

A Police Advisory Board meeting was held on the above date via Zoom conference call, with the following members in attendance: Salahudin Bin-Yusif, Michael Harpe, Debbie Harrington, Jacqueline Burditt, John Carwell, Wanda Dean, Felicita "Emy" Diaz, Jason Hunt, Joyce Kidd, and Charles "Billy" Warrick. Middletown Police Capt. William Texter, Police Union Rep. Brian McKinery and Mayor Ken Branner were also in attendance.

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Chairman Bin-Yusif.

MINUTES APPROVAL: It was moved by Debbie Harrington and seconded by Joyce Kidd to approve the minutes from the Jan. 25, 2021 meeting. Approved 10-0.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- John Carwell commended the Middletown Police Department for their involvement during the tragic passing of his mother two weeks ago. He said he couldn't say enough about how professional and supportive the MPD was when his sister had to call 911 during this tragic time for his family.
- Billy Warrick also commended the MPD for assisting in providing compressions to his wife when she had a heart incident at their home two weeks ago. He said three officers arrived and the efforts helped save his wife's life.

POLICE CHIEF SELECTION:

- Bin-Yusif proposed the two members for the Police Chief hiring process to be considered as Jacqueline Burditt and Debbie Harrington. He asked the two members if they were still interested in being on this committee. When they agreed, he asked Mayor Branner to give an update on where things stand.
- Mayor Branner reported that he and Town Council have decided to wait until after the Town Election in March to begin the process for new Police Chief. This way, if there are new members of Mayor & Council elected, they will be a part of the search from the beginning.
- He said Capt. Texter will remain as acting Chief until after the Council is set at the beginning of March.
- He said the request to have two members of the PAB on the Police Chief selection committee has been passed onto the employment law firm of Morris & Nichols for review to make sure it's legal to have the citizens on the committee.
- He said the law firm should have a response to them by March 8 meeting and he planned to discuss this with Council during executive session of their meeting.
- Mayor Branner said he wanted to hear what the PAB would like to see in a Chief, on the personal side and specific qualifications. He said no matter what the personnel attorney says, he would like the PAB to be involved in some kind of way.
- Joyce Kidd asked if the police department has a succession plan in place for when a police chief leaves or retires. Mayor Branner said yes, all of the staff level officers, including staff sergeants, are all eligible. We are prepared if we go that way, keeping the process inside, he said.
- Debbie Harrington asked about the job description and requirements. Mayor Branner said the job description is ready to go.
- Wanda Dean said it struck her as negative that the current job description does not require education.

- Mayor Branner said the experience the candidates have has always proved most valuable. However, if this committee thinks education is more important, he said he would be willing to take the request to the Town Council for minimum requirements. He said he was concerned about limiting the number of candidates for the position because in years past, officers did not start out their careers with degrees.

- The Committee said they would like to see candidates have a Bachelor's Degree in order to be considered for the job. Mayor Branner said he would take this request to the Town Council for consideration.

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS:

- Bin-Yusif asked for nominations to two committees he is creating.

- The first committee is the Police Report Evaluation Committee, which will be charged to work on the data collection and analysis of police report data. The nominations for the Police Report Evaluation Committee were: Michael Harpe, John Carwell, Joyce Kidd and Sue Mitchell.

- The second committee is the Community Connections Committee, which will include four members of the PAB, working with the MPD Community Relations Officer. The committee will be charged with providing recommendations to the board for community outreach, communications and connections programs. The nominations for this committee were: Jason Hunt, Jacqueline Burditt, John Carwell and a vacancy to be filled later.

POLICE REPORT:

- Acting Police Chief William Texter updated the PAB on incidents from the past month.

Since the last report at the Council meeting, there has been a robbery at the Middletown Liquors and at Rite Aid. There have also been some shots fired on Cole Blvd. and in Middletown Village. Texter said there have been very little witnesses or information coming in regarding either of these incidents.

- He said the biggest struggle the MPD has in these cases is that police do not know who the shooters are going after.

- And, the other issue is that the shooter is gone in seconds. He said MPD had an officer on scene to the recent Cole Blvd. incident in less than one minute and the shooter was already gone. He said the MPD does not care where the information comes from – they will take any information the community is willing to give.

- He said the MPD is watching trends in New Castle County and aren't sure if the shootings are connected to events happening north of the canal. But, in those cases, the suspects are stealing vehicles, using the stolen cars to commit shootings, then they are ditching the cars. He said in a lot of these cases, the suspects are juveniles and are released from jail quickly.

- Debbie Harrington asked about videos of the shootings.

- Texter said we have some video but the quality isn't the greatest. He said the Town and MPD are working to install better equipment and better lighting in the area. He said the Light Up Middletown initiative will be installing lighting on homes very soon.

- Mayor Branner said he would like to have requests from the residents for more lighting. He said in the past, when the Town initiated putting in more lights, the residents complained about being harassed.

- John Carwell said this sounds like one of the first initiatives of the community relations committee to tackle.

RESPONSE TIMES:

- Bin-Yusif asked about response times of recent shooting incidents.
- Texter said MPD is usually on the scene in a minute or two. He said if there seems to be a delay sometimes, it's because first of all, the crime was not reported immediately to 911. Then, once the caller does call 911, the 911 dispatcher has to go through the process of asking all of the pertinent questions and that could take a few minutes, so that is a trouble we have because in three minutes, the suspect is usually long gone, he said.
- Texter said overall, he feels the department's response times are good.
- Harrington asked if we have the right size force.
- Texter said the Mayor and Council are supportive of expanding the force to be able to work on some of the problem areas. There are two hiring processes going on right now to be able to fill some vacancies in the department.
- Mayor Branner said the Town will continue to go out and look for qualified officers. He said we had a really good turnout of candidates in the last round of requested applications.
- Bin-Yusif asked how the MPD is responding to the major crimes incidents.
- Texter said he has put overtime patrols out in the areas where the more violent crime has been occurring. Detectives are working on investigative means to address the drug issues. He has reached out to nearby jurisdictions to talk about the crimes, as criminals usually cross over jurisdictions when committing crimes. He is also working to get help from the community itself by reaching out to community leaders for help.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:

- Bin-Yusif asked Action Police Chief Texter how he feels the PAB's committees will work with the department's community policing initiatives.
- Texter said he believes it will work well and at the right time since he has already started integrating all patrol officers into a community policing format.
- He said Sgt. Saunders will still be the department's point person for community policing, but that all officers are getting trained on community policing aspects.
- For example, Sgt. Saunders is bringing in patrol officers to the Zoom meetings with the various Homeowner's association meetings and neighborhood meetings the he participates in.

ABLE PROGRAM:

Acting Chief Texter asked the PAB to consider writing a letter of support of the MPD implementing a program called ABLE, which is put on by Georgetown Law. The program is described on the program's website.

Michael Harpe said he has heard of this program and he would be willing to write a letter on behalf of the NAACP. Bin-Yusif said he would prepare a letter on behalf of the PAB after several members said they would be in support of it. Debbie Harrington said she would draft the letter on the PAB's behalf.

ADJOURNMENT:

It was moved by John Carwell and seconded by Debbie Harrington to adjourn.

NEXT MEETING:

Monday, March 15, 2021 (kk 3/5/21)