

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, Yvette Santiago, Debbie Harrington, Jacqueline Burditt, John Carwell, Wanda Dean, Felicita “Emy” Diaz, Jason Hunt, Joyce Kidd and Susan Mitchell. Middletown Police Chief William Texter and FOP Representative Michael Hilliard were also in attendance.

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chairman Bin-Yusif.

AGENDA APPROVAL: It was moved by Debbie Harrington and seconded by John Carwell to approve the agenda to move forward. Approved 10-0.

MINUTES APPROVAL: It was moved by Yvette Santiago and seconded by Debbie Harrington to approve the minutes for the March 15, 2021 minutes. Approved 10-0

SWOT ANALYSIS:

Chair Bin-Yusif wanted to briefly do a SWOT analysis of the Police Advisory Board. SWOT consists of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The following were comments brainstormed by the committee:

STRENGTHS:

- Joyce Kidd said diversity and various backgrounds of the board
- Debbie Harrington said the board members are connected to the community and can really be a voice for the community
- Yvette Santiago said the board is able to really lean in and provide input, feedback on the different discussions – direct and courageous conversations
- Emy Diaz said she feels the board members are all outspoken and known to really speak up if something has to be spoken up about.
- John Carwell said there’s a willingness to learn and not assume we have all of the answers; and have common passion for this work in wanting our MPD to be not only a leader in Delaware but in the US.
- Jason Hunt said we are being proactive, not being reactive – making sure we are all on the same team before something happens, and hopefully prevent something from happening.

WEAKNESSES:

- Hunt said it’s tough right now that we can’t meet in person
- Kidd said time to dedicate to the board is tough because they all have jobs
- Susan Mitchell said a weakness right now is getting the word out and awareness that the board even exists
- Diaz said technical difficulties and communications are lacking
- Carwell said the board doesn’t know its ceiling for potential
- Santiago said she would like to see the administrative side of things be better
- Harrington said each of us has a different level of understanding what goes on at MPD and looks forward to having academy to learn inner workings of department. Right now, the entire board is not on a level of complete understanding of MPD.

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Santiago said perhaps we can have a college intern to help with administrative items.
- Wanda Dean said she's not sure if it's a true opportunity or not, but perhaps utilizing the Mayor's suggestion of doing something about the board on the MPD website or on the Town's website or having a website of the board's own.

THREATS:

- Santiago said a threat is not being heard or information/recommendations we provide to make things stronger are not valued or heard.
- Mitchell said a threat could be to focus too much on one area of Town over another. We have to make sure we represent all of the various communities in Town, especially since the same crimes are happening all over the Town. Dean said the board may want to invite all HOAs to make reports to the board about what's happening in their communities. It was discussed sending letters to the HOAs to invite them to the board meetings.
- Carwell said a threat could be to not keep up with things that are happening nationally and analyzing how our local community is reacting to those events.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

A. Research Committee

Bin-Yusif said he would like to put a committee together to have a couple of members research what other police advisory boards are doing in Delaware and the US. He said the idea is to be given a topic and come back each month with a report on the topic after doing a little bit of research. Mitchell said she would like to be on this committee and would bring back a topic and some research to the next meeting.

B. Police Report Evaluation Committee

Kidd said Harpe sent out some documents that he received from Chief Texter and asked the committee for ideas today. He also typed up some ideas to be read tonight. "Based on the data provided by Chief Texter earlier this month, my recommendation is that this subcommittee focus on five main areas of interest: Use of data, personnel response to data collection, the collection and reporting of incident-based data, sharing data, and providing statistics to the community and media. It will be prudent to assess all calls for service, arrests, incident reports, traffic stops, clearance rates, and hotspot data, which will be useful to managing the MPD. When gathering data on community public safety issues, 911 call volume can be analyzed to understand the demand for service. Our evaluation should assess how many of these calls require a police response, or is a different service better equipped to respond? What type of volume of resources within the MPD jurisdiction need to adequately meet these demands? What are the most in-demand services, aside from policing? I welcome your reactions and recommendations."

