

Ad-hoc Committee on Police and Community Relations

Community Forum Public Comments – December 7, 2015

Curt Pavola opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and going over the committee's charter.

Lt. Jelcick introduced the officers present:

Sgt. Bryan Wyllie
Officer Rob Beckwell
Sgt. Rick Anderson

Reiko Callner gave some guidelines for the conversation and provided the general session questions.

What has been your experience with the Olympia Police Department?
How can the Olympia Police Department better serve you?

General Session:

Scott Hanauer – Executive Director, CYS

Their staff and clients fee interaction with OPD has been extremely positive. The more interactions they better the service. Would like officers to know better what the various CYS programs are.

Committee member Clinton Petty asked a question: What has been your experience with youth in Olympia?

Scott explained the types of youth and groups they work with. Their clients are ages 14-24, transitionally-aged youth. They serve 4000 a year, and have multiple programs, including Haven House. They provide Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) training, and work toward mitigating the impact of trauma.

Pavel Mikoloski - lives in unincorporated Olympia

He doesn't come into downtown Olympia very often (just to shop or dine and gets water from the artesian well), so not much experience with OPD within city limits. There was a string of small robberies about 10 yrs ago in his neighborhood. The sheriffs didn't do much about it. He understands that it takes longer for police to get to outlying areas, but the people that live in those areas feel like there's no protection. They work together as a neighborhood to watch out for each other and create their own protection. There was a meth head with daughter and friends, who got caught, went through treatment, and is back in the community. When they call 911 they get a slow response. Pavel got a gun permit but is not comfortable with that as a safety solution. He sees heavy-handed videos about bad police behavior online. Is that just a few rotten eggs? There are areas of employment that are prone to abuse. Police here are more like "Mayberry." The Pasco video of police shooting a man is very upsetting. He thought that couldn't be us, here in Olympia. When the two boys were shot and their only weapon was a skateboard, he started to wonder, is this systemic? What's going on? Police work is very tough. Do they know about escalation and de-escalation? He was downtown at the bar area at closing time. There were lots of minorities there, the scene was tumultuous, and it could have been handled badly by the cops. However, it was handled very well. All this conflict with police around the

country seems to be escalating, wants some answers. Feels strongly that something needs to change re: escalation/de-escalation training. His experience in Olympia has been positive.

Committee member Clinton Petty asked a question: What would need to happen for you to feel more secure?

Pavel's answer was to not call police. It takes too long for them to get there.

Clinton: we need to fix that. There should be a way to get them faster service

Curt Pavola: we will have to forward that comment to the Sheriff's office

Female – unknown

Has had a positive experience with walking patrol. They make people feel safer. Knowing the downtown cops, with relationships to the people there, made a big difference. Knowing someone changes relationships to the positive.

William Lay – Salvation Army, Social Services Director

Worked in Law Enforcement for 10 years prior to being in social work.

Deals with diverse population. They house 14 women and 42 men. They provide gas vouchers, propane, rent.

His experience with OPD has always been positive, courteous, and respectful. It's nice to know that they can expect good service when they need help.

Calls for police assistance about once a month. More often at the shelter than social service office.

Female - unknown – volunteer for Salvation Army soup kitchen

Had to call police on an occasion when a woman was being very difficult/disruptive. She was impressed with how the officer handled it.

Larry Kumkrist - PFLAG

Good interactions with OPD. Have gotten to know Sgt. Emerson well because of her connection and participation with PFLAG. Had a problem last summer with threats left on their answering machine and was worried about safety. They have been pleased by police support.

Homeless population that they work with includes a large number of LGBTQ youth.

Danny Kadden – Executive Director, Interfaith Works

In general he is pleased with his interactions with OPD. There have been some negative instances that he has heard about from clients.

Situations working with severely mentally ill people

They could use training about specific incidents, and he'd like to work with the department, and take a team approach. They want to do outreach. Wants to work with the cops to create ongoing forums or opportunities to communicate. Needs the department and the city leadership to be adaptive.

