

April 2016

Reflections from Committee Members

Members of the ad hoc Committee on Police and Community Relations wish to share their impressions of the six-month community discussion about policing in Olympia.

Reiko Callner, Co-Chair

We live in a place and time of unusual and dynamic change, nationally and in this city in particular, with regard to police and community relations. The internet and smart phones have created an atmosphere where biased interactions of police with minorities and other marginalized people have been credibly documented as never before. This presents a challenge and an opportunity. I have perceived that OPD and its leaders are sincere and active in desiring to truly serve the diverse public and to earn their trust. Opinions about the police here have been negatively colored by perceptions of police elsewhere where leadership does not share or act on those same goals. Members of OPD who were motivated to join because policing has historically been viewed as a noble profession are experiencing increasingly negative responses in the public that make a difficult job even more challenging.

It is not enough for public servants to do good – to earn trust they must also appear to do good. Consistent effective communication and relationship building is essential. People want and need reliable information about OPD actions, protocols, policies, and practice. They do not have that access now, or at least do not feel that they do. The current modes of communication are not adequate, even for intelligent and motivated information seekers. The current website is not easy to navigate.

Many people expressed the desire for the ad hoc committee to be made permanent. While this is not feasible, basically what people seem to be saying is that the model of a citizen-involved set of diverse, trustworthy, and identifiable players, engaged in focused community outreach, in a context that enables access to one on one conversation with actual police, is a genuine and authentic conversation model. When the ad hoc committee experience came close to this, the results were extremely positive and both police and citizens expressed affirmation, relief and hope in the interactions.

Many people in many contexts, from different walks of life, reiterated that in order for trust to be built, relationships need to be fostered. The alternative to that is that police only interact with people in crisis, and then in a top-down mode of interaction. The latter was perceived as very negative and is destructive to the goal of building trust and partnership. The staff of at least one major victim service provider expressed the wish that police would treat them more like respected allies than they have in the past.

The department is engaged in protocol and initiatives that already are positive and responsive to the hopes and needs of the public. The city is not so good at communicating this. This failure of communication fosters rumor, distrust, and a sense of disenfranchisement, and a sense, on the part of the police, of frustration and futility.

Actually meeting people as human beings and interacting with them in authentic ways goes further than anything else in achieving these goals. It is an Olympia reality that there are people with pre-formed conclusions who will speak loudest and most frequently and may monopolize the conversation, particularly at formal opportunities to engage. To reach the rest of the population, more fluid and nimble forms of engagement need to be employed. This is an aspect of showing respect to the public.

For the Ad Hoc Committee's efforts to have credibility and genuine effect, there must be a visible response on the part of the city, both the Council and the police department, to both the themes and specific issues highlighted in the process. If proposals are declined, there should be some form of communication about why.

April 2016

Reflections from Committee Members

Members of the ad hoc Committee on Police and Community Relations wish to share their impressions of the six-month community discussion about policing in Olympia.

Curt Pavola, Co-Chair

In classic and intentional Olympia fashion, the community has begun working through an issue that many experienced as a law enforcement incident but many others experienced as a statement about their place in the community, and within the legal system. The May 2015 police shooting led Olympia residents to the streets and to podiums, and the city council made this conversation official through the ad hoc Committee on Police and Community Relations.

This incident has sparked a conversation within the community about policing in Olympia and more broadly, with open hearts and minds, and this conversation should continue. Already, during the past six months, the Olympia Police Department, city management and the city council have begun working with information received through the ad hoc Committee toward a process of self-examination and improvement.

On topic for the ad hoc Committee's charge, city staff have begun an effort to better connect with the community around policing issues and to identify opportunities for improvements in both police training and community awareness and involvement in policing.

For the Committee's second charge, the community forum on police body-worn cameras demonstrated the helpfulness of video recordings while posing complex and emotionally difficult questions about releasing videos of people in their moment of highest need and vulnerability, especially those swept up in an incident through no action of their own, and very especially children. The Legislature is currently making improvements in this arena, and the community members attending the forum demonstrated their willingness to thoroughly examine the many legal and philosophical questions posed by police cameras.

As a former city councilmember, some of the most poignant public comments for me related to the policies guiding community policing in Olympia.

