

Committee on Police Reform and Reinvention

Meeting: December 2, 2020

Meeting Minutes

Recorded by Susannah Amiteye

Attendees:

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

Not in attendance:

- Kelly Gregory (unable to join)

Guest: Steve Gordon, head of 911

Observer: Gina Marozzi

Proceedings

Steve Gordon, director for the Sheriff's department 911 Call Center :

- The service provided to the village is top-notch when it comes to police, fire, ambulance. There is a state-of-the-art radio system, CAD (computer) system used to track calls. Also have the technology now that can plot cell phones
- County has made significant investment
- When Saratoga had issues due to COVID (outbreak in the PD), call center lent support within hours due to the interoperability infrastructure in place
- Enhances public safety anywhere in the county, not just in the village
- Service covers the entire county aside from City of Saratoga Springs. Work in concert with them
- Mayor: We have a small village with a police department, fire department, EMS. Do you have other police agencies you can call in, including social workers and mental health outside the village?
 - Yes, have access to all the county resources as requested by incident commander

- Work closely with office of Emergency Services, public health, EMTs, mental health (Dr. Prezioso). Can contact anyone but would not initiate without a request from the scene.
- If Ray has an incident and needs 10 ambulances, Call Center can handle it. If there is a fire at the school, Call Center would summon those resources based on pre-plans. Active shooter or bank robbery would require additional police support, which they would know. Otherwise, wait for a request
- Lori: Any public education or community-based communication programs?
 - Only small programs. There was disability awareness training for field responders, fire and EMS. Nothing widespread. Narcan programs. Not aware of any large-scale programs
- Ray: What is it like when you get a call at the comms center until you get a deputy or police officer on the scene?
 - Entire county: They field 80,000-85,000 emergency calls for service per year to dispatch cars. 250,000 phone calls—total, including information or routine calls.
 - On the Law Enforcement side, prioritize based on closest call. They put that out to county: sheriff and State. First arriving unit handles that call
 - Don't send other PDs in to a jurisdiction where there is a PD
 - Every day, the police on duty report who is working, and it goes into the CAD system. If call volume exceeds capacity or if they need additional assistance, or high profile, then they would put out the "all call" for help. ATF, FBI, etc. Anyone who shares the common radio frequency can assist
 - Also provide tow service, business contacted, additional support
- Ray: Closest car policy works. In our area, there are many overlapping districts (eg, Northline and 50). It's a good working relationship.
 - Response times are quick. Saves lives. System works well
 - Volume of calls is a lot. They get busier every year
 - 7 people on staff at a time, minimal. Can go up to 14 at any one time. Onsite workers, no remote. Others can overhear the call and respond immediately. Team effort needed for success
 - Small percentage of calls are for the Village, but the PD responds quickly, even to non-emergency calls
 - Biggest challenges: mental health and well-being of staff and workers. Last week someone in the 911 center had cardiac arrest, and they had to handle calls at the same time as resuscitating their colleague. Calls are often high intensity. Need to maintain composure, regardless of nature of the call
- Chief Bush: That day, when one of his people had cardiac arrest, they never stopped. They still answered calls on this busy day
- Lorri: How do you support staff?
 - Team effort, support of their peers. There is high level of awareness now. Also supervisors are good at recognizing when there might be an issue. There is an EAP group. Help with healing process
 - They have a quiet room in their new office

Lori Acee thanked Steve and resumed meeting discussion.

Reviewed section that was assigned for the meeting on Procedural Justice and Community Policing.

Best Practices list for creating a culture of community policing

1. Create a comprehensive community policing strategic plan.
2. Train all personnel on community policing – including overcoming distrust.
3. Foster an atmosphere of openness and transparency.
4. Adopt procedural justice as a guiding principle.
5. Prioritize law enforcement personnel safety and wellness.
6. Engage the community in a true partnership to address crime and disorder issues.
7. Treat every contact as an opportunity to engage positively with a community member.
8. Measure social cohesion and work to develop relationships.
9. Reevaluate metrics of community policing success.
10. Incorporate community policing measures into the performance evaluation process.

Mayor: How does the list of goals compare to the current situation in the PD? Are we there? Should we expand?

