

**TOWN OF WINDSOR
HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
JUNE 29, 2020
VIRTUAL MEETING**

APPROVED MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

Committee Member James Dobler called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m. with Councilor Nuchette Black-Burke and Councilor James Govoni present. Town Manager Peter Souza, Police Chief Don Melanson; Dr. Michael Pepe, Director of Health Services; and Amelia Bliss, Director of Human Resources, Bernie Hallums, Law Enforcement Trainer, were also present.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT - None

3. DISCUSSION ON POLICE OFFICER TRAINING RELATED TO IMPLICIT BIAS, CULTURAL AWARENESS/SENSITIVITY AND CRISIS INTERVENTION

Mr. Hallums gave some background information on himself and stated that police officers wear many hats with the largest being customer service and community policing which helps to develop strong relations with the community. Because of the George Floyd incident, he has devoted a lot of time in investigating what exactly happened so he could talk to officers about how they feel about the incident. He touched base on the many subjects that he focuses his training on and how that affects police officers.

Councilor Govoni stated he feels after the academy there should be a continuous program with the officers within the police department. Chief Melanson stated that there is a need to keep this conversation going and for it to be constantly revisited on an annual basis. He added that it is definitely 'doable'.

Councilor Govoni said he hopes that this will be a part of the curriculum with the police academy so it's a unified message that comes out to all the officers no matter which town you go into. Mr. Hallums said they do have instruction on that topic via training.

Councilor Dobler asked Mr. Hallums if there is anything that Manchester is doing that has been successful that Windsor is not doing? Mr. Hallums responded that the only thing he could think of is citizen police academies and Windsor is not presently doing that. This gives the community insight into what the police do but also shows them that they are people too. For the officers that were involved in the program, it was a rejuvenation to their commitment to the community.

Councilor Dobler asked if the Chief could go through the process on how 'bad egg' types of individuals are removed from their positions. Chief Melanson responded that the first step is

to make sure you don't hire a 'bad egg' and ensure they are joining the police department for the right reasons. The second part is making sure you have the policies and procedures in place that delineate an officer's responsibilities and outline what they should be doing and what the repercussions are if they don't comply. The third part is making sure the officers get the proper training and that they have the right tools to do the job in the right manner. The fourth part is supervision—making sure the supervisors are holding the officers accountable.

Councilor Dobler stated that during the 'black lives matter' event that happened last week, the Chief stated that 'this will not happen in Windsor.' It was inspirational that he said that but he wanted more. Why do you think that is? Chief Melanson stated that there are several reasons why. The training that the officers receive and the culture of our police department is one of them. We have also implemented body and car cameras and additional use of force and decision-making training. Above all, there is a culture in the police department where an officer is accountable for his/her actions. Mr. Hallums said a strong leadership is key to not having an incident like George Floyd happen within a community. Having a community where the police department, citizens and community work together is also key.

Councilor Dobler said that he cannot see defunding the police as a benefit. If you could have an extra \$50-\$100,000 towards training or something along those lines, what would you want to see the Windsor Police do with that money? Chief Melanson said he would like to have more decision-making training as almost 50% of the police force has less than 4 years of experience. That's a large part of our department that does not get decision-making training. He'd like to have more situational training as well.

Councilor Black Burke had asked for data on impartial policing, etc. but are those elective or mandatory within a specific time period for officers? Chief Melanson stated that when we hire an officer, they go to academy for 6 months. As part of those hours, officers receive training in different blocks. It's the number of hours that are exclusive. Officers receive 10 hours of training. It's part of a very large pool of required training that the police receive prior to coming to the police department. All officers have to meet the mandate for the number of training hours needed by the State of Connecticut.

Councilor Black-Burke asked about de-escalation. The chart is showing some more area of opportunity. Can officers do it within a certain time frame? Chief Melanson agreed with the Councilor Black-Burke that de-escalation training is important and it touches on every other piece of training that the police department does.

Councilor Black-Burke stated that across the state and country there are other police departments in which you can Google and get data on the police department. A very specific question she received was in regards to citizen complaints. What are the current tracking mechanisms in the area of officer-specific citizen complaints? Chief Melanson responded that they do have that information available at the police department. It is all subject to freedom of information requests. We don't presently post it online, but whether or not it should be done in the future can be discussed. Every officer complaint that comes into the department gets investigated thoroughly by a supervisor and gets reviewed. Any sensitive information would need to be redacted.

Councilor Black-Burke asked about other data such as incidents and police response to various incidents. Chief Melanson stated that they do not publish this type of information online. The department usually gets a request for this type of information from the media but also shares it with any individual that asks about it. That would be a conversation to have in how we should share data moving forward.

