

Interview Questions & Topics for 11.19.20 Meeting with Montague Police Dept. command staff

***Any materials referenced in this document that were not posted online with the Agenda for tonight's meeting are in the Data & Documents section of this web page:
<https://www.montague-ma.gov/g/77/Police-Equity--Use-of-Force-Advisory-Group>*

Introductory Question

--How do you understand your job of policing? Or What is the purpose of policing as you understand it?

Uses of Force ~ MPD perspectives

--We learned a few days ago, in Lt. Bonnett's written response to our second set of questions, that the reporting and accountability process the Montague Police Dept. has regarding use of force was adopted locally, with no requirement by state or federal government. We are very interested in hearing about the reasons, the timing, the motivations, and goals behind this policy.

--And were resources, models, or movements within professional policing or from other resources a factor in developing these policies and practices, and/or informing them?

--And is there anything you can share about how members of the department feel or have adapted to these policies and practices?

Questions we had prepared prior to the above include:

--Help us understand the different categories of force and the times they would be used. Can you share some real-life examples in which different types of compliance techniques or force might be used?

--Please help us understand the thinking of police officers when it comes to using force.

--Specifically, how do officers understand implicit bias when it comes to the performance of their duties, and how they might view or understand a person they are dealing with?

--What kind of training happens around these questions of sizing up another individual and how much of a threat that person may pose to the officer or others in the situation?

--One thing we have been learning from the national spotlight on unnecessary deaths in police custody or during an "incident" is that no locality is immune, and that unconscious bias does play a role in an officer's (or any person's) perception of danger/threat. What measures are being taken to ensure that members of the MPD do not make snap decisions that could lead to unnecessary use of force or deadly use of force in the face of high-stress situations?

Complaint Process and Records

--If a person who has been involved in an interaction with a member of the police department, or has witnessed or heard of an action that troubles them, and wishes to report a problem or complaint, what is the process for doing so?

--It would be helpful for this committee to receive data on any reports or complaints that may have been filed regarding police conduct or interactions over the past several years, including how each was handled and followed up.

Compliance Techniques, Uses of Force, & Reporting ~ technical aspects

Referencing the MPD Policies & Procedures manual, p. 113, Sec. III. Policy:

--Is it accurate to think that this section requires written Use of Force reporting of *all* compliance techniques and defensive tactics, with or without a weapon, and with or without any resulting injury or complaint of injury?

--If this is not accurate, what compliance techniques or defensive actions do not require reporting?

--Provision 5 in this section details actions that are not considered to be uses of force. An example is unholstering a weapon or handling it. Can you walk us through this distinction? Are there any other actions or gestures that an officer or layperson could view as coercion or use of force that are *not* required to be reported?

According to the manual [p. 116], "*The Use of Force Report shall be used for internal statistical and analytical purposes only, and shall not be part of the incident or arrest file for the particular incident.*"

--Why is this information not part of the incident or arrest file?

--Is this information available to the public? If not, why?

Medical Attention & Needs

Regarding Medical Attention in connection with use of force [manual, p. 110], there seem to be subjective aspects that are up to the officer.

--Who deems that a person who has experienced use of force needs medical attention?

--If there are not visible obvious injuries, how does an officer decide that a person's request for medical attention is valid? [In other words, that the request is not a claim coming from an ulterior motive?]

Clarification will be helpful.

Mental Health and states of mind altered by substance use

Some of the most recent high-profile shootings by police around the country have involved individuals suffering a mental-health crisis, or simply behaving idiosyncratically on the street. A number of police interactions in Montague that required force were reported in the Mental Health category.

--How do you, as command staff, and the officers generally, understand the role of a police officer in addressing calls related to mental-health challenges, addiction, homelessness, or any similar situation?

--What are your policies and practices related to responding to "wellness check" calls involving mental-health concerns?

--What would an officer think that a person in a mental-health crisis needs?

--What are our officers' training, and experience, with mental-health symptoms, and presentations?

--For example, do they have an understanding of the physiological stress response within the autonomic nervous system?

-- Do some of our officers have counseling and/or addictions training and/or experience?