The ad hoc Committee heard many comments related to the various policy proclamations in the "*Police Services Promote Public Safety*" section of the 2014 City of Olympia Comprehensive Plan, our community's guiding document for all city policies and programs. For example:

- Procedures/attitudes toward de-escalation of encounters by both citizens and officers,
- Understanding the mindset and history of groups of people, and how that history persists and impacts people's reactions to policing actions,
- Partnerships currently lacking but necessary to prevent non-policing issues from becoming enforcement incidents rather than delivery of a needed social service or mental health care treatment (especially in the downtown area),
- The need for consistent, ongoing, two-way, open communication about community policing to inform both the community and police officers. This argues against one-off, as-budget-is-available, optional, additional workload duties for officers; instead suggesting a redefinition of each officer's routine work methods to interact more meaningfully with groups and individuals throughout the community, regardless of current statewide training and standards from other departments. What kind of ongoing interactions do Olympians want?

Thank you for this enriching opportunity to meet some tremendous members of the Olympia community. We reached many, but I do know we also missed more...the un-organized, the non-connected, and many of the disenfranchised. We as a citizen committee delivered a volunteer-style effort, and the city, long-term, could benefit from a well-funded and consistent outreach effort to monitor the city's progress and to decrease the friction between our stated goal of "policing with the community" and those issues that bring residents and visitors to meet our police officers.

April 2016

Reflections from Committee Members

Members of the ad hoc Committee on Police and Community Relations wish to share their impressions of the six-month community discussion about policing in Olympia.

Kerensa Mabwa

As a 10 year resident of Olympia, it has been both an honor and a pleasure to serve on the Ad Hoc Committee on Police and Community (PCR). This committee, catalyzed by the shooting of two African-American residents by a white police officer last May, provides the opportunity for the City of Olympia and the Olympia Police Department (OPD) to respond and to relate to Olympia citizens in a new way. It was my intention to step into this work to listen, learn and to help hold a vision for more inclusive and safe community.

I believe the PCR Committee's work was an effective first step in a model for the city to better acknowledge divergent views of the community. To be fair, much of the feedback we heard about the OPD was positive. Interestingly, for some particularly disenfranchised members, our listening presence helped them to really be seen as community members. We heard from several different groups but by no means a full representation of our community. The main barriers to the PCR's effectiveness were the Committee's six-month duration and the challenge of listening to people in their own safe environments. Furthermore, the forum process was perceived by some as bogus given our relationship to the city; others were fearful of publicly sharing their stories with police present.

The need for **relationship building** was a huge theme in the community's feedback. We heard some reports of people being misunderstood, disrespected or profiled, often from people who were receiving services of some type, such as shelter, transitional housing or immigrant services. Our committee heard consistent requests that OPD officers find ways to be respectfully present in the community, and to hear the stories of community members, beyond dealing with crime. This could be a deterrent to crime in and of itself, allowing residents and officers to begin develop consistent two-way communication. For instance, the presence of police resource officers in schools allows for some surface relationship building with youth, yet without building trust and safety, officers miss the chance for deeper human connection.

The Olympia community has many different **perceptions** of policing, from media, personal experience in and outside Olympia, and common hearsay, as do police officers themselves. We found the community is often uninformed or misinformed about OPD policy and police officers' roles as enforcers of law. For example, OPD uses data-driven strategies rather than random policing. And outcomes of cases filed against officers are typically not made available via media, giving the perception that the OPD is biased toward its officers. In addition, though not directly responsible for the nationally increase in police shooting people of color, the OPD is a part of this larger context and is not immune to its stigma. The OPD is already working with community groups like the Black Alliance of Thurston County on community conversations about race and changing the WA state law on the use of excessive force. However, the PCR Committee strongly heard need for the OPD to be more **transparent**, give **better access to information** as well as establish a Citizen Review Board pilot to provide better police accountability to the community it serves.

Community service workers noted many OPD officers need deeper **understanding of underserved community members' issues** such as people experiencing homelessness, mental illness, trauma and the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACES). In addition, advocates noted some officers' lack of awareness of street dynamics affecting the safety of street youth, particularly those and LGBTQ of color. Opportunities for officers to collaborate with agencies need to be expanded.

The community strongly voiced that the OPD establish consistent **cultural competence training** for all officers. This is where the community can collaborate In seeking the diverse voices, skills, strengths and resources already present in the community, the OPD can create a training that shifts the officers' cultural understanding to better meet Olympia's needs. However, our community's makeup is not static. This reality requires all officers to engage in ongoing learning to respond flexibly to our changing cultural landscape. A successful training includes awareness of cultural assumptions/implicit bias, race/ethnicity, poverty, gender, orientation, disability, and historical trauma, etc. How can the OPD make its officers aware that a marginalized person's interactions with an officer are not separate from both parties' perceptions and experiences of race, power and privilege?

