

MINUTES

Police Advisory Board Meeting

Tuesday, October 26, 2021, at 5:00 PM

City Hall 2nd floor conference room, 100 No. Main Street

DRAFT

Board Members Present: Melinda White, Chair; Jamie Pinkam, Vice Chair; John Nicholls.

Board Members Absent: Kris Lukens; Tom Benton; Danielle Lindley Mitchell; Winnie Wilkinson.

Staff Members Present: Angela Bernard, Minutes Taker.

Members of the Public Present: Chief Maurice Lamothe, SAPD; Samantha Weber, NCSS; Jerry Vaisey, Northwest Access Television; Shaun Robinson, *VT Digger*, via Zoom; Zach (no last name) via Zoom.

1. Call to order

Chair M. White called the meeting to order at 5:04PM

2. Agenda Introduction & Review

Date on the agenda was corrected to September 26, 2021

With only three board members present, there is no quorum and therefore no official votes will be taken

3. Open Brief Public Comment on Agenda Items (limit 2 min. per person)

None

4. Mission Review

The board reviewed their stated and published mission. M. White read the mission out loud.

- *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. Consider approval of August, 2021 meeting minutes

With not enough board members present, minutes could not be approved at this time.

6. Embedded Crisis Workers – Chief Lamothe & Samantha Weber (NCSS)

M. White reintroduced Sam Weber to the Board. S. Weber explained that at the previous meeting in August, the board asked her to share stories of her experiences from the field working with the St. Albans Police Department. S. Weber brought two stories to share.

Story 1: Members of the public called in to report that there was a juvenile who was on top of the city parking garage, and they thought the juvenile was exhibiting strange behavior. When the officers and S. Weber arrived, the juvenile left. S. Weber caught up with them and spoke to

them while an officer connected with the juvenile's family. Police gave the juvenile a ride home, which, S. Weber said, would have previously concluded the event without offering mental health help for the juvenile. However, S. Weber was able to connect with the juvenile and concluded that they were considering suicide, that they were looking and hoping for therapy. S. Weber concluded the story by saying that had it just been an officer without mental health professional, it would have had a different outcome.

Story 2: Community members called in for a welfare check for an individual who posted suicidal intentions on social media. The person is a veteran who had recently found out their pet had a terminal diagnosis and would soon pass. The veteran announced intentions to commit suicide when the pet died. S. Weber explained that first they had to find the person because they had moved. An officer then spoke to them, but the veteran said they were firm in their decision and didn't want intervention. S. Weber concluded the story by saying the officer's responsibilities here are traditionally limited and that they cannot follow up with the person indefinitely. However, thanks to the collaboration of NCSS and mental health advocates, they were able to follow up with the veteran and help them get a new pet once their previous animal did pass and that the veteran, in the end, did not commit suicide.

J. Pinkam asked Chief Lamothe what they do differently. M. Lamothe said he's been lucky to have S. Weber with him and that he relies solely on mental health resource and thinks about how they can use them on every call. He explained that previously they would have taken people to the ER. Now mental health is always a call. M. Lamothe explained they can come up with a different game plan on cases now with NCSS onboard and that S. Weber is helpful for the follow up where the police department can't.

M. Lamothe then described an ongoing case with a resident who has completed multiple arrestable offenses, but with NCSS involvement they're able to work with her and her family rather than arrest her. S. Weber explained that this person continually enters a neighbor's home uninvited and that the neighbor is trying to stop her by taking out a court order and other steps. Traditionally, every time she violates that order, she could be arrested, but the NCSS collaboration allows them to work with the family, educate the neighbors and take a humanitarian approach to the situation, rather than arrest her.

M. White then asked if they do onsite assessments. S. Weber answered that she could if necessary but that she wants to build trust with the community. She said if the call asked for an onsite assessment, they would do it. M. Lamothe explained that other departments have their mental health professional also serve as an officer, but he prefers not to cross the line and potentially lose credibility.

