

Village of Brockport Advisory Committee on Police Reform and Reinvention

Meeting Minutes September 2, 2020, 7PM, LGI Room, Oliver Middle School, 40 Allen Street

Attending in person:

Co-Chair Mayor Margay Blackman, Co-Chair Trustee Annie Crane, Chief Mark Cuzzupoli, Village Clerk/Manager Erica Linden, Lt. Steve Mesiti, Monroe County Legislator Jackie Smith, Karen LoBracco, Dan Brockway, Patrenia Owens, Robert LeSuer, Melanie McDonald, Orlando Benzan, Bill Plews

Attending via Zoom:

Howard Ward, Katy Wilson

Virtual Public Participation: Livestream on Facebook/Village of Brockport by Susan Smith; email questions or comments to mblackman@brockportny.org.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05pm

Mayor Blackman briefly summarized the Governor's Executive Order 203,—the reason for this committee's existence; noted that this was to be a dialogue not an indictment of the BPD; that every member of the committee had something to offer; and that the end result would be a police reform plan presented to the Governor.

Village Clerk/Manager Erica Linden read the governing rules of the Committee and made the following statement:

Rules of the Committee:

We will speak with respect for other people, their point of view, and their time. We affirm having an open mind and an open heart is required for difficult conversations. We are here to learn from one another and agree there is always more to learn. Erica will serve as moderator and watch time.

This committee is short term but this dialogue is long term. Our jurisdiction is 2.2 square miles. However, our impact is boundary-less. We want the ripples we send out to be ones that embrace the fullness of community.

Village Clerk/Manager Erica Linden administered Oath to the Committee as a group. Each member needs to stop by Village Hall to sign Oath in book.

Each member of the Committee introduced themselves.

Discussion question:

What do you think the Brockport Police Department should do, and what do you expect from them?

Jackie Smith –To provide safety for community members, a safe place to work, raise families, and enjoy life.

Chief Cuzzupoli responded by reading an email from a resident concerning a positive interaction between one of our officers and a group of children.

Howard Ward –wants to see the same kind of love and care given to our children of color. Children of color should also be invited to have these interactions. Doesn't want our children to be afraid –if you see a person of color on the street, you need say “How are you doing?” That's all you need to say, but you need to say it.

There is an expectation in communicating: at RIT there is a large deaf and hard of hearing population. They tend to be physical in nature as a way of expressing themselves and can be seen as threatening. In general, the deaf and hard of hearing population is afraid of police officers –it would make a difference to have police officers trained in communicating with this population.

Melanie McDonald –The Police Department should work in tandem with mental health agencies. How do the Police triage? Concerned about the mental health of everyone, including those encountering police, and the police officers themselves.

Robert LeSuer –What is the role of the Police Department in modifying resident behaviors? For example: how do we enforce better driving habits? Does a Department in a more rural area take on a role of improving quality of life in that nature, beyond just public safety?

Katy Wilson–Well skilled de-escalation has seen a change in the last decade. SUNY had to remove a few officers who did not see the importance of this. We expect strong de-escalation skills in a police department. We have students from the 5 Boroughs, especially female, who are afraid of police officers, people in uniform. Expects de-escalation as part of community policing.

Bill Plews –The migrant community is concerned the PD is willing to call in the immigration agency in times that are inappropriate, that do not warrant involving that agency. It is a very widely held belief that they will.

Karen LoBracco –Expectations of professionalism, respect, honesty, good communication and transparency

Orlando Benzan -Recognizes that the Police Department's relationship with the School District is hampered by jurisdictional lines, with the only building in jurisdiction being Oliver Middle school. There is debate among staff at the High School about police (County Sheriff) presence in the building. The staff is divided. There is concern some students are afraid of police officers and their presence would escalate instead of de-escalate a situation. Is there a way to have a Police presence that helps students become more comfortable?

Migrant families are fearful of police, constantly questioning if police are here to help or hurt us. Many cannot communicate clearly in English. Police need survival language skills (not conversational, but survival) –need a Spanish speaking officer or responder to help. We also have a large Ukrainian population, students tend to be the translators for their parents.

Jackie Smith- Who do you call for a mental health arrest?

Chief Cuzzupoli answered –Kim Butler from Monroe County Health Department, who has developed a team and resources for us throughout the county and is phenomenal. We hope to have her as a guest speaker. She has a 40-hour crisis intervention team and provides resources directly related to de-escalation. She is trying to expand the service to 24 hours per day.

Melanie McDonald –Has a daughter who is in in the Diversity Club at the High School. Several friends become very anxious when they see officers in uniform. Wants all kids to feel safe in school. We want all people to be comfortable and want to high-five the officers.

Chief Cuzzupoli commented that he has never had a bad experience in our schools, especially Oliver Middle School. There are regular kindergarten visits to the Police Department and then there is a gap in the kids' exposure to the Police Department, they don't see each other again until middle school. Mark asks for suggestions on how to bridge this gap, how do we have more contact with young people in a positive way.

Jackie Smith –What is community policing?

Chief Cuzzupoli answered: building trust, being visible and interactive. It includes directed patrol, walking patrols and bike patrols. The people who see you know you and you become approachable to them, It is knowing your business owners and community members by name. "Trust is the heart of community policing."

Robert LeSuer –What does an 8-hour shift look like for an officer?

Chief Cuzzupoli answered in detail.

Karen LoBracco –Would like to understand how Brockport Police, University Police and Sheriff's Office all interact.

Chief Cuzzupoli: We use Monroe County Sheriff for specialty areas, such as technicians. We cannot have staff that know everything and it is best to call in a specialist for certain situations. We all have a mutual aid relationship, as well as an information exchange, and regular collegial/professional meetings to share resources. Meets with University Police regularly.

Patrenia Owens –How can you incorporate more diversity in the police department?

Chief Cuzzupoli responded that the Department has had a diversity training session lead by Pastors Washington and Jones. The session was observed by Mayor Blackman and Clerk/Manager Linden. There will be more diversity training sessions.

Bill Plews –The migrant community would like an overt statement that the Brockport Police Department will not call ICE for translation help or for an unwarranted reason. Members of this community are terrified of unjustified deportation which will result in never seeing their children or family again.

Chief Cuzzupoli mentioned that he did summer jobs on farm alongside migrant farm workers and would be willing to speak to a group of them. He raised the issue of ID cards. It is difficult for officers to recognize real versus fake/forged documents from other countries, specifically Mexico and Guatemala, the home countries of most of our migrant farm workers.

Clerk/Manager Linden stated that we have made a good start and there are many points to discuss further.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:35.