Councilor Black-Burke asked about the training that Mr. Hallums provides. Is it an assimilated piece or does it involve actual deep reflection like talking about mind sets dealing with experiences people have gone through? Mr. Hallums said there is a lot of time for discussion. He brings up a personal subject during the training of two family members that died, one at the hands of law enforcement and the other in custody. He tries to spark discussion about that and how the police officers might feel about the situation. He also brings up other subjects that involve a reaction from the police officers and which keeps them engaged. He gets into the issues of race as well.

Councilor Black-Burke asked, on behalf of a citizen, if Windsor has eliminated the knee on the neck position. Chief Melanson stated that Windsor has never allowed the knee on the neck position to be used along with any choke hold or anything like that. Anything that restricts the airway is not allowed per the police department's policy.

Councilor Black-Burke asked, on behalf of a citizen, if there is a community advisory board to look closer at the data as an added arm of accountability? Town Manager Souza stated that there is not an advisory board in place.

Councilor Black-Burke asked about body cameras. She is under the impression that Windsor does not use those at this time. Town Manager Souza said that in the FY 21 budget, the Chief has outlined the purchase and implementation of body cameras. One of the questions we have is if the State of Connecticut will mandate those systems and will there be other money coming to municipalities in helping to implement that. They have had a program the last three years that assists communities in implementing body cameras. For us it is the timing. Do we go forward using our own local money or do we wait for possible state assistance.

Councilor Black-Burke said the next steps she is thinking of is in regards to training and if the grid can be expanded to show other training that is going on in the police department. She feels there should be additional conversation about a community advisory board. Lastly, we should be thinking about how we share information more broadly where citizens don't have to do a Freedom of Information request for information.

Councilor Govoni said he would like to see a summary of the training required from the police department during the year.

Councilor Dobler echoed what Councilor Govoni said. Transparency is key. The more, the better.

Councilor Black-Burke stated that while they are looking at data points and charting pieces, that it would really be good to share, especially the active shooter response. Town Manager Souza stated that the Chief can address the acquisition of military equipment. He noted that

he and the Chief will be, within the next 60-90 days, developing an additional training model to include some of the items that were discussed this evening and looking at what resources it might take in order to implement that model. Our new facility will be ready this summer over on Addison Road and will provide a more convenient ability to host not only training for Windsor officers but also we get some gains and efficiencies by doing it on a sub-regional basis.

Chief Melanson spoke of the surplus military equipment that the department has acquired over the past 15 years. He stated that there are three categories of military equipment that was received. The bulk of the equipment is the patrol rifle or M-60, which is an assault rifle. It is common place in law enforcement today. They currently have 2 dozen rifles. The patrol rifle allows a more accurate and concentrated fire. As Connecticut does not have a SWAT team and the closest one around is one hour away, having this equipment is necessary for the police department's safety while out on a call. The mine resistant vehicle is a defensive weapon and does not have any offensive capabilities (no guns mounted on it.) It is used mainly as a shield. This vehicle allows them to go into live fire. The other category is a weapon sight. It's an optic tool to help the officer make a more accurate shot.

Councilor Black-Burke asked if all the surrounding towns have a mine resistant vehicle. Chief Melanson said they share this vehicle with the north central region.

4. DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND LISTENING TOOLS RELATED TO POLICE AND RACE

Town Manager Souza stated that the Police Department has used a variety of forums to connect with residents. Starting in 2015 and running through 2017, numerous officers attended "Study Circle" groups with Windsor High School students focusing on police, youth, and race.

For the past 3 years, the police department has sponsored 3 summer Community Block Parties at various parks in town. Each of these block parties attracted hundreds of neighborhood residents for an evening of fun and camaraderie.

In addition to the town's citizen's academy, the police department has held a Community Conversation on Policing in 2017 and a Community Forum in 2018 to provide opportunities for networking and discussion between members of the public and law enforcement personnel.

Councilor Dobler commented on the numerous officers that attended study circle groups with high school students. He heard they were very powerful for both the officer and the students. Do we have any plans on starting those up again? Chief Melanson responded one of the things we need to do is to find facilitators to run those study circles. The last facilitator they had has retired. This is more of a school initiated event that he'd love to see come back.

Councilor Govoni said he'd like to see the clinician at the police department become a full time position. As we move forward, he'd like to talk about that possibly happening.

Councilor Black-Burke said we need to do more community conversations maybe with a different feel where there is more listening from the community. Town Manager Souza added that he and the Chief concur that the listening component is important. He believes that on those informal events and activities officers do get a chance to listen, but at this point, maybe neighborhood listening sessions or community conversations are in the forefront of their minds as they continue to bolster our community relations.