C. Community Connections Committee

Carwell, Dean and Santiago are on this committee. They met March 9 with MSgt. Saunders which was reported last month. Since that meeting, two members Jacqueline Burditt and Jason Hunt joined Saunders on a couple of community meetings calls.

Hunt reported they met with The Estates at St. Anne's community. The residents talked about forming a community watch program due to the amount of activity of stolen cars in the area. Hunt said it was a great service provided so the community could see the police are best equipped to handle these issues and helped show how they are working on these efforts.

Burditt said she spoke to Saunders as well about what they can do in Millbranch because the community is concerned they need a community watch as well. She said the community needs to hear how the police are working behind the scenes.

Carwell said at the committee's next meeting, he plans to discuss social media presence and objectives and goals for getting information out to the community moving forward. He also announced a special event online hosted by the University of Miami Law School regarding police reform to be held on April 29 at 7 p.m.

D. Police Chief Report

Chief Texter shared the police report for the month of March that was given at the April Town Council meeting. He said the theft of motor vehicles continues and again, he can't emphasize enough that it's because people are leaving key fobs in their cars and the group comes down in a group and just tries door handles along the streets until they find an unlocked car. This is happening all over New Castle County right now.

He said the stolen cars are being recovered out of state in Maryland and New Jersey. He said another alarming report he's hearing is that people are leaving firearms in their vehicles, which have now been stolen.

Carwell asked if the PAB can help with outreach in particular districts on these things because the police should be focused on more serious crimes.

Texter said unfortunately, this is happening all over town, but any ideas or strategies to get the word out will be really welcome.

Texter said MPD will soon be signing a Memorandum of Understanding to work with New Castle County to start "Hero Help" which is a mental health program that the Town will be sharing with NCC. When people are in distress for various mental health reasons, they can receive help they need instead of being arrested.

Harrington said it's important to keep veterans in mind with mental health issues, so it will be important to make sure the social workers are familiar with veterans and their particular issues.

He announced that there are two new police officers who just graduated the police academy and you should see them around Town. Also, the MPD has one recruit starting the Del. State Police Academy, who just finished his first week.

NEW BUSINESS:

Focus on foot patrol and community policing: Chief Texter said he wants to talk to his staff about these items before reporting on initiatives. He has a meeting this week with them, so

he will be able to report next month. He said of course the community policing, especially residential policing with increased visibility will be a priority.

Citizen Police Academy: Chief Texter asked for the amount of time the board would like to spend in the Academy. He said MSgt. Saunders and he discussed making the PAB the first group to take the Academy in the next few months. He said they are willing to tailor the program to the PAB, depending upon the amount of time requested.

Harrington asked how the MPD is prepared for the verdict of the Chauvin case in Minnesota, if there is a community response to the verdict.

Texter said he can't respond with specifics, but he did say the entire state has been in communication about this verdict, police chiefs up and down the state. He said there is no known threats right now in Delaware for any organized prepared activity, but if it does happen, the MPD is prepared with personal protective equipment and are working collaboratively with departments throughout the state to provide safety as best as we can.

Michael Harpe asked about long-term preparation for community interactions where the "Police department is protecting people and not necessarily trying to be warriors trying to do other things outside of the scope of their responsibilities."

Texter said the department has done implicit bias training earlier this year. Thanks to the help from the PAB, the ABLE program is going to begin soon that includes fair and impartial police training and diversity and inclusion training.

Diaz asked if one of the new officers introduced was Latino. Texter said yes, Officer Vega is Latino. Dias said she thought it was great to see this because members of the Latino community need to have officers with whom they can communicate.

Bin-Yusif reminded the group to invite their friends and neighbors to join in the meetings to see what the PAB is doing.

NEXT MEETING: May 20, 2021

Moved by Santiago and seconded by Burditt to adjourn. Moved unanimously.