Chief Bush responds:

- Community policing costs money in personnel and resources
- In the workbook when they mention Community Policing, they mean a police officer assigned to a certain sector where they have jurisdiction
- When there are speeders on Hyde Blvd, we respond and address it. When we had Colonial Hills car break-ins, police officers assigned. This is how we respond in the Village
- We don't have the resources to assign officers to certain areas
- The arrest recently of 2 men who stole guns. That took two men 12 hours, start to finish: arrest, arraignment, processing, etc. We don't have the man power to assign police for Community Policing
- In the Village, we don't have the same problems that they have in larger areas that require Community Policing. We're very lucky, we don't have that

Lori: Maybe for our village, it will look different. Education programs, Coffee with Cops, being present at school sports? Since we cant dedicate staff to neighborhoods

Chief Bush

- Officers should be out there interacting with the community
- Should continue with basketball games with kids on the side of the road
- Will come to Lions, Business Professional Association, etc. Need to be invited

Ray: The closest we have to community policing is probably the School Resource Officer?

Yes, at the MS and HS, and across the elementary schools including Malta Ave. We used to have that, and it's a great thing. We still go into the school and interact. The SROs are affiliated with the Sheriff's office.

Lori: The next section is about detaining based on reasonable suspicion. Discuss discrimination and bias, including choke holds

- Chief: We don't stop and frisk. Has never been in policy or procedure. Have to have a reason to impede someone on the street
- Broken windows: Yes, criminal mischief might lead to information on a bigger crime. We're not going to turn a blind eye to someone committing a crime. With every crime, you have a victim. That victim deserves justice. That's his policy. They give plenty of breaks but the victim has a right to be heard. Minor crimes have to be addressed. Never elicit information about other crimes
- Bias-based stops, discriminatory—we don't do that. They look for whoever has been described.
- There is no discrimination in this PD because it is not present and he would not accept it.
- No police choke holds—now it's against the law. Chief has never used it or been involved in a situation where one was used.
- If you're fighting for your life, "anything goes." You're going to do whatever it takes not to get yourself killed.
- Use of force for punitive or retaliatory reasons. People have spit in my face, people are offensive about family members. People use lewd gestures. People will say and do the most horrific things when they're caught. It's hard not to react. You can't do this job if your skin is thin.
- Using force on people in hand cuffs: Chief doesn't tolerate it. Once they're restrained, your part of the fight is over. They may even be kicking the windows out of the car; the windows can be replaced
- Lorri: How do you ensure that the people who work for you are following the same value system?
 - Chief has to have the faith and confidence that they're doing what they're supposed to do.
 - Point of reference; we're not being sued, not being charged with laws of excessive force.
- Mayor: Should we have written policies or procedures? Yes, protects officer and municipality
- Lorri: Do we do any kind of restorative justice programs?
 - We don't have the authority to have a conclusion like that. Parents might decide to punish a kid with apology or way to rectify the crime (eg, egg on car). The court has more teeth than the PD
- Mayor: Do you work closely with the village judge? Yes, per chief. They have a good relationship with the court. Don't always agree
- Everything goes to the village court except for felonies. We can arraign on a felony but it will end up in county court