It's difficult for their staff & guests to attend events like this. Staff works long hours and are often not available. The atmosphere is intimidating for guests and they feel uncomfortable so they stay away.

They [clients & guests] are the ones that have the real stories and instances of negative interaction with police that need to be heard. To get that information takes a lot of ground work (more than a news release) and he thinks the city is capable of that.

We need to understand the culture of our community. There needs to be a new layer of honesty about the culture.

Clinton asked: how well the social service organizations were coordinating with each other. 1/3 of the problem lies with what you just spoke of. Social Service agencies need to come together to come up with a solution. The jail house is not a solution.

Danny commented: they're better connected than before; the trust and coordination is better. They want a coalition of government and NGOs in collaboration, not competition. Needs are housing, substance abuse, mental health, a culture of trauma. CYS was chosen by the Criminal Justice Training Commission to do ACE training. The Community Care Center is a big initiative and he wants the city to be and remain engaged.

Scott Hanauer commented: the service organizations are already in collaboration because they have a need to work together.

Danny commented: The Community Care Center project is under way. The Ad Hoc Committee should use this as an opportunity to bring together the community, Police Department, and service organizations

Female - unknown

Usually only sees police at community events. It seems as though officers at events are uncomfortable in the community, but if you speak to them they are very polite. We need to let the police officers know that we support them so they feel part of the community they serve.

Anita Ahumada – Commissioner of Hispanic Affairs

Let Danny know that she wants to volunteer with the Community Care project. Those types of services do a lot of good.

A lot of programs out there have problems because of language barriers

Warren Carlson - Sidewalk

We need to change the name from "Police Department" to "Police Services"

Pavel M.

Concerned about militarization of police in this country. Was Ferguson just heavy-handed? How many MRAPs (some kind of military vehicle) did OPD have?

Steve Hall: Answer – none.

Male – unknown

Been attending these meetings to try to get further information about the May shooting and has never gotten a clear picture of what actually happened.

Reiko commented: gave brief explanation of the information that was released by the prosecutor.

Male commented: he didn't find that information. There needs to be better communication by the police department.

Leslie Cushman – United Churches

She asked a member of the LGBTQ community to come to the forum tonight. The person refused because she previously had an experience where police beat her up.

Feels like policing is changing but there are still things that need to change. We need to build community. Have police work more as social workers. We need implicit bias training. She knows the chief is working on these things, but how do we achieve “law and order”?

Regon Unsoeld – former teacher

He’s working on a printed piece on conversations he’s been having with OPD and TCSO, as he wears his “Black Lives Matter” button. He lives 2 doors down from a problem house. Has seen a number of incidents and had a conversation with an officer after one incident who, after their conversation and as walking away, stated “all lives matter”. He had obviously seen my “Black lives matter” pin. Regon felt like this was said in a challenging way and that there was a low level of consciousness being expressed in this situation. Saying Black lives matter doesn’t take away from any other lives mattering, its about awareness.

How do officers process negative experiences? How does the department help officers process negative experiences? How do they keep it from affecting future interactions in the community? Thinks counseling might be needed to address those issues, to expand the capacity of police to be less enforcement oriented and more service oriented.

Reiko Callner talked about how the committee will be using the comments it collects. The committee will also try to answer some of the questions that have been asked at a future meeting. She then asked the group to break into small groups for further discussion.

Small Group Session

3 groups formed with the same questions for each group:

- Why do you come into contact with Olympia police officers in the greater downtown area, and what do you feel is currently working, or currently not working, for you when interacting with the police?
- What opportunities do you see to reduce conflicts among downtown populations, including residents, businesses, people seeking services (such as for homelessness or other life challenges), and how better communication with the police, or changing the police response, might help?

Group 1 – Reiko facilitated

Bars closing – chaotic – drunks in road – fight
Chaos handled patiently, guiding & > foot patrol.

Single female not coming downtown – present of OPD helpful

K w/police – systemic – need for social services. Social service gaps devolving to police. People aren’t getting enough social services and decompensate and then police must be involved.

