



FROM GREAT TO GREATEST: A ROADMAP FOR THE YORKTOWN POLICE DEPARTMENT

YORKTOWN COALITION ON COMMUNITY
SAFETY AND ENGAGEMENT (CCSE)

FEBRUARY 2021

From Great to Greatest: A Roadmap for the Yorktown Police Department

Introduction

Since last summer, Yorktown and communities across New York have engaged in a public process that reviewed public policing with the goal of promoting and enshrining equity, civil rights and best practices.

The process began with Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Executive Order 203 in June. Throughout the summer Town leaders worked to bring constructive ideas and dialog to a committee that would review police practices. In September the Yorktown Coalition on Community Safety and Engagement (CCSE) was introduced and it held a series of public hearings throughout the fall. The open meetings allowed the public and the coalition's members to understand the Yorktown Police Department's many accomplishments and its future goals.

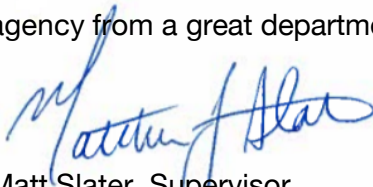
We were reminded that our police department already operates at one of the highest professional levels possible, as demonstrated by its longstanding status as an accredited police agency by the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, a status only 29% of New York State's 540 law enforcement agencies have achieved.

Through dialog with our coalition members and the public, the recommendations were developed for additional improvement and accountability, including the testing of body cameras, new quarterly reports about civilian complaints for the Town Board and annual anti-bias and de-escalation service training.

I am grateful to Yorktown Police Chief Robert Noble and all the coalition members for their time, empathy and thoughtfulness. These meetings would not have been possible without the innovation and diligence provided by Town Clerk Diana Quast and the employees of the Town Clerk's Office who have also invested much time to properly produce the minutes of our meetings. Lastly, I appreciate the input of all of our residents who participated in this important process including members of Yorktown for Justice.

We recognize and acknowledge that racism and intolerance exist—even in our community. In 2020 we did not just witness the horror of George Floyd's death, but we saw the hurtful vandalism of our local houses of worship.

I can say with confidence that Yorktown wholeheartedly embraced the spirit of Governor Cuomo's executive order and sincerely developed recommendations that will take our police agency from a great department to the greatest department in the state.



Matt Slater, Supervisor
February 19, 2021

What is EO 203?

On June 12, 2020 Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Order, also known as Executive Order 203 or EO 203. The order requires any municipality with a police agency to “perform a comprehensive review of current police force deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, and develop a plan to improve such deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, for the purposes of addressing the particular needs of the communities served by such police agency and promote community engagement to foster trust, fairness, and legitimacy, and to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color.”

The order also required the Yorktown supervisor to form a group that would undertake the police review in order to “consider evidence-based policing strategies, including but not limited to, use of force policies, procedural justice; any studies addressing systemic racial bias or racial justice in policing; implicit bias awareness training; de-escalation training and practices; law enforcement assisted diversion programs; restorative justice practices; community-based outreach and conflict resolution; problem-oriented policing; hot spots policing; focused deterrence; crime prevention through environmental design; violence prevention and reduction interventions; model policies and guidelines promulgated by the New York State Municipal Police Training Council; and standards promulgated by the New York State Law Enforcement Accreditation Program.”

Formation of the Yorktown Coalition on Community Safety and Engagement

Supervisor Matt Slater began identifying potential members of the Yorktown Coalition on Community Safety and Engagement in the summer of 2020. Supervisor Slater chose the members as representatives of Yorktown’s diverse stakeholders, including faith-based leaders, the business community, senior citizens, youth and ordinary residents. On September 22nd Supervisor Slater introduced the committee members to the Town Board and the public.

