

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, Yvette Santiago, Debbie Harrington, Jacqueline Burditt, John Carwell, Wanda Dean, Felicita “Emy” Diaz, Justin Faulkner, Jason Hunt, Joyce Kidd, and Charles “Billy” Warrick. Middletown Police Capt. William Texter and FOP Representative Michael Hilliard were also in attendance.

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by Chairman Bin-Yusif.

MINUTES APPROVAL: It was moved by Michael Harpe and seconded by John Carwell to approve the minutes from the February meeting. Approved 10-0.

OLD BUSINESS:

Bin-Yusif asked for an update on the police chief selection process. Town PR Officer Kristen Krenzer reported that Mayor Branner asked her to let the group know that the decision was made by the Town Council to hold interviews with current town police employees (inside hiring process) and due to the nature of this process, the council decided that no outside citizens could be present during the hiring panel.

Bin-Yusif said he was disappointed by this news and wished the PAB could have been given a heads up that this was going to happen, since they have spent the past two months discussing the possibility of there being two of their members on the hiring panel.

Wanda Dean asked if they could view the application given to the employees for this position. Krenzer said she would look into that.

Jacqueline Burditt asked if they could be given a synopsis of the education of each candidate who applied for chief. Krenzer said it would be difficult to give out this information as the department is small enough that the employee’s identities would easily be figured out from this information.

Debbie Harrington said she was disappointed and wonders what else has changed with this process in addition to not being part of the panel – will the Council still require education and the other recommendations this board made? She also said she felt it was never discussed that the hiring process would be “inside only” or that there was a chance that the advisory board wouldn’t be part of the process.

Krenzer said she has been at all of the board’s meetings and felt that the Mayor was clear that there were several options for the process – He has stated at both previous meetings that it could be inside, it could be outside, or a combination of both. He also eluded to consulting an outside attorney to make sure having citizens be part of the panel was legal.

Michael Harpe said he doesn’t think police advisory board is being taken seriously and that there is a serious disconnect between the board and the Mayor’s office, for them to make the board feel they would be a part of this and “have our say” but then left out of the decision-making process. “I’m a little perturbed by that,” he said.

Bin-Yusif agreed, saying “This is a significant change to what we were planning on, this isn’t just a small modification to the agenda.”

Susan Mitchell said she feels like this move “smacks of a lack of transparency, which is concerning to me also.”

Emy Diaz said she is wondering if this process is like what is done in New York, where she’s from. She said if this is indeed a promotional process, hiring from within, no one from the public is allowed in that process either. Krenzer said yes, this would be a promotional process, exactly.

Harrington said it still smacks of being disingenuous. She also said she would like to have a further discussion with the Mayor about this issue since they all have questions that Ms. Krenzer cannot answer. Bin-Yusif agreed and said it’s time to move on in the agenda.

Committee Reports

A. Police Report Evaluation Committee

Harpe reported that Capt. Texter has given this committee a ream of information they have requested, but it came too late to delve into before this meeting, but that’s OK, he said, at least we have it. He said the committee is planning to distribute the information later this week so committee members can review and make comments on how they would like to focus on the data.

B. Community Outreach Committee

Carwell reported that the committee has met with M/Sgt. Scott Saunders as he gave the committee members an overview of his position at the department and how he reaches out to the community. Saunders also reached out to officers on duty who were gracious enough to join in the Zoom meeting from their vehicles to talk about community relations efforts. They have another meeting scheduled for April 13.

Jason Hunt also reported that he talked with M/Sgt. Saunders about a potential community gun safety program that he would like the committee to keep in mind as it gets rolling in the next few months.

Police Chief Report

Capt. Texter gave the monthly police report from the town council meeting and then the board opened the discussion for various police topics including:

- Officer hiring report – Texter said the department is undergoing a second hiring process right now and he is hoping for a better turnout of potential officers than last time. He said this is a state and national issue – people are not applying for police positions right now.
- Texter said there is no set formula for deciding how big a department should be. He said it all depends upon the type of community you have – agricultural or urban, or daytime vs. nighttime problems – decide different results for police numbers.
- He said he would like to see about 10 more officers in the department, in a perfect world, so the department could focus on some of the issues and work to deter crimes, like being able to have teams that could go out and focus on the car thieves right now.

- Two of our cadets are in the academy and graduate on March 25.
- MOT sharing police departments – It has become a question in the local area of late, as it has been brought to light that Townsend would like its own police force and other areas around Middletown patrolled by New Castle County and the Delaware State Police, are asking why they can't be patrolled by MPD instead since we're so close. Texter said all of the departments work together during big emergencies and that will never change. But, he said because the funding has to come from the municipalities, there are jurisdictional agreements that must be abided by.

Moved by Wanda Dean and seconded by Joyce Kidd to adjourn. Moved unanimously.