

Police Equity and Use of Force Advisory Group
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, December 3, 2020
7:15 – 8:45 pm

In attendance:

Committee members: Richard Kuklewicz (Selectboard Chair), Ariel Elan, Maddox Sprengel, Richard Hall, Deborah Frenkel, David Bulley, Faith English

Community Member: Jeff Singleton

1. Ariel Elan, facilitator, opens the meeting, including announcing the meeting is being recorded, and roll call taken.
2. Approve Police Equity and Use of Force Advisory Group Minutes: November 12, 2020
 - Deborah makes motion to approve
 - David seconds
 - Minutes approved unanimously
3. Report on any written correspondence with the Montague Police Department (MPD) since November 19 meeting.
 - Nothing to report.
4. Follow-up questions and next steps from the Committee's Nov. 19 interview & discussion with Chief Williams and Lt. Bonnett of the Montague Police Dept. (MPD).
 - Deborah: We had an informative session with the Lt. and Chief of Police. Going forward, we need to review the impact that the use of force has had in the community. Some of the practices are not in line with the written policy, (e.g., the question about certain reasons for use of force per the policy book: Lt. said that the dept. knows that those practices aren't appropriate and are not used in the field). There shouldn't be a disconnect between their training and what is written in policy handbook.
 - David: There could be a problem with the fact that people who have complaints have to go to the police. They may not feel safe complaining. Maybe we could recommend that the police make someone else available to receive complaints.
 - Faith: Appreciated Jeff Singleton's presentation of the statistics, at the end of last meeting. We should request police dept. review the arrest data among people of color to see if there are cases of one person having multiple arrests – that could skew the arrest numbers of people of color, for example.
 - Deborah: Or, there could be more "frequent flyers" -- as we've been calling individuals with multiple arrests – among white people, which would make the arrest numbers in other groups artificially low.
 - There is also outdated language in the handbook (e.g. only using male pronouns)

- Rich K.: Regarding filing complaints, we could suggest an ombudsperson or a tiered process for people who felt like they weren't being heard; there would be alternative method they could turn to. Also, what actions are currently taken in response to complaints?
- Faith: Another reporting idea is to recommend that all use of force incidents be reviewed by a committee rather than just the Lt. Do our officers use body cameras?
- Deborah: Would be good to hear what other municipalities do with regard to body cameras.
- Maddox: Would be interested in hearing from people who have had a wellness check, or a crisis escort to the hospital. Also, if the police are the public and the public have significant mental health needs, is there a way to reinvest police funding into mental health resources?
- Faith, Deborah, and Maddox volunteer to research models used elsewhere in which unarmed responders handle crisis situations.
- David: Next step for each of us it to make a list of ideas/suggestions that can be included in the report.

Additional requests to direct to MPD:

- Review arrest data among communities of color to determine whether or not there are repeat offenders potentially skewing the data.
- We would like to hear from MPD about use of body cameras and/or reason for not using them, as well as to learn what other municipalities are doing.

Possible recommendations to include in our report:

- Make list of any discrepancies between the policy handbook and what was communicated by the Lt., and recommend that the department amend the handbook to be consistent with practices. Update policy handbook to include more inclusive language (e.g. use of she/her pronoun in addition to he/his).
- Recommend providing alternative person such as an ombudsman for community members to file complaints with, establish oversight/transparency with regard to how complaints are addressed.
- Recommend that all use of force incidents be reviewed by a committee rather than just the Lt.

5. Input for informal update to the Selectboard: Committee in agreement that we would like to request the survey data from Community Engagement Committee. Would like guidance from Selectboard around how much collaboration there will be between the two committees.

- Ariel: It is important that we are able to review the survey responses collected from the community about their experiences with the MPD. We can support the efforts of the Community Engagement Committee by addressing any issues that pertain to the use of force and equity.
- Deborah: We should each think about the question of impact [of current policing practices], and what are other ways that we can assess impact in the community?

6. Administrative needs of the Committee.

- Ariel: Would appreciate assistance with compiling materials. Please reach out to her directly to express interest in helping with this.

7. Plan agenda for next meeting.

- Brainstorm recommendations for report.

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

- None

Comment from Community Member, Jeff Singleton: Body cameras and complaint process are both important issues. This committee's report should include what conversations we have had, including pros and cons of each issue, so that the public knows what issues were addressed.

9. Adjournment

- David makes motion to adjourn
- Deborah seconds
- Motion passes unanimously