As a witness to the personal stories that form part of the fabric of our community, I appreciate serving on the Committee. It impacted me greatly that people trusted us to represent their voices to the Council. I complete my service acknowledging that we simply ran our first lap, and we hand the baton to the City to continue the next stages of creating a true partnership between the City, the Olympia Police Department and each Olympia resident no matter what walk of life. There is no quick fix--we are not here for a sprint, but rather to pace ourselves for the marathon.

April 2016

Reflections from Committee Members

Members of the ad hoc Committee on Police and Community Relations wish to share their impressions of the six-month community discussion about policing in Olympia.

Alejandro Rugarcia

DATE: April 4, 2016
FROM: Alejandro Rugarcia
Member, Ad Hoc Committee on Police and Community Relations
SUBJECT: Input for Final Report

Overall Perspective

The convening of the Ad Hoc Committee was useful and productive on the one hand, and not satisfying on the other hand.

The Committee served a purpose in that it brought people together. It focused attention and energy on the relationships the Olympia police have with the public.

Its shortcoming was that it is not easy for marginalized communities or individuals to participate in this type of process. Thus, the stories we gathered do not represent the whole picture of police and people in Olympia. Part of this is due to the very nature of today's law and order framework. The power dynamics make it difficult to be perfectly candid with the police; and at times the police might appear to be, or are, defensive.

Police culture may change after this work. Training will help and leadership that is committed to change will make a huge difference. The goal should be a less confrontational, less aggressive police department that believes in reform.

Specific Areas Identified for Change

#1 Address the laws.

A. RCW 9A.16.040 regarding use of deadly force needs to be revised.

- The "without malice and with a good faith belief" standard is a barrier to accountability for excessive use of force.
- Olympia should actively participate in the task force that was created by ESHB 2908 this legislation session. The Association of Washington Cities has a seat at the table and Olympia should work closely with AWC to get the law changed.

B. Body-worn cameras are subject to the recently enacted legislation, EHB 2362. There should not be wide public access to video and sound recordings. There are serious privacy concerns for many of the interactions between police, subjects, and the public. The City should work carefully with the public to assure that they understand there is limited access to the video and sound recordings. The City should develop a policy that provides access to anyone who has a legitimate need for the information, which should be limited to any individual who has been recorded and their attorneys and advocates.

#2. De-escalation and less lethal alternatives.

The Olympia Police Department should have regular training on how to use less lethal alternatives and how to deescalate situations. Use of deadly force should be a last resort, and the officer's primary duty should be to protect life.

#3. Outreach and Advocacy Position within the OPD.

The Police Department should establish a position within the Department that is responsible for outreach, networking, and building relationships. This should be filled by a person that is not a police officer, and who has the skills to liaison between the police and the public. A key role of

April 2016

Reflections from Committee Members

Members of the ad hoc Committee on Police and Community Relations wish to share their impressions of the six-month community discussion about policing in Olympia.

Alejandro Rugarcia

this person would be to provide follow up and closure to citizen complaints. The person would be like an ombudsman in that they would advocate for the public in order to determine what took place between the police and the public. This would be an internal review position, and the person would have the authority to solve problems related to complaints.

#4. Hiring.

The OPD has a very extensive hiring process that includes many review points and access to background data. This process is thorough but there is an additional review that should be added to provide key information about a candidate's potential. Also, the timing of this additional review should be early in the process so that the OPD has not invested too much already into the potential candidate. The review that needs to take place involves a different evaluation from what is done today for psychological fitness. This evaluation would provide scoring for the candidate related to whether they are open-minded, whether they have fresh ideas, how they react to change, how they react to stress, and how they react to criticism.

#5. Respect.

The Olympia Police Department should place a high priority on a culture that emphasizes the need to respect the people in the community. This means the police have to respect everyone. Police have tremendous power and authority. And police jobs are hard. The public is diverse. And life is tough for many people. Lack of respect impacts trust. Trust is needed in order for the community to be a true partner in policing.

#6. Improvement as part of the OPD culture.

The police should constantly look for ways to do a better job. This will require a frame of mind that can accept that things could be done better and that accepts change. Problem-solving and creativity should be encouraged. The public can also be involved in critiquing and offering ideas.

April 2016

Reflections from Committee Members

Members of the ad hoc Committee on Police and Community Relations wish to share their impressions of the six-month community discussion about policing in Olympia.

