

POLICE CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

October 12, 2021

Meeting Minutes

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

Others Present: Ron Lantz, Greg Jenkins, Diantha McKeel, Bea LaPisto-Kirtley, Dr. Jesse Turner, Madison McNamee

Meeting called to order at 9:02am

John Springett made a motion to approve the August 10, 2021, meeting minutes and Brian Williams 2nd the motion all were in favor. The August 10, 2021, meeting minutes were approved.

Matters from the Public:

There were no matters from the public from the last CAC meeting, and the department received 8 positive recognitions of officers going above and beyond to assist the citizens of Albemarle County. The department received an email from a community member on the westside who has cameras on the outside of their home which documented an intoxicated person in the middle of the night and called the police to see if we would like the video footage, which was turned over to us. The Police Chief stated that “When in doubt, call us out”.

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:

Dr. Jesse Turner, Director of Student Services with the Albemarle County Public Schools gave an overview of the new Albemarle County Public Schools Public Safety Program. The Public Safety Program not only deals with physical safety, but it also deals with mental safety as well. The schools have also seen an increase in mental health issues in children as life is much tougher now than it used to be. Children are very stressed as they are being asked to take on the roles of adults that they are not ready to take on. Chief Lantz mentioned that Crisis Intervention Training or Emergency First Aid might be a great tool for the Safety Officers. Both trainings are based on how to handle individuals that are suffering from a mental health crisis.

The program is also focused on keeping the children in school because if they are not in school, they are not learning. The high schools have psychologists that are trained in both physical and psychological safety and there are currently 8 safety coaches that exist between the middle and high schools (6-12 grades). One of the goals is to see the safety coaches be put in the elementary schools because this is where it all starts and one thing that Dr. Turner has noticed is that the attendance of students in the elementary schools is horrible. He would like to see the safety coaches in the elementary schools to build relationships with not only the students, but the families as well.

The principals in the larger schools are grateful for the safety coaches but there still is a relationship between the schools, safety coaches and the police department.

Mr. Williams was glad to hear that there is still a partnership between the schools and the police department. He was wondering about getting the parents of the high school juniors and seniors involved to help address some of

these issues. Dr. Turner indicated that they currently have what is call the “AnonymousAlerts” where individuals can send information, ideas or just let their voice be heard.

Ms. Boucher talked about social media and the mental health issues that it causes. Maybe the principal can convey to the students how powerful and negative social media can be and educate the students, parents, and grandparents about phone safety. Ms. Boucher talked about a program that links your phone to your child’s phone so you can see what they are doing on social media, this may also be an avenue for parents or grandparents.

Mr. Springett wanted to know the background or profile of the safety coaches that are being placed in the school system. Dr. Turner discussed that some have a background in psychology, sociology, worked in group homes or with challenging children, some have been teachers or therapist in the community but most of them have a physical safety background more so than the psychological side. Each Safety Officer must go through training where they get trained in all areas.

Ms. McKeel spoke about the Safety Coach position which compares to the School Resource Officer and that Safety Coaches have gone through the Safety Officer training. As far as the mental health issues in the middle and high school students it is because students are now latchkey kids due to the fact there are no longer after school programs or activities and the students are missing that. Principals of elementary school students say the number of students that are tardy is amazing and it is because the parents are not taking the school start times seriously.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley said that with elementary schools it comes down to the principals or assistant principals making a point to talk with the student’s parents and letting them know that they care about the student and the student’s wellbeing. When the word gets out in the community that the principal cares about their students you will see a change in the parent’s behavior. She would like to know if they could have a Safety Coach that does all elementary schools or one that is on a rotational basis. She would also like to know what the principals are currently doing.

Chief Lantz Updates:

Staffing update:

- In September there were 4 promotions
- In October there were 3 promotions
- Currently there have been 19 separations from the department due to retirements or resignations compared to the 12 we had in 2020.
- The department has been approved for 2 over hires
- We have 12 certified officers in the background process
- At the last testing we had 6 individuals show up
- By the end of October, we will be down 10-12 sworn positions

While these numbers may seem shocking, talking with peers from across the state, they are seeing the same thing. The County Executive’s Office, Police Department and Human Resources are working on a plan to help attract and retain officers.

Mr. Williams wanted to thank Chief Lantz for his leadership.

John Springett made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Brian Williams 2nd the motion. The meeting adjourned at 10:00 am.