

A Police Advisory Board meeting was held on the above date via Zoom conference call, with the following members in attendance: Salahudin Bin-Yusif, Michael Harpe, Debbie Harrington, John Carwell, Emy Diaz, Wanda Dean, Billy Warrick, Yvette Santiago, Jacqueline Burditt and Joyce Kidd. Middletown Police Chief William Texter, FOP Representative Stephen Haines.

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Chairman Bin-Yusif.

MINUTES APPROVAL: It was moved by Michael Harpe and seconded by Joyce Kidd to approve the minutes for the Sept. 20, 2021 minutes. Approved 10-0.

UPDATE ON WORKSHOP MEETING:

Chairman Bin-Yusif would like to host a workshop meeting after the holidays in 2022. He said he would like to consider meeting on a Tuesday or Thursday evening in January to touch base and talk about the first year of the PAB and have an open conversation about the direction of the PAB. He said he has found that boards like this are successful if they have breakout sessions to discuss topics outside of the usual agenda.

He suggested several dates in January on Tuesdays and Thursdays to get together. He asked the board to come back to him at the next meeting with which date works the best.

Debbie Harrington asked why the board can't cover what he's talking about during the regular meeting time. He said he's looking at a brainstorming session and since the PAB usually runs out of time each meeting to discuss the issues, adding a session like this would not give enough time to work it all out.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

A. Community Connections Committee

John Carwell reported that his committee was not able to meet this month. He announced the drug take back event will be held this weekend. Joyce Kidd attended the Willow Grove Mill community Zoom call. She said it was informative as always and the community was interested in the PAB having a website and/or a Facebook.

B. Research Committee

Susan Mitchell reported that she did get to talk to the City of Newark 911 Center Manager and he reported that Newark started its 911 Center in 1981. They hired civilian staff to dispatch officers, handle walk-ins, answer phones. Cost is in the City's budget. They receive national accreditation and training, also receive disbursement from Delaware 911 contracts. He is not able to provide data on how they have improved service over time. He was not able to provide response times for police, could only give the stat that the civilians answer 90 percent of the calls in 15 seconds time.

He said the civilians also handle the fire and ambulance calls. So, would we be looking at doing the same if we had our own? she asked.

Mitchell also reported the number of calls from the New Castle County 911 Call Center. She said in 2020, NCC handled 104,000 calls; Middletown had 14,000; Town of Elsmere had 5,000; City of New Castle, 5,000; and Delaware City, 1,000.

She said it might be a good idea to do a citizen survey to find out about the satisfaction of residents regarding the 911 Call Center as well as the police department in general. She suggested the group review the City of Newark website where there is a community satisfaction survey. She said perhaps the 911 Call Center is a long-term goal, maybe for five years down the road.

She asked Kristen Krenzer if the Town has done a community survey. Krenzer said the Town has not done a survey like this pertaining to the police department, but there is an ongoing survey right now regarding the Town of Middletown in general as part of the comprehensive plan project. She added that she has been working at the Town for 15 years and most complaints end up reaching her desk when people are really upset about something or would like something added to the Town – and a 911 Call Center has never been discussed by any residents at all in the past.

Bin-Yusif said he would like to see Sue Mitchell have more people help her out on the research committee regarding this issue. Wanda Dean and Debbie Harrington said they will be helping to gather information to present. Dean said the two members are planning to visit the Smyrna Police Department and find out how their call center works.

Harrington said Smyrna has 10,000 less people than Middletown, but they have their own call center. Why is that? How is it working out? Is it a good thing to have to improve the safety? We need to look at the data and determine if it's needed. Whether it will go through or not – that's up to the Mayor & Council to decide.

Billy Warrick said he doesn't see the need for a call center for only 30 officers. He said the manpower of the department is more important, such as raises and trying to get more officers.

Officer Haines said he worked for four years as a dispatcher before joining MPD. He said he worked for a county sheriff's department in New Jersey for four police departments, fire and EMS. He offered to help Sue with any questions she might have about call centers.

The discussion continued at the end of the meeting about the types of questions and surveys that need to be done regarding this topic. It was decided to table this until the brainstorming session in January.

Police Chief Report

Chief Texter shared the police report for the month of September that was given at the May Town Council meeting. He said there weren't as many significant events, which is a good thing. The PAB had the following questions regarding the police chief's report for the month of September:

None.

OLD BUSINESS:

PAL Center:

Bin-Yusif said he is still working to recruit folks in efforts to help out with getting a PAL Center up and running. He said he has spoken with Monique Chadband, executive director of the Middletown Main Street organization, who has offered her help in any way she can. Harrington said she heard that State Sen. Stephanie Hansen and State Rep. Rae Moore are both looking into a PAL Center in Middletown. And they have spoken with State Rep. Longhurst about it and she is the executive director of the PAL Center. What is our part in the PAL Center? What do we hope to do with the PAL Center?

Bin-Yusif said the PAB has been talking about it for about five months and has been reaching out to the community members and trying to bring folks together who have actually done this activity before. When we talked to the County Executive about getting a PAL Center, he said getting it going isn't hard, but we need to have maintenance in place for it for the "long haul." You cannot have a PAL center without the first letter – POLICE, he said. So, we need to get our police department fully staffed and comfortable before we can imagine getting the PAL Center off the ground, Bin-Yusif said.

He said the PAB probably shouldn't be in the day-to-day running of the center, but can help with the push to make it a reality.

Hiring Process:

Chief Texter said there is a hiring process open until this Friday and anyone can apply through Friday night and come out to the forum. He said there are several certified officers planning to attend the orientation. He asked the PAB to spread the word to friends and family if they know anyone who would like to apply, the information and application can be found on the police department's and Town's websites.

Texter said he is not sure of the next County Police academy. He said he believes it will be in January or February, but he hopes to have a recruit or two in the academy when it happens.

Bin-Yusif asked the difference between a certified officer and non-certified. Texter said a certified officer is someone who is already a police officer. Obviously, they would be able to apply for MPD and if they are already a Delaware police officer, the transition is smooth. However, if they are certified outside of state, it depends on the officer's previous training – sometimes they have to go through Delaware police training in the academy before they can get started.

NEW BUSINESS:

ABLE PROGRAM:

Texter said the officers are scheduled to be trained in ABLE in November, along with New Castle City officers. He said he will be offering the training to other police departments as part of the department's commitment to ABLE.

Bin-Yusif asked for a refresher on what the ABLE program is. Texter said it stands for "Active Bystander for Law Enforcement." Basically, if you see someone trying to poke at

an officer or get a negative response from an officer – a bystander or another officer can intervene before things escalate.

He said the program is pretty new in the state and he hopes it catches on because it seems helpful in MPD and the officers are on board with the program.

NEXT MEETING: Nov. 15, 2021

Moved by Joyce Kidd and seconded by Mitchell to adjourn at 8:29 p.m. Moved unanimously.