



TOWN OF EASTCHESTER

POLICE REFORM AND REINVENTION COLLABORATIVE COMMITTEE PLAN

MARCH 1, 2021

On June 12th, 2020, Governor Andrew Cuomo issued Executive Order 203 which required each municipality in New York to examine the function, policies and goals of its Police Department in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the New York State Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Resources & Guide for Public Officials and Citizens (hereinafter referred to as “Guide” issued in August 2020). The Governor required the establishment of a review committee and eventual preparation of a plan for changes to each department’s policies and practices.

In accordance with Executive Order 203, Supervisor Colavita convened a volunteer committee tasked with the responsibility of developing and recommending a plan for implementation in the operations of the Eastchester Police Department. The Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Committee (hereinafter referred to “PRRCC” or “Committee”) was chaired by John Roland and included members of the District Attorney’s Office, Legal Aid Society, members of the clergy, present Eastchester Police Department Officers including Chief Bonci and Executive Officer Joseph Rodriguez, designees from both the Eastchester and Tuckahoe School Districts, representatives from multiple community organizations in town and private citizens. A list of the members is attached to this draft plan. The Committee also included Town Comptroller Dawn Donovan and Town Supervisor Anthony S. Colavita. The Committee met on Wednesdays in the evening to accommodate everyone’s schedule. Each member was provided with the Guide referred to above together with a copy of the Governor’s accompanying letter. Members were also given each other’s contact information for additional collaboration. Each member was also given a summary version of the Guide book (prepared by the Eastchester Police Department), a summary of each meeting, copies of portions of the Eastchester Police Department Operations Manual, accumulated results of the survey and comments made by the public and any other relevant information and comments submitted by the public or requested by the committee members.

As was referenced above, the Town of Eastchester conducted an on-line survey which was available on the Town’s website and also emailed to all SwiftReach 911 subscribers. There were 800 participants in the on-line survey. The results were shared with each committee member. The tabulations of the survey indicate that the vast majority of the people responding to same looked very favorably upon the Eastchester Police Department.

The Police Department also prepared a Power Point presentation regarding the structure, function and policies of the Police Department. The Eastchester Police Department was recently re-accredited in June 2020 (initially accredited in June 2015). Accreditation is issued by the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services after a comprehensive analysis of administrative, training and operation standards of the Department. A very small percentage (21%) of Police Departments in New York

State are accredited. Receiving accreditation indicates that your Department is exceeding expectations of service and is state of the art with regard to administration training and overall operations.

Throughout the course of several meetings, the Committee spent the majority of its time reviewing the multiple subject matters and review points set forth in the Guide. Many questions were raised by Committee members regarding the Department's policies, composition, operations and discipline. Multiple suggestions were debated at length which fostered several recommendations and became the impetus for the eventual Plan prepared by the PRRCC. The Committee collaborated on a Draft Plan which was then refined and placed on the Town's website for review by the public for an extended period. The Committee decided to conduct its Public Hearing on Wednesday, March 10, 2021 at 7:30 in the Court Room at Town Hall located at 40 Mill Road, Eastchester, NY 10709.

Set forth below are the recommendations of the Committee for public review and eventual submission to the Town Board (as possibly modified and amended by future examination and review):

1. Additional bias/diversity training for officers (in addition to the multiple hour training conducted by Westchester County). Recruits receive a module of training on this subject in the Academy. We will ensure that the training is extended to all members and continue training annually.
2. Additional mental health training for officers, particularly after traumatic events. As part of an overall officer wellness initiative, the department will train specific officers in the "peer mentoring" concept to respond to fellow officers that may need counseling.
3. Continue to use the "Police 1" video training format regarding multiple subject matters. The department currently subscribes to a video based "roll call" training program which consists of a library of videos on multiple subjects. The videos vary in length and the department will use this platform to have access to the subject matter referred to in #1 and 2.
4. Make a recommendation to Westchester County to restore the "Crisis Team". The Committee recommends participation and utilization of this County asset.
5. Utilize plain clothes officers in order to reduce stress and anxiety (especially on mental health/emotionally disturbed person calls). Utilize the plain clothes officer during periods with the highest rates of occurrence for this type of activity. Further, the Department should canvas the Town to locate an organization or individual willing to serve as a volunteer or attendee on these types of calls. Consideration need be given to liability and workman's compensation issues. Use could be on an "as-needed" basis.

