

POLICE CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

June 8, 2021
Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present: John Springett, Richard Hewitt, Brian Williams, Olga Boucher

Others Present: Ron Lantz, Greg Jenkins, Sean Reeves, Diantha McKeel, Donna Price, Kevin Miller, Doug Walker

Meeting called to order at 9:00am

Brian Williams made a motion to approve the April 13, 2021, meeting minutes and John Springett 2nd the motion all were in favor. The April 13, 2021, meeting minutes were approved.

Everyone welcomed Board of Supervisor Donna Price, Scottsville District and Deputy County Executive Doug Walker

Matters from the Public:

There were no matters from the public from the April CAC meeting, but there have been several compliments from citizens regarding the professionalism of the Albemarle County Police Officers.

The Department would like to remind everyone that the best way for public comment or to reach the Chief of Police, is to use the following email address askthechief@albemarle.org, which is located on the Citizens Advisory Committee website and the Police Department's website at www.albemarle.org.

New Business:

During April's CAC meeting, Mr. Williams indicated that he would like to see more communication with the African American community and Major Reeves stated that he would provide an update at June's meeting. Chief Lantz updated the committee about the relationships that the Police Department has with the NAACP and the African American Pastors Council.

The Command Staff; such as, Chief Lantz and Major Jenkins have done several presentations before the NAACP Board where discussions took place on training, recruitment, policies and procedures to use of force. On July 12, 2021, Major Sean Reeves will be doing his presentation before the NAACP Board.

The relationship between the Chief and the African American Pastor's Council is one of which that is on speed dial. Pre-Covid, the Pastors Council and the Police Department would meet quarterly if not every other month, if necessary. These meetings were about fellowship and idea sharing, how the police department could do a better job of reaching out to the African American community. After several meetings, it was decided that the meetings should be opened up to all Clergy, as this would help make more connections in the community, gather more ideas and hopefully people will become more comfortable bringing their concerns to the Chief.

In addition, during Covid-19 the police officers were spending time in Esmont making sure that the citizens who needed it were getting transportation to vaccination clinics. Thanksgiving 2020 the officers spent time in Keswick and Esmont delivering turkeys to those in need and while they were there, they took the time to answer questions and concerns from the citizens.

Mr. Williams thanked the Chief for all the department has done and hopes they continue to keep up the good work.

Lieutenant Kevin Miller with the Office of Professional Standards updated the Committee on Police Body Cameras. The power point presentation can be found at <https://www.albemarle.org/home/showpublisheddocument/9336/637589114686670000>.

Mr. Hewitt asked the committee members if they had any questions regarding the presentation. Everyone thought the presentation was excellent and thanked Lt. Miller for the information.

Mr. Williams understands that we will be utilizing the media to roll out the information on the use of body cameras for Albemarle County, but will we be using any other types of strategies to get the information out to the public; such as the website. Lt. Miller indicated that the department will more than likely utilize social media along with the website to release information and he is working with Siri Russell in regards to putting together flyers for the African American Pastors Council, NAACP, LGBTQ Community etc., but at this time we are working to find out what information they want to know. What do they want on these flyers? At this time, it seems the most important thing they want to see is our policy. What about involving the education department (schools), getting the information out to the students. Lt. Miller indicated that during the instruction part of driver's education an officer does come in and talk with the students, so it may be just adding this portion into that block of instruction time.

Mr. Springett wanted to clarify as to whether or not the information on the cameras could be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Lt. Miller indicated that if the video were considered evidence in an ongoing case then the FOIA request would be denied. There are some instances where the video may have to be released, but each FOIA is different and we work with the County Attorney's office when it comes to these types of requests. Another issue is subpoenas, but they are also reviewed case-by-case and run by the County Attorney's office as well before any information is released.

What is the current view of the officer's reaction? Our officers want the cameras. What they have found is that cameras have exonerated a high percentage of officers when it comes to citizen complaints; they see it as an insurance policy for themselves. They also use it for going back to review information that was being said because not always during a high stress incident do people remember what they said.

Ms. McKeel hopes that we are proactive when it comes to the schools in regards to getting the information out to the students, and that we make sure that replacement cameras are included in with our CIP budget. Lt. Miller said that because it will be part of our current in-car camera system it is included in our operating budget. The body camera and in-car cameras are a complete kit and come with a new vehicle that is purchased out of our vehicle replacement line item, the cameras are also included with the new officer package. He indicated that what the Board might see in the CIP budget is an upgrade of server space from Information Technology.

Ms. McKeel wanted to know who actually controls/releases the videos. Chief Lantz stated that it would be the Police Department working in conjunction with the County Attorney's office on a case-by-case basis. The Police Department already has a system in place due to the in-car camera system. Ms. McKeel said that CA Hingeley's office has submitted a request for a new position to do nothing but deal with body camera information. She is trying to understand the relationship and find out what additional expenses the Board might see due to the addition of body cameras. Mr. Walker stated that at this time that is an unanswerable question. We need to wait until the program is up and running to find out what additional expenses there will be.

Ms. Price stated that she is in full support of the Police Department. She wanted to make a general comment about law enforcement and body cameras; she feels that body cameras may change behavior. Where before all citizens saw was cell phone footage that started half way into the scene of an incident that showed police officers in a not so favorable light, but with body cameras, we will have the whole incident showing that the police officer was actually doing the right thing. She is very pleased that the Albemarle County Police Department does not have a number of police misconduct issues and she thinks it is great that we researched and found a product that is integrative with what we already have in place. She feels this will be a great marketing tool that says you can trust the Albemarle County Police Department.

The Chief updated the Committee on our staffing numbers. We are currently authorized to have 152 sworn officers and as of today, we are down 4. In July, we will be sending 7 new recruits to the Academy. Chief Lantz continues to hire local individuals because he feels that they are invested in a community where they grew up. He did an interview with NBC29 and talked about staffing levels, one area he discussed was attrition. Normal attrition is around 3-5 but he is seeing it at an all-time high of 6-8, we are looking at several more retirements coming in September and October.

Ms. Price made the comment regarding the authorization of 152 sworn, stating that if you have 7 currently in the academy then you really do not have 152 sworn officers on patrol and that the Board should look into adding more officers to compensate for those that are in the academy to maintain the total number on the street. Mr. Walker stated that they are aware the police department is under staffed and that the department does have the ability for an over hire at this time.

John Springett made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Brian Williams 2nd the motion. The meeting adjourned at 10:04 am.