J. Nicholls asked M. Lamothe to reflect on the small pool of applicants the city received for the police chief's job and wondered how they could attract more applicants in the future for potential open jobs as a mental health liaison or crisis counselor. S. Weber said that the more the positions are defined and explored, the more interest is generated, and the more people come to her that are interested in this type of position. She thinks there might be a stigma that mental health pros wouldn't be welcomed in a police department, but that the St. Albans Police Department is very welcoming, and they work together. S. Weber says the SAPD is wanting to be better at this part of the job.

J. Nicholls said he understood the hesitancy of potential mental health employees to step into a position with unknown officers. He said it is encouraging that people are expressing interest in the position to S. Weber. S. Weber said it is an important consideration and that mental health professionals may be concerned about liability, because these are different types of situations from those who have sessions in an office setting.

J. Pinkam asked if there's room for EMS or fire department employees to fill the gaps on calls and get training for mental health crisis response. S. Weber said yes, she thinks it's possible but that mental health professionals are licensed, and it would be difficult to decide what level of training is right, if it's not credentialed and monitored by the state. She talked about a different community where they have one credentialed therapist and one who does different jobs to fill the gaps. M. White talked about another community with similar setup and discussed the possibility of getting additional employees to lighten the load.

J. Pinkam questioned if there is funding that can be reallocated to hire someone who can help with crisis response but who is not credentialed to the same level as S. Weber.

S. Weber said it could be a good idea to lighten the load.

M. White thanked Chief Lamothe and S. Weber for attending. J. Pinkam inquired about S. Weber returning in future meetings and wondered what the frequency of visits could be. A suggestion was made for quarterly meetings. S. Weber said she would be happy to come when the board wants her. She said she planned to generate statistics and a data piece to bring with her in the future to find some way of tracking cases and benefits. M. White said she would appreciate data and a few general pieces to demonstrate how the program is successful and why.

S. Weber then suggested the board and she work together to see what kind of data can be pulled from ongoing cases. She discussed the case of an elderly resident whose family member moved into their home to provide caregiving services, but the resident didn't want them there. In the past, police calls were made to the residence out of concern for the wellbeing of the resident. Now the same level of calls is coming in, but now they're from the resident complaining about the caregiver in their home. S. Weber suggested that cases like this make it difficult to extract data and see where the system is working, because it's the same level of calls, but they're of a different nature. S. Weber wondered if she and the board could figure out together how to pull usable data from a story such as this.

J. Pinkam said this is a good example of how to reduce calls to SAPD because the people are going to the right services instead.

J. Nicholls said it seems that the nature of the calls may be different because they are now getting to the root of the problems and why the calls come up. M. White said it's exciting to start collecting data on how the program helps and having partners to collect anecdotes to come up with more data.

J. Nicholls then asked the board about how this will affect the mission. He said everyone feels good about having the crisis worker, and wondered what are the next steps in collaboration between the board and the PD. He said they need some kind of plan for how they can assist, as stated in the mission. J. Pinkam put the question to Chief. Lamothe and asked if the board

should meet with city council to get funding to build on this program or for new positions. She then wondered if it would be a city position and decided it might be better off using another agency and having the city pay for it.

J. Pinkam asked Chief Lamothe if there is support from city council for a new position. He answered that he believes there would be.

J. Pinkam and J. Nicholls said the board should plan a presentation to city council to recommend action. M. White said the board needs to be clear of what they're asking for recommendation for. She wondered if the goal is for another position identical to S. Weber's, or slightly different for crisis response?

J. Pinkam suggested telling the council that this is the board's focus. This is where the board thinks the city should invest time and money.

J. Nicholls said the PD could come up with a plan for city council and describe what would work best.

M. White said she would reach out to the city council to get on the agenda for their December 2021 meeting.

S. Weber suggested not making it a city position and the board agreed. S Weber left and agreed to come back when the board wants her.