6. Examine recruitment of additional Auxiliary Police Officers from all neighborhoods in the Town to provide familiarity and working knowledge on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis.
7. Publicize "Community Policing" efforts presently in existence and all future efforts. Utilize social media more frequently for a better dialogue and exchange between the Department and the public; personalization of the Department; and for better overall communications. It was agreed that the Department would not accept anonymous complaints as it would likely cause abuse, fraud and substantial manpower consumption. Additionally, all complainants have to be interviewed to properly prosecute the alleged conduct which would not be possible.
8. Develop a better balance and separation between the Building Department and the Eastchester Police Department with regard to code violations and violations of municipal ordinances (rather than creating a criminal prosecution environment). Create additional weekend/holiday hours for the Building Inspector and Code Enforcement Officers that they can respond to issues rather than Officers.
9. Greater utilization of the Police Department webpage which should include:
 - An easily accessible civilian complaint form (with a disclosure advising complainants that they must have their signature notarized and that there is a penalty of perjury for making a false complaint)
 - Add a drop down box on the website with information regarding police sponsored community happenings, events and functions
 - Conduct a yearly public survey to better gauge issues and the perception of the Department and interaction by the Department with the public
 - Disclose the number of civilian complaints
 - Generally keep the website up to date
10. Continuous examination of state and federal laws to make sure that our procedures and policies are up to date with case law and statutes.
11. Engage in more community policing and training for same. Work on training members in various community outreach programs that are available and enact the programs in future activities.
 - Active Social Media
 - School Check-ins
 - Coffee with a Cop
 - L.E. Torch Run
 - Girl Scouts-Boy Scouts-Pre-School Presentations
 - Bicycle / Motorcycle Units

12. With regard to Use of Force complaints, the Department reported that there was only a single Use of Force complaint made in the last five years and was determined to be unfounded by the District Attorney's Office. The complaint was withdrawn with an apology.
13. With regard to the need for a Civilian Oversight Committee, the PRRCC determined that same was not necessary. Outside of three complaints made by a mentally disturbed person, the Department received less than one civilian complaint a year for the last five years. Complaints can also be made directly to Elected Officials and Lieutenants and the Chief directly. Sometimes they are made to the District Attorney's Office. Either way, the matter is processed in strict conformity with the Civil Service law, the operations manual of the Police Department and all complainants are notified of the outcome in writing. Lastly, if civilian complaints rise to a certain level they are referred to the District Attorney's Office and/or the New York State Police.
14. It was recommended that, in light of the infrequency of complaints and prompt review of any complaint, the Town not participate in the Westchester County Office of Police Accountability until such time as it is fully functioning and operational. Thereafter, the Town may consider participation.
15. The Committee recommended that body cameras should be acquired by the Town and utilized by each Officer on tour. The Committee found that the use of body cameras, together with the video cameras installed in the patrol cars, would be beneficial to the public and to the Officers. Body cameras can also be used as a training tool. It was also recommended that a clear policy be established regarding release and disclosure of the video, timing of activation, storage, etc..
16. Representatives from the Eastchester Police Benevolent Association indicated that the Department has significant training (more so than other local departments) and is very supportive of Officer Wellness training. The Officers also indicated their willingness to become more involved in community policing techniques and strategies. The Town has an Employee Assistance Program available to all Town employees. The department also has access to a Public Safety E.A.P. which has counselors and counselling services available to members who need assistance. In addition, the department will begin to train peer counselors which would be available to members.
17. The Committee also recommended the consideration of adding the position of Captain to the staff of the Eastchester Police Department in conjunction with a reallocation of responsibilities and/or chart changes.

Anyone wishing to comment on the report can do so at the Public Hearing or is directed to the Town's website. Emails can be sent to pgeorge@eastchester.org. All emails will be forwarded to each member of the Committee. The final draft of the PRRCC Plan will also be available on the Town's website for review.

The Town of Eastchester wishes to thank Chairman John Roland and each member of the Committee for committing their valuable time towards this important project. The recommendations set forth in the Plan will make the New York State Accredited Eastchester Police Department function better and this process has fostered a better understanding by our community of both the operations and responsibilities of the men and women of the Eastchester Police Department and the Department has a greater appreciation of the sensitivities and concerns of the community it serves.

Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Committee

John Roland, Chairman

Kerrie Williams, Esq. - Assistant District Attorney

Vincent DeMarte, Esq. – Senior Counsel, Legal Aid Society of Westchester County

Rev. Carl Maiello

Rev. Eric Hall

Dawn Donovan - Town Comptroller

Paul D'Agostino – Eastchester Police Association

Lt. Joseph Rodriguez - Police Advisor

Sgt. Andrew Wade - Police Advisor

Police Chief Timothy Bonci

Sally Veltidi – Eastchester School District Representative

Scott DeBellis – Tuckahoe School District Representative

Peggy Conway

Andy Rabin

Josh Gaccione

James DeMaio

Dan Galella

Steve Huvane

Loretta DeSimone

Supervisor Anthony S. Colavita