Councilor Black-Burke asked about police officers and community officers (ones that are out in the community) and having their uniforms look different. She is raising this question as she is thinking about approachability and people being comfortable to talk to officers. Town Manager Souza said he and the Chief have had a conversation about the uniforms a couple of weeks ago. It's something to talk about with our employees, get their input and thoughts. At least for the warmer summer weeks. Chief Melanson added that he has been thinking the same thing. He wants to make officers approachable as well.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESOLUTION ADOPTED ON 6/15/20 BY TOWN COUNCIL

Town Manager Souza stated that the resolution passed by the Council last Monday talks about data and being able to understand the inequities. Dr. Pepe has made some initial inquiries from a non-profit company called Data Haven. They have collected different sets of data on a regional and state wide basis regarding physical and mental health, civic engagement, neighborhood condition and economic opportunity. We are starting to look at that information. Within the next 45-60 days, we will get better information on how to collect data on a municipal level, county wide and on a regional basis. Those are just starting points.

Councilor Govoni stated that he wants to keep this moving forward. He realizes there is a lot of information that we need to collect. At some point, he'd like to see an overall program. As a community, he hopes that in the future, we have the sensitivity and an awareness to see this as a whole community.

Councilor Dobler stated that a plan needs to be developed. If we're just having a conversation, I think we run the risk of doing nothing. We need to come together with an idea at a very high level. What do we want to accomplish and what is the end goal. He would like the committee to have a plan in writing.

Councilor Govoni said that we should have a written plan as well with some action items.

Councilor Black-Burke stated that on June 15, the Council passed a resolution declaring racism as a health crisis. We were the first town in our state to do so. Since June 15, Hartford, Bloomfield, West Hartford and New Britain have done the same. Councilor Black-Burke stated that she would like to hear from both councilors one or two items they would like to see happen as a result of this resolution or something that they'd would want to ensure continues.

Councilor Dobler stated that for the first 30 days, he would like to communicate through the town that we are looking for input. Then from there, the next 30 days should be putting together that input and formulating a comprehensive plan.

Councilor Govoni said that he'd like to have research done on the statistics. He'd like to see more concrete data from the state so we can better understand what is going on. Not just for COVID but for other health issues as well. He realizes that it might be challenging this time of the year, but we still need to set these timelines.

Councilor Black-Burke stated that as the Health & Safety Committee, are we going to be the keeper of the charge or will this become a separate ad-hoc piece? Is it going to be a community wide commission or something along those lines? She agrees with Councilor Dobler. Tomorrow we will be at the 15 day mark of the 30 days of the resolution having been passed. She would like a concrete plan as well.

Councilor Govoni stated he liked it when Councilor Black-Burke mentioned a commission. One thing he likes about a commission instead of committee is a commission has longevity.

Councilor Dobler agrees with Councilor Govoni about having a commission. Just because if we don't, who will run with this and who will take charge? If you put together a commission you have a set group designed from that. We need to get input from all different circles in town for it to grab hold.

Councilor Black-Burke said in regards to the resolution there is still lots of work to do. She wants to go on the record to say that folks in town have really been great and responsive. They have offered great commentary thoughts, input, and ideas. At this point, the next step is to think about which way we are going to go. Is it going to be through the commission?

Town Manager Souza stated that the important part from a health and safety perspective is finding out the action plan relative to what is under the Council committee's purview. There are other issues within the resolution that are broader than health & safety. He believes it should stay at a Council level for a period of time so the Council is able to shape what the parameters are. He thinks giving it to a commission at this time might be a bit premature. In order to gather good data, it will take time when you start looking at how we design a response from a health perspective.

Councilor Dobler added that he thinks that might work out well as it will give the Town Council time to formulate a plan of action while the Town Manager is putting together all the data points.

Councilor Black-Burke stated that they could perhaps have a public Health & Safety Committee meeting where they can receive input from the public to hear from the community their thoughts.

6. STAFF REPORTS

Town Manager Souza stated the police station construction/renovation is going well. We are still on track to have the building turned over to the town by the 3rd week of July. The police department would be moving over in the first two weeks of August. The second phase of the project is the renovations of 340 Bloomfield Avenue. The PBC will be reviewing those contractors and are hoping to have a contract awarded in the next 20 days or so.

The Public Safety Radio system is on track and should be up and running soon at just about the same time as the police department will be moving to the new facility.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a) May 11, 2020

MOVED by Councilor Dobler, seconded by Councilor Govoni to approve the unapproved minutes of the May 11, 2020 meeting as presented.

Motion Passed 3-0-0

8. ADJOURMENT

MOVED by Councilor Govoni, seconded by Councilor Dobler, to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 p.m.

Motion Passed 3-0-0

Respectfully submitted by,

Helene Albert
Executive Assistant