

Police Equity and Use of Force Advisory Group
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, November 5, 2020
7:15 – 8:45 pm

In attendance:

Committee members: Richard Kuklewicz (Selectboard Chair), Ariel Elan, Maddox Sprengel, Richard Hall, David Bulley, Deborah Frenkel, Faith English
Town staff: Steve Ellis
Community Member: Jeff Singleton

1. Ariel makes motion to approve minutes of September 22 joint meeting:
Second: Deborah.
Minutes unanimously approved.
2. Deborah makes motion to approve minutes of October 22 meeting:
Second: Maddox.
Minutes unanimously approved.
3. Report on any follow-up questions Ariel has submitted to Montague Police Dept. (MPD) prior to this meeting, regarding data the MPD has provided to both police advisory groups so far: No follow-up on this since last week. Some answers have been provided by Lt. Bonnett in his email in response to preliminary questions.
4. Report from David Bulley and Rich Hall on recommended interview questions and topics for Chief Williams and Lt. Bonnett:

David: reviewed the Arrest, Use of Force, and Traffic Citations in separate sections, reviewed in depth. We thank the police chief for sharing detailed information with the committee. Some questions:

- Legalese language; would like help understanding the different categories in force
- Does every use of a compliance technique result in arrest?
- Does every defensive action by officer(s) result in arrest?
- If one person is getting arrested multiple times, that might impact the data. How much or often might this be part of the numbers we see?
- Turners Falls *appears* to have the highest proportion of arrests (compared to its population, which is not listed) of any of Montague's 5 villages. What is the MPD's perspective on this? Would more poverty and/or more people of color in T.F. be factors?
- Highest number of arrests are white people, which reflects our town.
- Hispanic not a race, which means that this population isn't shown as a visible sub-group.
- What kind of training does MPD receive for interacting with people with mental illness?
- Police consider showing their taser as a "use of force", which is great. But among people with trauma background, this technique can cause escalation.

Rich Hall also worked on compiling questions; he adds:

- Some categories had a Hispanic designation, others do not.
- Do other agencies provide support for police, or could provide support instead of police, when working with people with mental illness?
- Do they have suggestions for us in terms of how they might address these situations?
- What are the de-escalation techniques/what type of training are they receiving?

Comments/suggestions from the committee:

Rich K.: A question about percentage of MPD with a military background was brought up in last meeting.

Rich H: Military-style training (if that is taking place) might be problematic, but determining whether or not someone has military background isn't informative. I wouldn't say that someone coming from a military background is necessarily more violent. Also, 7 of 8 people employed in the military are in support roles – not combat or combat-ready.

Would be more useful to focus on the policies versus the backgrounds of personnel.

Ariel: There have been notable Federal policies adopted in the past few decades that have encouraged & funded local police forces to be more pro-active looking for certain kinds of crimes, or behavior, and also that have and funded more military-style equipment for police forces throughout the country. For example: Homeland Security after 911; and at least two phases of the “War on Drugs” in the Reagan and Clinton Administrations.

I'd like to hear from the Chief & Lt. whether they feel policing has been influenced by these events, and their perspectives on changes they have noticed.

David: We could frame an open-ended question about how people feeling about the push to embrace military techniques/equipment.

Steve: Is it advantageous or disadvantageous to have military training/background? In some cases, that training might help someone to not panic and use a firearm.

Rich K.: There is an incentive for officers to get higher education. For a bachelor's degree, even a master's. (Sounds like usually in criminal justice.) What are the benefits of this? What are the percentages of officers with higher degrees?

Maddox: How might unholstering a weapon impact the person being arrested? This should potentially be reported, would be curious to hear about the victim experience. What is their perception of implicit bias?

David: Would like to hear more about what is a documented use of force and what isn't.

Rich H.: Can we get policing information from the state (is there a statewide database that has town-specific data)?

ACTION ITEM: Committee members will send David any additional questions for us to ask Chief Williams and Lt. Bonnett in person. David & Rich H. will compile all of our first round of questions for our first interview with them.

5. Select date(s) and time(s) to request the Chief and Lt. meet with this committee.
--Committee agrees to invite them two weeks from tonight, 11/19 from 7-9 PM.

6. Discussion of the MPD policies and practices handbook, and training manual (provided to both police advisory groups last week).

Faith: Might be useful to review the exam questions relevant to use of force and de-escalation that are used in the training manual.

Deborah: Would be useful to read the curricula and other sources where they are getting the training information in the first place.

Committee members to send additional questions & comments requiring more data or printed information to Ariel.

7. Other questions and suggestions group members may have about the process and/or work of this committee so far.

--None

8. Alternate meeting time for the week of Thanksgiving?

--We will skip our meeting the week of Thanksgiving.

9. Select facilitator for next meeting.

--Ariel volunteers to continue with facilitation

10. Topics not anticipated within 48-hour advance-notice posting requirement.

--None

11. Adjournment

Rich K. makes motion, Deborah seconds.

Motion passes unanimously.