

**Meeting Minutes**  
**Police Advisory Board Meeting**  
**VIA TELECONFERENCING**  
**5:00 PM FRIDAY JANUARY 08, 2021**

**Board Members Present:** Chair Melinda White; Co-Chair Jamie Pinkham; Danielle Lindley; Tom Benton; John Nicholls; Winnie Wilkerson; Kris Lukins,

**Board Members Absent:** None

**Staff Members Present:** Wendy-Ayn Coy, Minute Taker

**Public Present –**

1. **Call to Order** – Meeting was called to order at 5:01.
2. **Agenda Introduction & Review** –
3. **Brief Public Comment on Agenda Items – None**
4. **Mission Review** –
  - Mission: To offer advice to the St. Albans Police Department for the successful implementation of 21st Century Policing strategies and to assist the Police Department in following the established “Road Map” as amended by the City Council
5. **Introduction of Board Members & Chief** –
  - **Melinda White** – Chair White is a life-long resident of St. Albans. She is in long term recovery so she has experience on both sides of the law. She works with people that have substance use disorder. She believes in building partnerships to better support the community. She has a vested interest in finding solutions.
  - **Jamie Pinkham** –Co-Chair Pinkham works in healthcare. There have been challenges in healthcare community that are similar to the problems that law enforcement is having. She believes that she can help find solutions.
  - **Danielle Lindley** – Member Lindley has been a resident of St. Albans for a while. She is the Director of Counseling for Youth Services at NCCS. She would like to have a safe community. She believes that good systems and policy work will be better for the community in the long run.
  - **Tom Benton** – Member Benton has a background in journalism and he believes that a fact background might be balancing to the board.
  - care about the issues – don’t have any particular agenda trying to fulfill –
  - **John Nicholls** – Member Nicholls is a community member who has a vested interest in how police department operates. He believes that he will bring perspective and thoughtfulness and help to achieve some positive change.

- **Winnie Wilkinson** – Member Wilkinson has experienced systematic racism as well as police brutality. She wants to be the voice as if the Board doesn't hear it from people who have lost people they won't understand the impact. She wants to bring the humanness to these issues. She stated that being a Police Officer is not a privilege but an honor so there is a need to be honorable as a police officer.
- **Kris Lukins** – Member Lukins is a resident of St. Albans town and Director of Voices Against Violence. The police are a big part of the issue of domestic violence. Her group has always worked well with police department but there is always room for improvement. She would like to be a voice for survivors and marginalized communities.
- **Chief Maurice Lamothe** – Chief Lamothe has 20 years' experience with the State Police Department. He is good at bringing people together. He looks for outside resources and brings them in. He is looking forward to partnership and collaboration. He would like to be a part of the group but doesn't want to hinder the work of the group

## 6. Police Transformation Roadmap

- **Explore resources suggestions and ideas** – Ms. White reviewed the Roadmap then opened up the meeting for Board Members comments on the Roadmap. Member Pinkham is hopeful that the Board can use data to help achieve the goals. She wants to hear the personal stories but there should be a balance. Data can help guide and support the police and community with those improvements. Chief Lamothe stated that yearly stats will go out and identify the complaints both internal and external whether they are substantiated or not. The stats will go to the City Council, be posted in city hall and on the City Council website. Co-Chair Pinkham thought that the committee could leverage that information. Member Lindley wants to identify what is working well right now and what community resources are available.

Member Wilkerson talked about a woman that was arrested, handcuffed in a cell and beaten. The police officer left and was hired by the sheriff's office. Before a person is arrested the emotional status of the person should be factored into the situation. People with drug problems should not be arrested. They should be treated for the sickness and illness that they have. This issue should be a clear part of the roadmap. There should be more social worker interaction, drug counselors and treatment before arresting.

Chair White stated that the Board needs more training to be aware of the problems. She asked Chief Lamothe to tell the Board about the SAPD's community outreach. He responded that COVID has hindered outreach efforts. Coffee with a Cop had to be suspended. They do have birthday parades. A Community support unit on Wednesday goes out to wherever there are marginalized groups. People are talking to them more. He asked that if anyone thought of any community event that the Police Department could be involved to call and the PD will send them out.

Member Nichols stated that missing from the roadmap is transparency and accountability for the police department. It is important for building trust in the Police department as an institution.