--Are some police officers EMTs?

--Referring back to the Use of Force policies, these include the use of physical techniques that can cause pain. Since compliance measures that can cause pain are authorized when a person does not cooperate with verbal instructions or persuasion by police, what is the policy when a person is non-responsive due to their mental state?

--What if someone is essentially unable to respond?

--Displaying a taser without deploying it is listed as a Use of Force in the Montague statistics, which made sense to the members of this committee. For a person with mental-health issues or a trauma background, showing a taser could be perceived as threatening and end up escalating a situation. What training do officers receive to mitigate this?

--What support do officers have from other public agencies in dealing with mental-health and altered-state events?

--In addition to EMTs from, for example, the Fire Dept. or an ambulance, does the MPD call upon social-service workers, addiction specialists, or other types of crisis intervenors?

--Can the officer(s) responding to a situation call in other resources directly, or must they request help through a supervisor or dispatcher?

--In your best-case hopes, what additional support, resources, and/or changes in your department's scope of services, would the police department want in order to optimally serve individuals who are experiencing a mental-health crisis, and others who are impacted?

--Is there anything else you would like to share with us on the department's policies and approach in handling these situations?

Training

The Montague Field Training & Evaluation Program Manual describes a range of tests, including constructed knowledge, scenario, and field-performance tests. Can this committee see any of the [blank] written or interview-type examinations? Can we look at source materials used to create tests and examinations of different kinds?

Clarifications & follow-up questions on information MPD has supplied to this committee

Because the police advisory groups are charged with examining the effects of local policing on various subgroups, this committee requested and received demographic statistics from the MPD showing racial and/or ethnicity of individuals who experienced Arrests, Uses of Force, and Traffic Stops. These questions may repeat some that Lt. Bonnett responded to this week in writing, but mainly follow up on the information you have provided in writing:

1. Do police officers ask individuals their race or ethnicity, or do they record it by observation?

2. In the arrest data for a small town, one or two individuals who are arrested multiple times can significantly skew the data. Should we be aware of this happening here?

3. Turners Falls seems to be the village with a significantly higher number of arrests than any other area. We would like to hear the police's perspective on this.

4. In the list of reasons for traffic stops, provided us with breakdowns by race, ethnicity, and gender and also by results of the stop such as getting a ticket, a written warning, or a verbal warning. Are you able to give us additional breakdowns showing the racial and ethnic breakdowns among those who received verbal warnings, written warnings, and tickets?

5. You provided to us and to the public the Montague Police Dept. Policies & Procedures manual. (*Thank you.*) Under the Uses of Force described in the manual, does every "compliance technique" result in an arrest? Does every "defensive action" result in an arrest?

6. Regarding the Montague Police Department Uses of Force statistics that you provided to us and to the public:

--In the various categories, such as Village, Race, Ethnicity, Age, Nature of Event, and type of Force Used, can you provide a resident/non-resident breakdown?

7. Can you provide breakdowns that would correlate the type of Force Used with the Nature of the Event? We are especially interested in what kinds of force were used in Mental Health events.

8. *Arrest Data:*

As we look at the arrest numbers from MPD, questions arise about the causes of the arrests.

--Is it possible to break down how many arrests were for behavior to which the MPD responded in real time? And to show other categories, such as warrants issued by courts for probation violations, failure to pay criminal or civil fines, failure to appear in court, ignoring a subpoena to testify in a case, etc.?

Policies & Procedures Updating & Resources

--How often are the MPD's written policies reviewed and revised?

--Many sections of the manual, perhaps all of it(?), were revised June 2020. Was this round of revisions connected with the issues surrounding policing that have surfaced nationally this year? If so, what did command staff feel you wanted to add or change in this larger context?

--When changes are made to policies and practices in Montague, in what ways are all members of the force, and employees such as dispatchers, engaged in either the process or in adoption of whatever is new?

--Are there specific sources the department often draws upon for templates or guidance? (For example, professional organizations, training centers, policy-development groups, academics, state or Federal agencies?)

--Is input for policies & procedures solicited and/or received from experts in psychology, statistics, or other relevant fields?

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