Clinton Petty

I was asked and selected to be a member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Police and Community Relations by the Mayor. One of the lessons I've learned, being a member of this citizen team on the subject of Police and Community Relations, is that the citizens who live here truly care about this community.

The shooting that took place with two Black youth here in Olympia was both a surprise and disappointment with the action of our police force, and our city leaders on the action or inaction that has been seen around the Nation on the subject matter of shooting of Black males. Is this a part of our culture also? People needed to know what their leaders are doing to find a solution on this matter because a human life no matter the race is important and to shoot a person and ask questions later is not the solution we expect from our police.

I am humbled by the faith and commitment of the people who live in this community. The Forums that were held they were orderly and people spoke from their heart with great concern they had about the Police Department. Some were negative and some were positive. The comments and concerns were well spoken without anger – but with questions about answers to correct this problem is what they want to hear.

The Forums gave us an excellent opportunity to hear their concerns. Some examples and much more:

- Police need to meet with small groups
- Training of police officers using 21st Century techniques
- City Council and Police need to hear people's story
- How do Police process negative/traumatic events during their work day
- Review OPD re: use of force
- Body cameras are not the total solution
- Create civilian oversight of police
- Change the State law re: when a police officer can face criminal charges – remove the requirement for "evil intent or intentional malice"
- Respect is what people want from police

(Example of just a very few of the comments we've heard)

When I think of the person who works as a dish washer in a restaurant, who works tirelessly during the late night shift at 3 a.m. on his second job. He goes home for a few hours of sleep, then still tired from the night before; gets up for a class at a local college before going to his day job may be stopped by the police and has a short temper, what could be the outcome when these two people meet?

We know our Community is stronger when we all look out for each other – when everyone has the Opportunity to Build a secure environment.

I hope as you review this feedback that was given by the people in our community, that it doesn't fall on deaf ears but provide the next step in building the example of how we can live in harmony and safety. The information that was collected need to be put into an Action Response Plan by priority and shared back to our Community using the Website, other Media forms and open discussion.

April 2016

Reflections from Committee Members

Members of the ad hoc Committee on Police and Community Relations wish to share their impressions of the six-month community discussion about policing in Olympia.

Aaron Jelcick

Over the past six months, the Ad Hoc committee on Police and Community Relations organized and facilitated five community forums with the mission to receive information and share perspectives about methods for engaging under-represented and minority groups on policing practices, in order to bridge understanding between Olympia's law enforcement officers and the public. The committee was also tasked with seeking input on a preferred process for engaging the public on implementing police-worn body cameras.

As an ex-officio member of this committee and a representative of the Olympia Police Department (OPD), this was a unique opportunity for me to listen to perspectives of under-represented groups of people in the community about how OPD could better serve them. Each member of the Ad Hoc committee has committed to expressing underlying themes they heard from the community, and to document things that resonated most to them. In this document I have separated what resonated most to me into five categories.

- 1) **Healthy and constructive communication:** Creating a space where all people feel comfortable talking about difficult issues related to police interaction can be difficult. In all five forums the communication that took place was thoughtful, respectful and honest. *Creating time and space for community members to share thoughts and perspectives with OPD is essential.*
- 2) **Negative Perceptions:** The vast majority of people who spoke at the forums had no negative interaction with OPD, however, negative interactions with police outside of Olympia greatly affected their perceptions and relationships with OPD. At almost every forum, community members told me that if they had more opportunities to interact with Olympia officers on a non-enforcement level, it would help change their perceptions of police; this was particularly highlighted by youth at the youth forum. *Non-enforcement community outreach is an essential element to building community trust.*
- 3) **Education about OPD:** Most of the people who attended the forums did not have a good understanding about the policies, procedures, laws, training and hiring practices of OPD, which diminished the level of trust between the police and the community during times of crisis. This was particularly highlighted during conversations related to police use of force and to issues related to body-worn cameras. *Educating the community about OPD is important to building trust and strong relationships between OPD and the community.*
- 4) **Empathy and respect:** At all five forums I heard community members talk about how important it was for officers to show empathy and respect for all people. Empathy in police-community relations reveals itself when officers listened and expressed understanding during their interactions with citizens, which increased trust and legitimacy. This was particularly highlighted in the forum that focused on input from the Hispanic community. *OPD holds its employees accountable for carrying out their duties in a fair and impartial manner, with empathy, and respect.*
- 5) **Training:** At all five forums I heard community members talk about their desire for police to receive training on multi-cultural competency, implicit and explicit bias, and de-escalation techniques related to use of force options. *OPD must continue to seek training for employees that best serves the community.*