Member Lukins has a long history of working with PD. Research has shown that people involved on domestic violence and/or stalking won't reach out for services. Police now have an assessment sheet that provides a base to judge whether an advocate needs to be on the scene. This has been working well as they have found people who haven't been on anybody's radar. She believes that training has to be done all the time. There needs to be ongoing conversations. Survivors have been arrested. A collaborative grant allows a SAPD officer as an investigator and he works out of the State Attorney's officer. He has helped with survivors. It is not necessary to have a police response all the time. Chair White gave the Board a link to the Messenger who has a very good resource guide. It would be a great starting point to identify the resources in our communities so the gaps can be found and slowly start filling them in.

Chair White stated that the Board will remain as is for the next year. She suggested bringing in a law enforcement expert to help the Board understand issues and to provide a law enforcement perspective. The Board members liked the idea. Chair White will identify a who by the next meeting. If the Board has any suggestions they should reach out to her. Co-Chair Pinkham stated that the public comment section of the agenda needed to be a safe space for people to speak

#### **7. Address any new agenda items –**

- Data – The Board asked Chief Lamothe for addiction and mental health arrest data. He stated that he doesn't have that data. A mental health component has been added to their database but it is subjective data. It asks for the officer to make the judgement call on the mental health status of the person. In the past, many officers would not report a mental health issue due to the stigma that is attached to it. The Department now has an embedded mental health coordinator. Member Mitchell stated that an area to build upon would be an expanded to a family approach. How do you pull them in to get them in the system earlier and not just at the crisis point. Member Wilkerson stated that a police officer is not trained as a mental health worker. The mental health assessment should not be made by a police officer. 80% of the City budget goes to police and should be cut back so that there can be more mental health workers. She suggested that the Board and the Chief look at Atlanta's [ParkPine](#) Lake. They had similar issues and have been resolving them. In [Pine](#) Lake, the mental health coordinator is not on the city payroll but is a private contractor. They work per case. Money should be diverted to different areas.

Member Lindley asked for data on inappropriate times when the police were called. Chief Lamothe recounted an instance where the police department was called to remove a five year old from a car. He stated that the police shouldn't be called to the scene for a case like that. Member Benton would love to see the data collection as soon as possible so the Board can look in specific directions of need. Data is a place to start.

Chief Lamothe asked that the Board send him information on what they would like for data and he would provide it or explain to the Board why he couldn't provide it.

## 8. Public Comment –

- **Reier Erickson** - He is one of the community members responsible for helping the City start the Board. He was upset about the direction the Board was going in. The idea was not to hear individual cases. It made him uncomfortable to hear the Chief talk about having an increased presence in the community and use military terms to describe it. Data shows that community policing increases the likelihood of people being put in jail, arrested and abused. Data points against having an increased presence in the community. All it does is add people to the system. He felt that this Board didn't seem to be interested in fixing and critiquing the system. There have been community members who have been handcuffed and punched. Children who have been verbally abused and no one was held accountable. The officers still work for the Police Department. The repairs haven't been done to help the community trust the police. He doesn't trust the police and wouldn't call them even if he felt they were needed. The Board seemed to be focusing on services and not rebuilding the broken trust that the police has created in the community.

**Kate Larose** – She suggested that the Board access the videos and public comments from the City Council meetings that clearly show the pain that the Board was supposed to be addressing. This Board needs to respond to the unfair power dynamic and imbalances. This Board was not supposed to be an at-a-boy board for the police. This Board is supposed to be an advocate for the community. The Board can be more than what was said tonight and she hoped that the Board had the courage to be the community representatives that the community needed.

**Reese Kelly** – Mr. Kelly was also a part of the City Council discussions that pushed for this Board to be in place. It was to address several ongoing concerns:

- Inequitable and negative experiences with the police
- The experience of overpolicing in the City
- Escalating a situation when there isn't a need
- Lack of accountability for police behavior

He had several questions about the Roadmap.

- What are the benchmarks were for each point that is laid out in the Roadmap.
- How would the Department know if they have reached transformation and achieved their goals.
- What data is wanted and needed that is not being tracked.

He stated that the Chief needed to address the issues of the budget.

- Where is the money being allocated.
- How does it compare to other cities and towns.
- What is the Department spending its resources on.

**Tanner McCuin** (via Zoom chat) to Everyone: 06:23 PM Just to add - there is a number of data resources that have been compiled already if you visit <https://staneighbors.org/> and look at the knowledge base.

Member Wilkerson thanked the public commenters. Things that have been pushed under the rug need to come out.

9. **Adjourn – Next meeting will be on February 12<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 p.m.**

DRAFT