

Meeting Minutes
Police Advisory Board Meeting
VIA TELECONFERENCING
5:00 PM TUESDAY July 27, 2021

Board Members Present: Chair Melinda White; Co-Chair Jamie Pinkham; Kris Lukens; Winnie Wilkinson; Tom Benton; Danielle Lindley Mitchell

Board Members Absent: John Nicholls

Public Present: St. Albans Police Dept. Chief Maurice Lamothe; Zach Scheffler; Angie Sturm; Reier Erickson

1) Call to Order – Chair White called the meeting to order at 5:03.

2) Agenda Introduction & Review – Chair White shared the agenda through screen sharing.

3) Open Brief Public Comment on Agenda – None of the public commented during this time.

4) Mission Review – Chair White reviewed the PAB's mission: "To offer advice to the St. Albans Police Dept. for the successful implementation of 21st Century policing strategies and to assist the police dept. in following the established 'Road Map' as amended by the city council."

5) Consider approval of meeting minutes – The board had not yet received June's meeting minutes. Therefore, the board did not even consider approval. Chair White tabled the issue.

6) Update on City of St. Albans website: statement changed from "death" to "murder" – Chair White informed the board that the City of St. Albans' website now refers to George Floyd's "murder" rather than his "death." The change was made after the PAB's last meeting, at which the inaccurate phrasing was a topic of discussion. Chair White said the change "immediately" followed the board's last meeting and the expression of those concerns.

7) Community Policing Survey – update on survey delivery – Chief Lamothe updated the board on the SAPD's community policing survey – specifically, that the

police dept. has decided to distribute the survey by mail, rather than physically distributing individual surveys, a topic of discussion at prior meetings. Chief Lamothe said the police dept. "heard the complaints and concerns" regarding that approach, and that the survey's distribution is now just waiting on SAPD Lt. Jason Wetherby's return.

8) Areas of Focus:

Future PAB meetings: Chair White informed the board that technical limitations require future PAB meetings to be conducted exclusively in-person at City Hall. However, board members will have the option to call in to the meetings if they can't be physically present. Board meetings will be in the second floor conference room of City Hall, on North Main Street, following the same schedule as the board's recent meetings.

Chief presence during public comment time: Chair White noted mixed opinions from the board on whether Chief Lamothe should be present during the board meetings' public comment period. The board considered inviting Chief Lamothe to attend those public comment periods once per quarter rather than every meeting at the board's last meeting, but board members did not reach a consensus on the issue.

Co-Chair Pinkham said she is in favor of that suggestion, and emphasized that Chief Lamothe's presence would be "really about being able to hear and listen" more than "an open debate," "to hear the concerns of the community." Member Benton said he supported that perspective, as did Member Wilkinson, who suggested that if Chief Lamothe has follow-up questions for those who publicly comment, those questions be submitted in writing for a "clear dialogue" minimizing misconceptions.

Co-Chair Pinkham made a motion that the board invite Chief Lamothe to public comment sessions as a listener once per quarter. Member Benton seconded the motion. The board approved the motion.

Community Partnership: Chair White informed board members the PAB is invited to speak to the Franklin-Grand Isle Community Partnership, probably in October or November. Chair White said the FGICP is a group of providers and community members with a "far reach" who regularly host presentations by local initiatives. Chair White suggested PAB members describe the board's history to the FGICP. Chair White said the more board members who can attend the presentation, the better, and promised to provide specifics as the presentation date nears.

Policy and Procedure: Co-Chair Pinkham and Chief Lamothe reviewed three SAPD policies PAB members worked with the SAPD to clarify, regarding social media, body worn cameras, and court order service.

Social media: The public offered no comment on the social media policy. Member Lindley made a motion to recommend the social media policy for city council approval. Member Benton seconded the motion. The board passed the motion.

Court order service: Chief Lamothe described his experiences regarding court orders in Franklin County, specifically the prevalence of such orders. Chief Lamothe said he hopes this court order policy assures plaintiffs the SAPD will serve any order "in a very timely manner."

Reier expressed concern at an introductory paragraph on the court order policy, focused on abuse statistics concerning women and connecting those statistics with the importance of efficient court order delivery. Reier specifically expressed concern that the policy seemed gender specific, given that introductory language.

Chief Lamothe said he felt the statistic was important as an indicator of the danger to inefficient court order delivery.

Member Wilkinson suggested the efficiency of court order delivery need not be connected to an individual's gender.

Chief Lamothe responded that he agreed with the importance of gender-neutral policy language, but said he did not feel the statistic in question's gender specificity detracted from an attempt at inclusiveness.

Member Lindley made a motion to make proposed changes to the court order delivery policy, including removing the introductory paragraph, and then to send the revised policy to the city council for approval. Member Benton seconded the motion. The board approved the motion.

Body worn cameras: Chief Lamothe explained the SAPD adapted the Criminal Justice Training Council's body camera policy, and that the State of Vermont requires each law enforcement agency have such a policy by Oct. 1. Chief Lamothe then extensively described when officers will and won't activate their body cameras, the cost of body cameras, and the realities of body camera footage storage.

Both Co-Chair Pinkham and Member Benton enthusiastically moved to send the body worn camera policy as written to the city council for approval. For the record, Chair White decided Member Benton had beat Co-Chair Pinkham to the motion, which Co-Chair Pinkham then seconded with no loss of enthusiasm. The board approved the motion.

9) Public Comment – Chief Lamothe said he wanted to comment on the Neighbors for a Safer St. Albans' Community Rally for Togetherness, a public event held in Taylor Park on July 16. Chief Lamothe said the SAPD hoped to be invited to the event, that he considered it an opportunity to "have some time with the community," for example hosting a booth at the event. Chief Lamothe said he received a voicemail from an event organizer urging police to be "scarce" at the event, but that SAPD officers kept an eye on the proceedings "to make sure nothing happened." Chief Lamothe then informed the

board, and present members of the public, that National Night Out was scheduled for August 3, and invited the community to attend.

Chair White recognized that Reier wanted to respond to Chief Lamothe's comments before Chief Lamothe left the meeting.

Reier listed highly publicized legal allegations against SAPD officers in recent years, and while Reier acknowledged Chief Lamothe was not employed by the SAPD at the time of the alleged incidents, Reier said he feels he has not seen the SAPD acknowledge a breach in trust between the department and the broader community following those allegations.

Co-Chair Pinkham acknowledged both perspectives and that breach of trust. Co-Chair Pinkham said the PAB is "advocating... to build that bridge... for police and the community to come together." Co-Chair Pinkham said she appreciated both Chief Lamothe and Reier's courage in sharing their concerns. Co-Chair Pinkham concluded her own response by saying she feels the board works with that trust "gap" in mind and that to fill that gap, the board must "see it from both sides of the gap."

Member Wilkinson then responded. After providing the contextual background that she is an "avid wine drinker," Member Wilkinson compared the PAB's trust-bridging process to that of producing wine: "You don't see grapes and you get wine. It's a process."

Chief Lamothe then left the meeting.

Reier elaborated on his objection to the gender-specific language in the draft court order service policy. Reier said he appreciates the truth of the statistic in question, but said he would feel he wasn't "as much of a priority" as a self-identified male if he read the policy as it had been drafted, with that gender-specific language. Reier said he feels "keeping identity out of those policies only benefits everyone."

10) Adjourn – Member Lindley made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member Lukens seconded the motion. The board approved the meeting, and adjourned at 5:58.