

DRAFT

VILLAGE OF WESTHAMPTON BEACH COMMUNITY LAW ENFORCEMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MISSION:

Maintaining public safety is an essential role of government. Governor Cuomo has tasked each New York municipality with a police department to adopt a policing reform plan by April 1, 2021, with the goal of strengthening mutual trust and respect between the police and the community they serve. The Westhampton Beach Community Law Enforcement Review Committee, comprised of local officials and community stakeholders was created to engage in a fact based and honest dialog about the public safety needs of our community and to develop recommendations resulting from this review.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Mayor Maria Moore

Police Chief Steven McManus

Stephen Frano – Village trustee, longtime resident and former police officer

Jack King - Pastor of the Westhampton Beach Methodist Church

James LaDu - member of the Village's Ethics Board and resident

Suzanne Mensch - School Board President, attorney and business owner

George Vickers - business owner and active community member

Danielle Waskiewicz - Chamber of Commerce executive board and Library Director

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

The Committee met several times during the months of December 2020 and January 2021 and explored the following key considerations:

- the role that the police currently play in our community
- staffing, duties and rules of conduct
- the use of in-car and body-worn video cameras
- whether law enforcement should have a presence in our schools
- how the police should engage in crowd control
- stops, searches and arrests, and related data collection
- accreditation
- diversity of the workforce
- officer training
- support of officer wellness and well-being
- community outreach plans

POLICIES REVIEWED:

- Department Duties and Rules of Conduct
- Body Cameras
- In-Car Mobile Cameras
- Use of Force
- Recording of Custodial Interrogations

STAFFING, DUTIES AND RULES OF CONDUCT:

The Village of Westhampton Beach police department is comprised of a Chief, three Sergeants positions, one Detective, nine Patrol Officers, one Public Safety Dispatcher and one Police Operations Aide.

The Committee members were provided with information to familiarize themselves with the composition of the Village's police department and the roles of each officer within the department. The Department's policy of Duties and Rules of Conduct was provided, outlining each of the referenced positions.

IN-CAR AND BODY-WORN CAMERAS:

Policies for body-worn cameras and in-car mobile cameras were reviewed. The Committee was supportive of the fact that the department employs both types of cameras, noting that this type of equipment is necessary for both officer accountability and for their protection as well. Chief McManus informed the Committee that Westhampton Beach was one of the first of the east end municipalities to implement the use of the body-worn cameras. He further explained that after years of use and changes in technology, it would be beneficial to upgrade the equipment. The Committee recommended that quotes for upgrades to the body-worn cameras and in-car camera and computer systems be promptly obtained and evaluated to ensure proper functioning.

SCHOOL PRESENCE:

The Village and the Westhampton Beach School District implemented a cost-sharing School Resource Officer Program three years ago to promote safety and education, and establish a positive police presence within the schools while furthering the principles and philosophies of community policing directly into the school environment. The SRO Program is designed to encourage working relationships between the police, the schools, and the students, and to provide school administrators and staff with law enforcement resources and expertise to maintain safety, order and discipline in the school environment. The responsibilities of the School Resource Officer include patrolling the school perimeter, assisting school administrators in emergency crisis planning and building security matters, working with the School on drills and exercises, providing training for school staff and security personnel in handling crisis situations, developing and implementing classes in law related education to support the educational efforts of the faculty, and improving security protocols and response plans for an active shooter event.

The position of School Resource Officer (SRO) was discussed by the Committee, and feedback was provided by Chief McManus and School Board President Suzanne Mensch. They reported that the addition of an SRO in the schools for the past 3 years has been a success and much welcomed by the students and school administration. No changes to the program were recommended.

CROWD CONTROL:

The Committee discussed the role of the police in the community, and specifically discussed the interactions during recent protests and during large community events. The feedback was positive, and it was determined that the department and the officers involved managed the crowds with respect while maintaining order.

DATA COLLECTION:

Questions were raised by the Committee with respect to demographic data on stops, searches and arrests. It was explained by Chief McManus that this data is currently collected and stored, but that software program currently in use does not allow for the data to be searched electronically for statistics on race and gender. The Committee noted that searchable data is an important tool for improving transparency and is necessary to identify the possible existence of disparate and biased policing. To that end, the Committee recommended that the police department's current records management system be replaced with one that allows for more efficient tracking of data on race and gender in connection with searches, traffic stops and the issuance of summonses.

ACCREDITATION:

The Committee reviewed certain of the department's policies and procedures and was informed that the department has not yet achieved accredited status from NYS. The State's Accreditation Program encompasses four principal goals:

- To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of law enforcement agencies utilizing existing personnel, equipment and facilities to the extent possible;
- To promote increased cooperation and coordination among law enforcement agencies and other agencies of the criminal justice services;
- To ensure the appropriate training of law enforcement personnel; and
- To promote public confidence in law enforcement agencies.

Chief McManus described the process for updating and implementing the department's policies and procedures, and informed the Committee that the Village has recently partnered with Lexipol, a private law enforcement support consulting company to assist with the accreditation process. The Committee recommended that the police department diligently pursue this goal of achieving accredited status.

DIVERSITY:

The Committee inquired as to the minority status of officers in the department and was informed that there are two fulltime and two part time minority and female employees. The Chief described the Civil Service selection process that requires the Village to hire officers from the top three candidates on the Civil Service list. The Chief also informed the Committee that the department is in the process of recruiting an officer for an open fulltime position, and that the eligible candidate on the Village's civil service list is female.

TRAINING AND OFFICER WELLNESS:

The Committee discussed officer training as well as support of officer wellness and well-being. In responding to certain types of calls such as serious vehicle accidents and fatalities, officers occasionally experience trauma. Examples were provided by Chief McManus of peer group decompression methods and employee law enforcement support groups.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

Community outreach was a focus of the discussions, with the Committee recommending increased community engagement. The Committee offered many suggestions that would lead to enhanced visibility and interaction between the police and the community including:

- Increased foot patrol on Main Street during the summer season.
- Partnering with the Fire Department and the Southampton Town Police Department during community events.

- Partnering with the Library and the School and utilizing their newsletters for community updates.
- Providing a child car seat inspection station.
- Partnering with the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department on a child ID program.
- Offering an open house/police department tour.
- Increasing the department's social media presence on Facebook and Instagram.
- Issuing a survey to the community for additional feedback.
- Organizing a community "Night Out" program with music/games/activities.
- Partnering with other agencies for Coat/Food/Toy Drives.
- Stopping in at local churches hosting the Maureen's Haven homeless overnight program.
- Issuing a community safety guide.
- Establishing a "Coffee with a Cop" event.

BAIL/DISCOVERY REFORM:

One of the Committee meetings was attended by several representatives from the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office who provided information to the Committee on the new bail reform laws as well as the new discovery laws and how each has impacted the police department in terms of the documents required to be delivered to the District Attorney's office, and the timeframes under which they must be provided. The representatives from the District Attorney's office were complimentary of the Village's police department, stating that it has navigated the new rules well.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee has issued the following recommendations:

- Replace the department's current records management system with one that provides for more efficient tracking of data on race and gender in connection with searches, traffic stops and the issuance of summonses.

- Update all department policies and procedures and obtain accredited status for the department from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services.
- Obtain quotes for upgrades to the body-worn camera equipment and in-car camera and computer systems to ensure proper functioning.
- Take steps to enhance community outreach by implementing some or all of the suggestions listed above.