People expect the cops to intervene in the larger societal issue of homelessness, mental illness. One person experienced a fender bender and the cop was very nice. Was kind and understanding – could not have been nicer or more reassuring. They were really good guys. It was a great story and her husband repeated it a lot. If it was bad he would have repeated it a lot. The way cops treat each person is an amplifier for community reputation of the whole department.

Jesse with the YWCA of Olympia. Heard from clients both positive and negative experience, depending on the individual level of compassion and understanding from the individual officer. They cops were positive if the person was sympathetic or not.

Person from Capital Recovery Center. – wants someone there from the city commons.

Jeff Dervill (sp?) CYS counselor and syringe exchange, homeless supervisor with Interfaith. Hears about consistent harassment of downtown homeless people on benches with their bags. The same officer rousts them, asks what they're doing there, and that they should "move along." Would the police treat a shopper with a bag full of purchases the same way? Doesn't know that they should be. This person is in their 50s or 60s and has mental health problems. Consistently complains of being harassed by a particular cop. Should be consistent good conduct throughout the force, shouldn't have to cherry-pick who knows how to be appropriate with marginalized people.

A woman with a wheelchair and a dachshund. She was homeless. Her experience with police was all positive. Thought the officers always showed respect. They were kind, polite, going out of their way to assist her. She now lives in the Fleetwood. The cops were always kind and polite. She thinks people return kind with kind. If I show them respect I get it back. What does respect look like to different people?

Housing is important. The attitude of people would change if they had a washer and dryer, phone, bathrooms. It makes you mentally ill to be downtown on the street.

Suggestions – they'd like to know more about police training on crisis intervention. What about police doing reverse ride-alongs? Walk in their shoes, it should be part of the cops' paid time, not necessarily in uniform, so they could really see what's going on.

Have a service summit with OPD – move away from service providers or enforcers and feel and be more valued and partner. Have a day to celebrate their services.

Increase funding and scope of services. Want police to well know the availability of services and what's out there. They should be agents of referral.

Navigators – resource lists always changing. Alternative would be to have navigators to help people negotiate their way through red tape. Youth-driven assessments.

Tacoma did its cleanup and overnight Olympia filled up with problems. We need to fix problems and not just move them around.

Back to the cultural issue. Truth and reconciliation, restorative justice. We are so litigious it gets in the way of building relationships.

Downtown should attract a major tech industry that would revitalize downtown.

Ongoing civic engagement. Fixes to engage entire population.

Group 2 – Curt facilitated

Work as court interpreter

AAC – immigration hold – Olympia does not do this

Language barriers/cultural barriers

Also, some officers = “colored people” are the bad guys

South Capital Neighborhood

Never been concerned about downtown. Not try to sanitize downtown – helpful when we have place for people

In Oly since 1958 – from Detroit, now a pastor

No mistreatment. Talk to police and treat them with respect.

Plans to have an appreciation session at her church

Need better training – everyone in community needs to participate

Hispanic community could use a liaison

Need to educate as services provided

More than 2 hours of “cultural competence” training

Personality – experiences/conflicts for policing.

Sharing vulnerability vs authority

Can be done with skill that does not press buttons

De-escalate, not escalate (triggers are quick for folks on the street)

Awareness of this

Multi-dimensionality could be in the job description

Involve youth

Ride alongs

Sylvester park

Place for teens – thinks its great

Stratified society

Why are officers different from the people they have assumptions about?

Causes of differences – community solutions

Curriculum for officers

A screening/community committee

Officers on downtown beat

Awareness of expectations of performance

Pressure to make noticeable gains

Would like more info/honesty about this issue

Like to hear leadership talk more openly about this

Like idea of sessions to share their perspectives/information about downtown policing

Develop relationships; understand each other’s needs to get something done

Above issues – the pressure in on the community, not on the officers
OPD treat everyone with respect, not provide all the services themselves

Collaboration – how do services collaborate with each other to solve the problem?