The coalition’s members were:

- Jim Poulin – President of the Yorktown Lions
- Rabbi Robbie Weiner – Yorktown Interfaith Coalition
- Rosemarie Panio – Chairperson of the Senior Advisory Committee
- Toni Reynolds – Citizen Representative
- Liz Rivera – Citizen Representative
- Peter Lanza – Vice President of the Yorktown Chamber of Commerce
- Paul Cirilo – Youth Representative
- Supervisor Matt Slater
- Police Chief Robert Noble

Community Input and Discussion

The Yorktown Coalition on Community Safety and Engagement held six public online meetings on October 8 and 20; November 12, 19 and 24; and January 6. The meetings were recorded and shared on the [town’s website](#) and YouTube page.

Prior to the formation of the CCSE, the Yorktown Town Board and Chief Noble, invited Yorktown for Justice to a Town Board work session on July 28, 2020 to answer questions, discuss concerns and understand police department policy. In addition, Chief Noble met with the Yorktown Interfaith Council separately in the days following the death of George Floyd to discuss police-community relations.

The Yorktown Coalition on Community Safety and Engagement series included two presentations by Chief Noble and two listening sessions for community partners. Dozens of community members attended the six meetings. Topics raised by residents included: civilian review boards, micro-aggressions, the Yorktown Police's active engagement with residents, body cameras, implicit-bias awareness training, teen intervention programs, de-escalation strategies, lethal force reduction and police policies.

The coalition also received signed and anonymous written correspondence from the public, as well as both superintendents of the school districts that serve Yorktown. All correspondence was shared with coalition members and read into the record by Supervisor Slater. Town officials also encouraged members of Yorktown for Justice, a local civil justice group, to participate in all the coalition meetings, and they did.

Lastly, the Yorktown News provided detailed coverage of the coalition meetings which in addition to the Town's efforts, kept the public informed of topics of conversation. This included both presentations by Chief Noble which further educated the public on current police policies and initiatives.

Police Data

Chief Noble presented the coalition with 53 data slides that documented police activity and performance from January 1, 2016 through June 13, 2020.

Among the key data points for that period were 293 use of force incidents of which 180, or 61.4%, consisted of dispatching animals that were suffering. None of the use of force incidents involved deadly force and only 12 use of force complaints involved complaints of injury during a time that the Yorktown Police Department made over 1,500 arrests. As for firearms, police did not discharge a weapon at any individual during this time period.

Regarding personnel complaints, the Yorktown Police processed nine personnel complaints during the same four-and-a-half-year period. Civilians initiated two of the complaints and the remainder were internally generated.

Police training significantly increased during the review period from 6,617 hours in 2016 to 10,498 hours in 2019.

Results and Recommendations

After more than eight hours of comments from coalition members and the public, a series of recommendations for the Yorktown Police Department were discussed at the January 6th meeting. These recommendations include those from individual coalition members as well as Chief Robert Noble.

The recommendations include:

- Revise the personnel complaint policy to require a quarterly report from the police chief on personnel complaints from the public or disciplinary actions initiated by the department. It is recommended that this policy be implemented in 2021.
- Beta test body cameras with a report on the tests for the Town Board by April 30, 2021.
- Collaborate with Westchester County to restore the Mobile Crisis Unit to better deal with emotionally disturbed individuals.
- Improve public understanding of the role Town Board members play as acting Police Commissioners.
- Introduce annual anti-bias and de-escalation in-service training.
- Post the police complaint policy on the department's website and enhance the integration and information sharing on the Town's website.
- Acknowledge that racial profiling is prohibited.
- Continue community outreach initiatives, diversionary and accreditation programs.

Next Steps:

The CCSE recognizes that many of the policy-related matters can and should be implemented upon approval by local and state officials in 2021. However, the Coalition also recognizes that local governments are grappling with the financial impacts of COVID-19. Consequently—in order to properly implement recommendations that would incur new costs, such as investing in body cameras or other technology—a strong and focused effort must be made for state and federal funding to be provided to assist with these costs.

Specifically for the implementation of body cameras, the Coalition believes the April 2021 report will guide next steps to proper implementation including potential fiscal impacts. The Coalition encourages the Town Board to hold a special public meeting specifically to review the report and accept public comments.

Appendix

Chief Noble's recommendations
Correspondence
Meeting minutes
Data slides