- Susannah: Thought this section of the workbook was about racial bias and racial tensions. What is your perspective on what racial tensions there are or are not, or anything we need to address? Do we need to consider unconscious bias? Important for the committee to at least talk about
 - Village of Ballston Spa Next Wave book has demographics
 - 2019, 91.1% white, 1.7 % black. We don't have a large black population in the village
 - 99.9 % of the people we arrest are white. We don't have that issue here.
 - During BLM protest, Chief witnessed black and white were chatting at the gas station. There was a lot of tension at that time. Black man came and apologized to the Chief for the protest and the situation (tension, distrust, implication that all police were bad). We don't have that issue here. Chief has not seen the issue here.
 - No interactions with minorities in the Village. We don't even deal with them.
 - A great example of a black citizen in the community: Michael Washington was a gang banger in Philadelphia, shot 7 times. He's very friendly, jolly. Chief loves sitting and talking with him. We need to interact more with non-white members of the community
- Susannah: Maybe record demographics going forward? Yes, even on traffic stops now those demographics are required to be recorded with the state
- No quotas in the Village, not allowed to
- Shooting at moving vehicles? The only reason is if your life or someone else's life is in danger.
- We don't have a lot of high speed pursuits. We've come to find out that most people who flee, it's because there are underlying reasons—warrant, drunk, etc. Have to weigh these things quickly
- No facial recognition technology. The NYS BCI may have it—not sure
- Diversion programs? For youthful first-time offenders, mental health issues, restorative justice
 - Overseen by court system. Several ARC homes in the village. One with a mental health issue where person lashes out at staff. The staff are adamant about pressing charges. When someone wants to press charges, we have to do it. Diversion programs are handled by the court. Probation may reach out and ask our opinion—that's a formality
- Hot spots: not a pressing issue for us generally
- De-escalation strategies: initially police officers are trained through the academy on de-escalation. The Chief models this for other officers. His guys are really good at it. For example, Todd Ives is really good. Additional, ongoing training would benefit the officers, but we're dealing well now
- Ray reinforced this: EMTs have called for help with a subject and the de-escalation techniques they use are spot-on, a lot of time people need to take the ride to the hospital. A lot of time people are not stable and will try to fight. Even EMS are trying not to restrain patients
- Chief: You'll always have some people under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and that person is not thinking rationally. Again, we don't have the law suits or false arrests. We just don't have them

- Lori: Community outreach plans. We may be able to get the PD out there more with the public.
- Citizen advisory boards/committees: may need to set that up in the future
- Chief: Community engagement: The PBA is not out there as cops. They used to ride with Mr. Ding-a-ling, and would give out ice cream. They have given out Thanksgiving turkeys. Community understands and recognizes that the PBA has given to the community. Could they build on it? Yes
- Lori: Social media could help raise awareness. There is a Ballston Spa Police Department Facebook page with arrests, weather reports, events, road closures
- Marginalized communities:
 - What about where English is limited? Chief: when we have this situation, we have resources available through the state to get an interpreter. At the nail salon by New China restaurant, one of the nail workers abused one of his clients. They started by using a translation app, then worked with an interpreter. He was arraigned and processed.
 - Several hearing impaired people in the village. Chief: Officers carry a pencil and pen
 - LGBTQ community? Chief: We don't put an emphasis on this. We don't make that person feel different. We have had several domestics between LGBTQ partners. We treat it the same way as heterosexual couples. It's a non-issue
 - Mayor: Any persecution of people in those categories? Chief: No. My officers are human beings. They treat people the way they want to be treated. To treat anyone differently would be a hate crime. Chief: One hate crime in 20+ years in this village
 - Immigrant community: We have substantial number of Hispanic and Asian community members. Other than the case with the nail salon, no issues.
 - People only want the police when they have a problem. We haven't had a problem with these communities
 - Lorri: Do we know whether marginalized communities are comfortable with the police?
 - Chief: Distrust with authority may come from ICE
 - Chief has had conversations with members of these communities, and they are friendly and nice people
 - Policies and procedures are ever-changing. We have a rule book with vast numbers of policies. We play by those rules; we have to
- Lori thanked Chief Bush for his candor and input; we always learn so much from him on these calls

Survey feedback

- Dave Womer could review the questions for objectivity, and ensure that the questions are unbiased. He will set up the survey and compile the findings
- Chief has no additional questions for the survey; he expects negative commentary since those are usually the kinds of responses that come from this type of survey

- We need to set up the survey with appropriate introduction to establish the purpose and set up the survey responsibly/respectfully
- Lorri: When we see the report, we should look for themes and not highlight outlier complaints. We should ask questions with a scaled response—this may invite neutral responses
- Ray: He hates yes/no questions. What is your opinion on this and why? Need to ask for detail
- Lori: Will need to ask Dave about open ended questions: hard to compile commentary or put it visually
- Lori will invite Dave to review the draft questions and come to the next meeting

Mayor: Wants to praise Chief Bush. "I think the world of him." He is our Andy Taylor (from Mayberry). He was born and raised here, is a really nice guy. Mayor appreciates Chief's generosity in working with this community

No public comment from remaining observer, Gina Marozzi.

Meeting adjourned.