

WAUSAU POLICING TASK FORCE MINUTES

Date/Time: Monday, September 23, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.
Location: City Council Chambers – 407 Grant St, Wausau
Members Present: J Robinson (C), P Peckham, M Loy, W Harris, K McColley, S
Schneck, M Klemp-North
Member Absent: None
Others Present: B. Bliven, K Rosenberg, J Frankel

In accordance with Chapter 19, Wisconsin State Statutes, notice of this meeting was posted at Wausau City Hall and the Public Safety Building, and emailed to the Wausau Pilot and Review and the City Pages in the proper manner.

Call to Order/Roll Call

The Wausau Policing Task Force meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m. Members introduced themselves and gave brief backgrounds of their interest in being on this task force.

General Agenda Items

Overview of the Task Force charter: Mayor Rosenberg spoke about why she organized this task force and what she hopes to accomplish. Some of her thoughts included the opportunity to look at some of the police department policies and regulations that get the most attention, public exploration of what the officers are dealing with (homelessness, mental illness, etc.), and the chain of events that lead to use of force and how this is reviewed. Some desired outcomes might be a report to the public and public hearings on issues.

Overview of the Police Department: Chief Benjamin Bliven gave members flash drives with a variety of information, such as policies that might be relevant, videos about various parts and functions of the departments, strategic plans, training information, union contract, and other potentially helpful documents. Chief Bliven invited members to do a ride along with a police officer (pending COVID,) speak with him personally, and offered to put together a mini Citizens' Academy on topics that would be relevant.

Discussion on information needed to make decisions: Some of the items suggested included information on what initiates investigations, further break down on the types of arrests for various types of crimes, what "arrest" versus "charges brought" means, what is the officer's role in crisis situations as well as when does their role end and crisis teams begin and the de-escalation process, what is the public perception of safety, and a baseline of what the public knows about the police department and their policies. There was very strong support for this task force to also work to make things actionable for the officers, such as what does the police department need for resources to carry out their duties, what challenges officers face with the current policies, and are there public policies like officer decertification that could work better. If there are additional ideas for information desired, please contact Chief Bliven, Mayor Rosenberg or Chairman Robinson.

Discussion on community engagement: Members would like this to start early with getting feedback on the public's concerns, to be sure the task force is addressing the community's concerns. Suggestions included: while attending various forums (such as community events, neighborhood meetings, etc.) engage citizens about the task force, hold a town hall meeting, do a survey for feedback. Want to be sure to hit the various demographics: officers, community, those who have experienced the criminal justice system first hand, and vulnerable populations such as the Hispanic community, LGBTQ, Hmong, etc.)

Discussion on what success might look like: Member suggestions were to be able to make recommendations to make the police department better and the community safer, help citizens to trust the police department more, and to show how Wausau has made a concerted effort to be responsive. It was suggested that conveying these successes may be hard to show in practice, but giving feedback, perhaps via dashboards, articulating clear actionable recommendations and showing changes and improvements would be desired.

Discussion on how to share information: The process is in place to listen live to the meetings. Also, the agenda, minutes and link to the recorded video will be posted on the city's website. Discussion on whether the web page should be on the city portion of the website, or under the police department – there was concern that if it was on the police portion, it may be viewed as tainted. Also needs to be shared via social media, such as Facebook.

Discussion on meeting frequency: The consensus was to start with meeting once a month for the business meeting at a set time, and more frequently for community engagement, with various times of the day to allow people with different schedules to attend.

The next meeting will be Monday, October 19th at 3:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers.

Adjourn

Motion made by W Harris to adjourn, second by P Peckham. Motion carried 7-0.

Meeting adjourned at 3:45 p.m.