

A Police Advisory Board meeting was held on the above date via Zoom conference call, with the following members in attendance: Salahudin Bin-Yusif, Wanda Dean, Linda LaRue, Jelani Bryant, Jacqueline Burditt, John Carwell, Yvonne Santiago, Michael Harpe, Debbie Harrington and Joyce Kidd. Middletown Police Captain Ron Davis and FOP Representative Michael Hilliard were also in attendance.

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chairman Bin-Yusif.

MINUTES AND AGENDA APPROVAL: Chairman Bin-Yusif asked if there were any corrections to the minutes. Hearing none, he said the minutes for February are approved as written and submitted.

CHAIR REPORT:

Bin-Yusif reported that although he doesn't have a draft of the Strategic Plan for the PAB, it is still coming along. He said the main purpose of coming up with the Strategic Plan is to come up with a "laser focus" for the group on what its mission truly is as we move forward.

Joyce Kidd said she has reviewed other strategic plans and found that other groups base their strategic plans on community surveys, so perhaps we should work on developing the survey that we have been talking about doing, and we could develop the strategic plan from that effort.

Bin-Yusif said he would like to form a committee for the survey effort, so stay tuned for that.

Quarterly report – Bin-Yusif said he will be sending out the report one more time to the group and wants people to comment on it. He said it's important to document what we are doing. So, when the members receive this report, please comment on it – "Even if it's to say, I love it, OK as written," he said.

Citizen's Academy – MPD will be hosting a Citizen's Police Academy and will be inviting the PAB as well as members of the community at-large. He said he is hoping members of the PAB will attend as many sessions as possible. Several members have gone through the academy already, but he implores as many members who haven't been yet, to attend.

Police Officer's Bill of Rights – Sen. Stephanie Hansen sent the PAB the proposed document of the State of Delaware's revised Police Officer's Bill of Rights and asked for comments from the PAB, as well as other advisory boards across the state.

Bin-Yusif said this effort is something that is being done across the country and he thinks it is a good thing that the state is taking comments from the public and specifically from police advisory boards.

Yvette Santiago said she sits on the Delaware Racial Justice Collaborative and said at a meeting this week on the Bill of Rights, that committee believes it seems that the edits to the bill seem to "take us back to where we were initially," so although the intent is to promote equity and equality in policing, these edits make that "essentially gone," if it is adopted, she said. She said the document has been broken down by the collaborative to show how the edits change the original intent of the bill. She is going to find out if she can share the document with the PAB.

Bin-Yusif said he has asked one of the bill's authors (Sen. Lockman) to present to us before we make comments upon it. He then polled the group to find out if everyone was available for a Zoom call in the evening in the coming week to have this discussion. Bin-Yusif said he will set up a meeting and would send out the information to the group.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

A. Police Report Evaluation Committee

Dr. Michael Harpe has created a document, an attempt to codify the information that is sent out by Chief Texter each month. The idea is to have a “snapshot” of things that are happening month-to-month and year-to-year. Harpe said it’s interesting to note the amount of catalytic converters being stolen – six incidents in the past month that Chief Texter provided. These are the types of things we can track – specific types of criminal activity happening in an area of Town.

Bin-Yusif said several months ago, we talked about hiring an intern, and this looks like something we could have an intern work on, inputting all of this information into a spreadsheet. He said if an intern isn’t feasible before next month, he will try to help Harpe with inputting the information.

B. Community Connections Committee

Chair Carwell said the committee has not met since last month, however, the Facebook page has gone live. He said he would like some help adding content into the page such as the committee meetings and would like to launch the page and announce what we want to get from the community. Bin-Yusif said he will also add these duties to the list of things that an intern could help the PAB with handling.

C. Research Committee

Wanda Dean reported that she is working on putting together a survey for the PAB, for the community. She requested that someone put together the data that is submitted each month to the PAB into the spreadsheet provided by Dr. Harpe. She said this data will help analyze how many calls are not taken in by the police department and what is handled by New Castle County.

Dean also reported that they are waiting to get total numbers of 911 calls provided by New Castle County’s call center and these total numbers can be compared to the MPD’s monthly report of calls they have to respond to, she said.

Debbie Harrington said another analysis being done is regarding “force strength.” She said the data being collected needs to be used to decide what is the right size of the force needed to handle Middletown. She said there are models out there and we have to find the right one (model) that could best be used for Middletown. She asked Capt. Davis if this is also being analyzed by the MPD. She said there is a number of police officers that we should be trying to get here, and it may never happen, but we should at least know the number that we are striving for.

Cpl. Hilliard said based on the FBI’s data from 2011, which is more than 10 years old now, a department our size and the Town’s size, should be at 50 to 60 officers. He said he agrees with that number and it would allow for the MPD to have more specialized units and target high crime areas would be perfect for our department. However, he said it is difficult to even consider having a number of officers to try to get to in the department, when there is such a struggle to find qualified police officers.

Harrington said all organizations are struggling with hiring right now and we will have to help tackle that issue as well, but it’s important to strive for a goal number of officers to meet the needs of the public.

POLICE CHIEF REPORT

- Capt. Davis reported that a hiring process will open next week for officers. He told the PAB to tell friends and family to send people in to apply.
- Dean asked if the MPD has any type of mentorship program for people who might have questions about becoming a police officer. She said there might be folks in the community who might not have ever considered being a police officer but could be that “nugget” in the community who just needs to be pushed a little bit.
- Capt. Davis said the MPD is good about meeting with any potential recruits who are interested in police work and he’s even done it himself. Officers will talk to anyone interested in becoming an officer to hear their concerns and allay their fears.
- He said the summer seasonal police aide hiring process will commence next week as well and the pay for seasonals has increased to \$18/hr., so spread the word to anyone who might be interested in police work, they might want to check out this program for the summer.

Capt. Davis read the police report for the month of March and the PAB had the following questions:

- John Carwell asked what is the reason for the theft of catalytic converters. Capt. Davis said he believes there is platinum in them, so they “hit the jackpot” when they steal them and are able to sell them.
- Joyce Kidd asked what happens when an officer reports to the scene and the person is no longer there, what do they put in the report? Capt. Davis said if they report to the scene in the middle of the night and the person is no longer there, they turn over the information to the day shift police, and they will canvass the area and check Ring cameras and do the investigation they have to do involving interviewing the neighborhood.
- Dean asked about 911 calls and how they are documented in the police report. She said, for example, the police report documents 1010 calls. Do all of those calls come in through the County 911 center? Capt. Davis said yes, the County ReCom Center filters the calls to MPD.

NEW BUSINESS:

Bin-Yusif said he would like to see the group move forward with pushing the idea of a video highlighting the MPD for the Town’s website that can be shared on Facebook and other avenues, to show how great it is to work in Middletown on the police force. He added that the downtown Main Street group is working on a video and perhaps we could piggyback on that.

Wanda Dean said she sent over a few suggestions about what other police departments have done.

NEXT MEETING: April 18, 2022 – Via Zoom until it can be discussed with the Town about providing a “hybrid” meeting.