

Meeting Minutes
Police Advisory Board Meeting
5:00 PM Tuesday, September 28, 2021

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

Public Present: Cooper (NCSS); SAPD Chief Maurice Lamothe; Zach Scheffler; Nick Tebbetts (NCSS); Samantha Weber (NCSS)

1) Call to Order: Chair White called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m.

2) Agenda Introduction & Review: None of the board asked questions about the agenda.

3) Public Comment on Agenda: At this time, none of the public was present to comment.

4) Mission Review: Member Lukens read aloud the PAB's 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) Approval of Meeting Minutes: Member Lindley Mitchell made a motion to approve the board's June and July meeting minutes. Member Wilkinson seconded the motion. The board approved the motion, with Co-Chair Pinkham abstaining from the vote due to her absence from one of the meetings in question.

6) Areas of Focus:

Embedded Crisis Workers – Nick Tebbetts and Samantha Weber, NCSS:
Nick said he began crisis work with Northwest Counseling and Support Services while he was with the Vermont State Police six years ago, supporting the SAPD. Sam said she's been an embedded clinician with the SAPD since the beginning of 2021. Cooper said nothing, being a dog, so Nick introduced him: he's three years old, and together they do search-and-rescue and tracking (for life-saving, not criminal work), as well as a lot of work with juveniles and fatal or accidental death cases.

In those cases, Nick said, "Just having a dog there, they immediately open up and talk with me." While he said he couldn't provide specifics without violating HIPAA, Nick provided the example of responding to a fatal accident at a job site, where three witnesses refused to talk with emergency responders ... until Nick let Cooper out of the vehicle to relieve himself, at which point conversations started that helped Nick get two of those three witnesses into therapy.

Sam said she spends most of her days with at least one SAPD officer responding to calls, but said she also takes calls from any officer who feels she might be particularly

helpful on a call. Sam said she's found success de-escalating situations as relatively simple as someone upset over a dog locked in a car on a hot day.

The board's questions for Nick and Sam focused on statistics. Both Nick and Sam explained that compiling statistics on their work is complicated. On Sam's part, she said one reason it's hard to produce statistics is it's still her first year on the job. But both she and Nick said that while they might collect data on their initial interactions with individuals, i.e. when responding to a call, most of their work involves helping those individuals connect with resources after the call, like substance use recovery, counseling, housing, etc. Prior to their work, Nick said, officers handed out phone numbers for those services, but "the success rate of them wanting services [was] zero."

Nick said a constant they see in their work is that people have been connected with resources in the past, but that connection has lapsed over time and that's why they are struggling. He said a brand new referral for services is rare, in his experience.

Sam said another complication in compiling statistics regarding their work is that they currently only track "things we're able to bill for," and that 75 percent of people they work with are not able to be billed as NCSS clients. She said with that in mind they have been discussing different ways of tracking that information, but without a clear decision as of yet. Along the same lines, Nick said 50 percent of the meetings he attends concern ideas about how to compile those statistics.

Member Nicholls asked if their work was evenly split between calls during the day and night. Sam said she's found there are a lot of calls during the day with which she can help – for example, she said, she can respond to a call regarding a juvenile and go into a school "with a little more dignity and thoughtfulness," without pulling a student out of classes and disrupting their school day.

Nick, on the other hand, said he deals with a lot of late night accidents and early morning fatalities.

Member Lindley Mitchell left the meeting amid this discussion, around 5:55 p.m., due to a prior obligation.

Board members offered multiple suggestions to Nick and Sam regarding compiling data as evidence of their work's effectiveness, but both Nick and Sam said the ideas had been proposed before. Member Wilkinson spoke in favor of a survey, for example, but Nick said when that was tried in the past, people did not respond positively because "they felt like a client."

"We're there with people on the worst days of their lives," Nick said. He said anything that makes them feel worse complicates his role in helping them.

Co-Chair Pinkham exited the meeting at 6 p.m. due to a prior engagement.

As the meeting neared its scheduled end, board members said they felt the discussion was far from over. Member Wilkinson made a motion to ask Nick and Sam back for a further discussion, which Member Nicholls seconded and the board then approved.

Data/Policy & Procedure: The board agreed to table the discussion until the next meeting due to Co-Chair Pinkham's departure.

Training Update: Chair White said she is exploring options for further board training with Nikki Fuller, who trained the board earlier this year. Chair White said Nikki

suggested a "community listening project of some sort," but that could require additional funding. Chair White said she is looking into it.

7) Public Comment: Zach spoke positively about Nick and Sam's discussion. Zach said he'd love to see community-level data collection, reiterating what the board members said. Zach said it seems like an ongoing conversation between local agencies, from Voices Against Violence and NCSS to the SAPD, is crucial.

Zach spoke negatively, however, about the "dog of a time" he had entering the building for the meeting, especially given it was a public meeting. He suggested online options, like Zoom hosting, or holding the meeting in the first floor conference room. Chair White said the board was surprised by complications that evening, including the locked front doors of city hall, especially since this was the board's first in-person meeting. She said that the board will take extra time to ensure public access moving forward.

Chief Lamothe took time to state the embedded crisis worker positions held by Nick and Sam are "not sought after" – that when Nick's position opened up, he was the sole applicant. On top of the low number of applicants, Chief Lamothe said those who do apply for these positions "have to be a really good fit," including meshing with the SAPD and being willing to "put a vest on" and leave the security of office work. In response, Member Nicholls said he would like to ask Nick and Sam what drew them to their positions when they attend their next PAB meeting.

8) Adjournment: Member Wilkinson made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which Member Lukens seconded. The board adjourned the meeting at 6:18 p.m.