

A Police Advisory Board meeting was held on the above date via Zoom conference call, with the following members in attendance: Salahudin Bin-Yusif, Jelani Bryant, Jason Hunt, Wanda Dean, Debbie Harrington, Sue Mitchell, Yvette Santiago, John Carwell, Emy Diaz, Billy Warrick, Jacqueline Burditt and Joyce Kidd. Middletown Police Captain Davis, Chief William Texter 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 APPROVAL: Chairman Bin-Yusif asked if there were any corrections to the minutes. Hearing none, he said the minutes for December are approved as written.

CHAIR REPORT:

Bin-Yusif reported that the Zoom workshop meeting on Jan. 11 went well and he would like to continue to have similar meetings, where members of the committee can speak about any topics on their minds. He said he will continue to set up this meeting two weeks before each committee meeting, so the group can set the agenda for the month.

- He said the main point that kept coming up during the phone call, was to make sure the board keeps to their main purpose, what our “ultimate goal and ultimate purpose” is. Also, they said they would like to have more time under new business to discuss items and bring ideas forward. Bin-Yusif said he will try to keep new business open so there is more time to discuss hot topics.
- The group also feels like there has not been enough contact with the community and this board. He said the group plans to work harder to involve the community with the board, as the group feels its main purpose is as a “conduit between the community and the police department.”
- The group wants to have more public meetings, bringing in leaders from throughout the community to discuss how the police and community can work together.
- Finally, the group would like to focus on creating a survey of the community to see how it feels about the police department and get some thoughts from the community members about how they feel they could be better served.
- Debbie Harrington and Emy Diaz questioned the addition of the workshop meetings. They both said Bin-Yusif should keep board members in mind who are not able to attend the side meetings because of work responsibilities.
- Bin-Yusif said the agenda-building meeting would be just for those who need to get something off their chest and members never have to attend if they don’t want to. “I look at it like a bus stop, it’s there if you need it, but you don’t have to get on or go there,” he said.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

A. Police Report Evaluation Committee

Dr. Harpe has created a document to plug information into that is received from the police department. So, it is going to take some time to input the data so we can compare incidents from year to year.

Dr. Harrington said the format is great, but she is hoping to see the committee actually analyze some data in the near future so we have an idea of what we should be looking at. If there are more shootings this year over last year, or more animal cruelty incidents, etc., we need to know, she said.

B. Community Connections Committee

Chair Carwell said the committee had a meeting on Jan. 11 and discussed the Facebook page. He said he needs a little more information before posting the page – headshots and bios of members for starters.

He asked the group to think of topics they would like to put on the page. After the Facebook page launches, he hopes to launch a website as well.

Also, Carwell said he wants to continue the discussion about having a “Courageous Conversations” event in Middletown and he asked Cpl. Hilliard for a contact person for that program. Cpl. Hilliard said he would get him in touch with them.

C. Research Committee

No report.

POLICE CHIEF REPORT

- Capt. Davis shared the police report for the month of December that was given at the January Town Council meeting. Juveniles stealing vehicles and using them to commit crimes in other locations around the tri-state area are continuing to happen.
- Capt. Davis said the problem is the judicial system is releasing these juveniles on their own recognizance after committing these crimes, so they get out of jail and go right back to doing the same thing once again.
- Capt. Davis said he can't tell us the number of times he has been on patrol and found a car running in front of the stores. The juveniles are taking complete advantage of the trusting nature of people.
- Debbie Harrington asked about the case of the police vehicle being shot up in Willow Grove Mill two months ago. Capt. Davis said the individual was arrested after admitting to the crime. He was also charged with additional crimes and it was a Middletown resident who was charged.
- Harrington said the increase in shootings is disturbing and she would really like some answers as to why they are increasing in our area.
- Cpl. Hilliard said this is something that needs to be dealt with legislatively, as Capt. Davis was referring to earlier in the discussion. “Officers are being ambushed, shot and killed in the line of duty all over the country and the numbers were rising in 2021 and into 2022, it's not getting any better. Look at what is happening in New York City. We have repeat, violent offenders committing crimes, who are released back on the streets. They get their hands on firearms and commit crimes.

Legislatively, we have to do something to hold violent criminals accountable for their actions, so our communities are safer, your lives and our lives as police officers are safer, this can't keep going on," Hilliard said.

- Bin-Yusif asked if the MPD offers a buy-back program for guns. Chief Texter said the department is working on something with the Attorney General's office.
- Harrington asked if the police department is open on weekends and holidays? She said the talk in the community is they could not make contact with the police department when the police car was shot up.
- Chief said there is a yellow phone outside the police station that goes directly to the 911 Center and an officer would be dispatched. Bin-Yusif asked if that was a staffing issue or financial? Texter said the job was posted before and there was no luck with finding a candidate who wanted to work that position.
- John Carwell asked if the Mayor and Mayors of other towns are linking up to tackle this issue of violence. Maybe increasing penalties for people who are committing these dangerous crimes like shooting up a police car. "It takes a lot of gall to commit those kinds of crimes," he said.
- Chief Texter said this legislation needs to be addressed on the State of Delaware level. He said the legislature did do some reforms with bail last session and he believes there are more bills being looked at. He suggested the PAB reach out to Senator Hansen and State Rep. Moore to discuss these issues.
- Sue Mitchell asked about structured gang activity in Middletown? Chief said the MPD is cognizant of more activity. He said there are gang members who float through our area and there seems to be an east-side / west-side issue with young people these days and there is a detective on staff who keeps track of these people and issues at all times.
- Harrington asked for a personnel update.
- Chief Texter said the MPD lost one officer in the fall to the DSP and one in December to NCC police. The MPD hired three who are in the police academy right now. One just graduated from the academy and one who is just hitting the street Thursday and one who just completed his field training. And, there's a hiring process going on right now.
- Bin-Yusif asked for the minimum requirements. Texter said he would send him the most recent posting, which lays it all out, the different ways you could apply. The MPD looks at all experience, college, military experience, etc.
- Emy Diaz asked for the civilian requirements. He said he would include that posting as well.
- Billy Warrick said there seems to be a rush of shoplifting in Middletown. He said he heard the department is going to put an officer in uniform at the Walmart. Chief said what he probably heard about is that we want to work with Walmart to try to negotiate a time for them to make their big reports of shoplifting instead of them happening at shift changes, which can end up tying up the officers for a long time.

OLD BUSINESS:

Bylaws Review:

- Bin-Yusif said there has been a suggestion from a board member to add language in the bylaws regarding the board being “non-partisan.”
- He read the statement that was crafted by member Emy Diaz (at the request of the board chairman) that read: The Middletown Police Advisory Board is an independent and non-partisan body, neither supporting nor opposing political parties nor its candidates in any in any level of government. Members of the MPAB shall not participate in any political activities while representing the MPAB. Members of the MPAB must also avoid all appearances of support for political affiliation and or its candidates while performing duties / roles of the MPAB.
- Billy Warrick said he believes the board may want to get an opinion from an attorney on this matter because we are dealing with first and second amendment rights and it becomes “very touchy.”
- It was decided to table this issue one more time until it can be reviewed by the Town Solicitor.

NEW BUSINESS:

Bill Wolfe was on the Zoom call and he wanted to make a statement:

“I graduated the citizens academy, the second class and I learned more than I expected. I strongly feel that anyone on oversight should graduate this full course. Don't judge a person until you walk in their shoes, we could never walk in these the Middletown Police Department's shoes, but taking the class gives us a much better understanding of what MPD goes through on a daily basis and why they make the decisions they make. It's a huge eye opener.”

NEXT MEETING: Feb. 28, 2022