7. Areas of Focus

- Data – Co-Chair, Jamie Pinkham
 - Police Advisory Board Survey Update - J. Pinkam said the group made the decision to do a survey by postal mail and paper survey. Once it has been sent, J. Pinkam suggests everyone on the board put it on social media to promote it and ask people to respond and mail it back. Paper surveys are scheduled to go out in the mail during the first week of November and then everyone should plug it with their city resident friends and family. Review of responses will help the board refine their mission and purpose. J. Pinkam expressed hope that the board would have data in time for the January 2022 meeting. Chief Lamothe asked if there was a timeline to get surveys back. J. Pinkam said no, not on the printed survey, but that maybe they could put a due date on their social media blitz, to encourage people to send back right away. M. White suggested December 1st as the deadline and due date for the survey to be returned. J. Pinkam volunteered to come up with scripting for the social media posts. Chief Lamothe suggested having it put on the city's Facebook page. J. Pinkam suggested reminders in city hall. J. Nicholls suggested messages on community events bulletin boards.
 - National Night Out - J. Pinkam gave an overview of the August 2021 National Night Out event in Taylor Park. She made notes of the great things at the event for families. She liked the central location of Taylor Park and the partnership with different community groups. She also noted there was a point where there were a lot of uniformed officers standing together and noted that this may have felt intimidating for

some attendees. She wondered if the officers should disperse throughout the park to make it less intimidating.

J. Pinkam asked Lamothe if there was a count of the number of people who attended. He said no but mentioned that they went through about 275 hot dogs and his rough estimate was about 500 people attended. He agreed that the group of officers did stand together in a crowd and acknowledged that they could disperse officers throughout the crowd to mingle or stagger officers' arrival at event. Chief Lamothe said he hopes for more attendance in 2022.

M. White said she went as well and thought it was a great event, but that she thought past events were attended by more people. She noted that some officers did play with kids and hang out in the crowd. She wondered what they can do to make it more welcoming, such as bring in live music or entertainment.

J. Pinkam asked if are there other events like this in other communities, where residents can interact with police officers in an informal setting. Chief Lamothe said they are hosting trunk or treat the weekend of Halloween 2021 at the new SAPD headquarters and that they invited other police agencies to participate. J. Pinkam asked about "coffee with a cop" and Chief Lamothe said they still host the event, but that the officer in charge of it is out on military leave. He said that when she comes back it will happen again.

Chief Lamothe said they're open to any ideas to get involved and out in the community. He said they will be out there for Spooky Saturday, the tree lighting in the park, and the running of the bells. He said they post their events on Facebook and might host an open house of the new police headquarters. He also mentioned that there's an open community room at the new station that is free to the public and that anyone can use.

J. Pinkam said it would be a good idea for the board's purpose to stay open to new ideas about public events with the PD that could create more accessibility and openness.

M. White said there is still an email address for the board if anyone wants to give feedback. M. White reminded people on Zoom that they value comments.

- Community Partnership (November) – Chair, Melinda White
 - PAB scheduled to share on Wednesday, November 3rd – 8:30 am via Zoom.
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82998327814>

Meeting ID: 829 9832 7814

Passcode: Alpaca

M. White discussed the Zoom Community partnership meeting on November 3, 2021. The board will be there to discuss their mission and to discuss the embedded NCSS program with the SAPD.

- Policy & Procedure – Co-Chair, Jamie Pinkham

- Social Media Policy - J. Pinkam asked Chief Lamothe about an update on the department's social media policy. Chief Lamothe said the legal department made a few suggestions, but that an officer went to a nationwide training session that covered social media policies, which caused them to send the ideas generated by the nationwide training session back to their legal department to see if their policy needed even more reworking. J. Pinkam asked if the board would get to see it once it was finalized and Chief Lamothe said yes they would.

J. Pinkam said the board will have several policies to review and discuss at a future meeting. More attention is planned on the policies for November meeting.

8. Public Comment -

Zach on Zoom thanked the board for having the hybrid zoom / in-person option. He commented on S. Weber's presentation and remarked that she's clearly helping in the community. He called it a fantastic discussion and said he is excited to see the police roadmap and how the community can help assist the PD. He said he looks forward to hearing the city council's response to the board's recommendation in December. He also wondered if the incoming American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds could be useful and urged the board to advocate to allocate some of these funds towards the partnership and towards funding for another mental health professional. He thanked the board for the survey as well and all their work. J. Pinkam concluded by asking Zach to help the board spread word on the upcoming survey via social media and he agreed to help.

9. Adjourn - **J Pinkam made a motion to adjourn. Second by J. Nicholls. Meeting was adjourned 6:30PM.**