Not just the relationship but the process of getting to the relationship

Worry that this effort (committee) will be heard by leaders, but public not have patience for this work –
“law & order” instead.

Not “arrest our way” out of a problem

Question about community court
Relevant as alternative for youth especially

Possibility of increasing requirements for officers
Such as downtown officers reading body language

Group 3 – Kerensa facilitated

Tv program – TCTV asked downtown people about experience with OPD
Lots of stories – “horrible” (5 yrs ago)
Beating a drunk man
Moving party in middle of night
Thrown to ground, stepped on

CYS – youth
Works when collaboration, communication
Problems
Not clear about why police being called
Police assume they know what’s going on

More joint training with police and staff
Helps successful response

Talking same language
Do police know drivers behind behavior? (ACE’s)

“wild by age, not by choice”

Police are involved in VAT, Sidewalk
Diversion – get to high users of services
Connect people to services

Denver – dispute resolution process
Increased satisfaction among participants

Truth and reconciliation process

Litigious society gets in the way of positive outcomes

Restorative justice

Trust – basis for working things out
One person at a time

Social worker
Outreach/volunteerism
Beyond regular job

Explore possibility to volunteer (officers)
Skills/time – get job done

Summit – create space for community to focus on working together

Help agencies coordinate service delivery

System of care – “navigator” role to steer thru system

ACE = adverse childhood experiences

Responses to mitigate impacts of trauma – transfer calls to police

15 Minute Break

Wrap Up

Reiko called the group back together and made a couple announcements:

- Black Alliance Conversation Café, Dec 10th 6-9 p.m. – South Sound Manor
- (another event that I didn't write down)

Posed final question:

In your “wish list” ideal world for downtown Olympia, what would you like to see to improve interactions and communication with the Olympia Police Department? What should the City of Olympia be working on?

Janine Unsoeld – Little Hollywood

Put up emergency buttons (like at the college) in strategic locations around downtown so people can easily call for help.

Caroline Lacey – City of Olympia

Triple the number of police on the streets and have them on foot in the community. Make sure they are problem solvers.

Reiko Callner - committee

Is the service needed happening?

Scott Hanauer

Yes. It seems like the current police services are adequate.

Curt Pavola - committee

The downtown ambassadors have expressed a good relationship with OPD.

Alejandro Rugarcia - committee

There should be a summit with community and officers to celebrate diversity in the community and celebrate the job that the officers do.

Kelly Olson – Crisis Clinic

Increase funding for services and scope of services. Officers need to have knowledge of services available in the community and how readily available they are.

Scott Hanauer

Police have knowledge of services available (shelter, food, job) and act as an agent of referral . Have navigators as a system of care. People that need services have a person that can walk them through how to access services and go with them if needed.

Clinton Petty – committee

Tacoma cleaned up the mission and all of them came to Olympia. We need to fix the problem not just do “clean up” or they will just go somewhere else.

Reiko

Regon

Restorative justice/truth in reconciliation

Pursue perspective in law enforcement of reinforcing relationships

Male – unknown

Something needs to attract a major tech industry to downtown to revitalize the downtown area. A lot of social services would be better funded.

Unknown

Tribal community connections

Regon Unsoeld

Can a draft version of the recommendation to council be made available to the public for review?

Kerensa Mabwa & Reiko Callner responded:

We are still deciding what that will look like and we are open to suggestions.

Leslie Cushman

Would like the recommendation to include continuing community engagement by the city.

Also need racial justice

Female – YWCA

Fixes that engage the entire population

Danny Kadden

Community Care Center include all community partners, law enforcement, hospital, emergency folks, etc

Alejandro Rugarcia – committee

We have to be in this together. We need your help to get those people here that have the real stories.

Closeout

Kerensa Mabwa had everyone get into a circle and join hands. Please share one word that you can take with you from this event.

- Opportunity
- Achievement
- Caring
- Honesty
- Community
- Action
- Trust
- Peace
- Hope
- Team
- Possibility
- Relationship
- Dedication
- Growth
- Respect

*note: not all words were captured