the City uses on-street and bike patrolling to increase visibility. Pastor Jen asked what is the objective of the program? Is the goal to increase the visibility of officers in our community or more of a deference of crime in the community. Does this seem to be the objective of the video?

Pastor Jen wanted a picture of how the NPD fits into the above scenario and asked a question “In a given week how are officers engaging with citizens, are they in the community on a regular basis or in the police station waiting for calls”. Chief Marsh stated when he first went on patrol he would wave at citizens and they would not wave back until the Bicycle Patrol was started. The Norwich PD still has the bicycles to utilize. The program ran from spring to Halloween in order to continue this program the City would need a full department. If we were to bring this program back, there is a weeklong training in Ithaca that the officers would need to attend. NPD has no staff trained for bicycle patrol.

Officer Clarke noted that the police department has had staffing issues, and there is lack of age and experience currently. NPD has a very young department; they are full of initiative and enthusiasm, but we must balance the expectation, experience, and training.

Pastor Jen asked how many officers respond to a call/or are in a car? Officer Clarke noted that every call is a two-person call until it is deemed a one-person call. It would depend on the situation one scenario was a dog barking because a cat is in a tree, that would be a one-person call, the other scenario was a couple fighting that would be a two-person call.

Pastor Jen asked how much time do officers spend driving around Norwich? Depends on the calls that come in.

The committee’s plan for community policing is as follows: Bicycle patrol, walking around patrolling the streets and engaging with the community. The Police Department will need to set up opportunities for the public to engage with the police officers, examples were an open house, tours of the police station, coffee with a cop, have police officers meet public at McDonalds, etc. Educating community members on how much is already happening with outreach opportunities. Is it possible to have the new Police Officers doing more of the community engaging/policing? Would depend on staffing.

Adrienne discussed having more visibility in high crime areas to deter crime on a consistent basis. Examples were having patrol cars go by high crime areas frequently or to sit in an area for a period of time to deter crime.

Assistant Chief Burlison talked about National Drug take back day on Saturday 10/24/2020. He had Chenango Network Coalition attend. Two people showed up and they had a youth component, they handed out little red ribbons and downtown was light up in red to promote drug awareness. Detective

Sergeant Roach was on duty and did a presentation with the youth. Was a win win situation and would invite Chenango Network Coalition back.

Discussed if there should be mandatory volunteering hours for the PD, might be something to look at in the future. The PBA does a lot of volunteer hours. What are some of the community orientated activities that the PBA currently does? Pastor Jen and Officer Clarke will talk about this so that it can be noted in the draft plan.

A plan for continuing our community advisory committee. Adrienne has looked at the Governor's reform handbook and noted that after the reform is submitted should we put in the plan some type of citizen advisory committee for an oversight of the Police Reform. We do not need to decide today however the group should consider this going forward. The consensus was that this would be a good idea and would help with police transparency and accountability. Would be a recommendation to the Council. Pastor Jen will create a document in google drive to discuss this going forward.

How can the community be more involved with the police?

Chief Marsh discussed a Citizens Police Academy for citizens that was run by the Police Officers in the past. Basically, citizens would meet for 2-3 hours one day a week for 3 months and go through a mild form of the NYS police academy. It gave citizens a better understanding of the police calls and the line of work that a police officer does daily. Chief Marsh will follow up on a Citizens Police Academy.

Committee members wanted to know about a neighborhood watch group for the City of Norwich. It was noted that we do not have any neighborhood watch groups however Alderman Doliver from Ward 2 notified the committee that there are two neighborhood watch groups in his ward. Pastor Jen asked that Aldermen Doliver email Melody a summary about the neighborhood watch program. Melody will be looking into the process of setting up neighborhood watch groups in the Norwich area. PO Clarke stated that the Police Officers could not do their job without the assistance of citizens.

Friends of Recovery was referenced as having peer support system and that we may mention them in our plan if they come to Chenango County.

Educating the community was covered with the police academy and open houses. Consider coffee with a cop to meet with citizens and hear their complaints and suggestions.

Police officers in school was the next discussion.

The Police Reform book talked about two kinds of police officers in school. One was a school resource officer and the other was a mentor. The SOR is more of an aggressive type of role in the school. The mentor position is more of building a rapport with the children. Pastor Jen spoke with Scott Ryan, Director of Teaching, Learning and Personnel from the Norwich City School District. The school district would like to see a mentor type program in the school system. Officer Clarke discussed how when he met with children, they seemed fearful of Police Officers. It took Officer Clarke 2 years to build rapport with the children. The committee agreed that the Police department should offer a police officer mentoring program for the school district. Pastor Jen brought up if it would be beneficial to have a couple of police officers to help with mentoring students and have those police officers on the same shift. Assistant Police Chief Burlison noted that it was a contractual agreement between the City and the PBA. Adrienne would like to see a more concrete program for a resource officer in the Norwich City School. Pastor Jen stated that there should be a memorandum of understanding between the school and police department.

Follow up on Action Items

The committee needs to review the Police Officers Survey by Friday, Pastor Jen said that the findings will be beneficial and important for the training and education section in the police reform book.

The committee also needs to review the community survey before next Wednesday. This will be added to the agenda next week. We will also be discussing Dr Harper's list of questions and insight and MCAT/mental health. How are going to utilize public comments moving forward.

The City of Norwich will be adding a Police Reform portal to the website that will have a section for public comment, questions, or suggestions.

Close/Recap Action Items

The weekly meetings will take place on Veteran's Day November 11, 2020 and the day before Thanksgiving November 25, 2020.

Determine Leader for Next Meeting

Pastor Jen will be leading the next meeting.

There was a question regarding how we communicate with the public. It was noted that the meeting was on Facebook and will be on there every week. Dave asked what about the citizens who don't have Facebook, the committee discussed utilizing the Evening Sun or the Pennysaver. A question was asked how are we communicating with our community?

Meeting was closed at 4:31 pm.

Next meeting November 4, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.