



Town of Amherst
Special Meeting of the Town Council on Public Safety in Amherst
Monday, July 6, 6:30 p.m.
Virtual Meeting
Minutes

Complete video is available online: <https://amherstmedia.org/content/amherst-town-council-july-6-2020>

1. Call to Order

Councilors Participating Remotely: Bahl-Milne, Brewer, De Angelis, DuMont, Griesemer, Hanneke, Pam, Ross, Ryan, Schoen, Schreiber, Steinberg

Councilors Absent: Councilor Swartz

Others Participating Remotely: Town Manager Paul Bockelman, Amherst Police: Chief Scott Livingstone, Captain Ron Young, Captain Gabe Ting, Fire Chief Tim Nelson, IT Systems Analyst Serge Fedorovsky, Clerk of the Council Athena O’Keeffe

After confirming all participants could hear and be heard, President Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum, called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. and announced audio and video recording by Amherst Media.

Note: Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, this meeting of the Town Council was conducted via remote participation.

2. Announcements

President Griesemer announced that Emergency Rental Assistance Grant Program information is available online at www.communityaction.us/amherstrentalprogram

3. Presentation

a. Public Safety in Amherst

President Griesemer spoke about the events that led to this meeting, including the death of George Floyd.

Town Manager Paul Bockelman introduced Amherst Police Chief Scott Livingstone.

Police Chief Scott Livingstone spoke about the following:

- His experience with Amherst Police Department
- The effect of George Floyd’s death on policing
- The importance of engagement with the community
- Amherst Police Department’s mission statement
- Police operations hierarchy
- Organization and staffing

Police Captain Ron Young spoke about the following:

- Recruitment and selection process
- Staffing challenges
- Annual training
- Training review

Police Captain Gabriel Ting spoke about the following:

- State Police Accreditation commission
- What happens when APD responds to calls
- Call volume and criminal charges
- Community outreach efforts
- Collaboration with higher education institutions
- Policies and procedures
- Specialized equipment
- Standard equipment

Chief Livingstone spoke about the following:

- Accountability and community feedback
- Use of force policies and reports on use of force
- De-escalation techniques
- Civilian oversight and policy review
- Complaint process
- Coming challenges
- AmherstPD.org
- Amherstma.gov/complaint
- Amherstma.gov/commend
- PD bargaining agreements available online

Councilor Brewer commented about a citizen police academy that was held in the past; thanked Chief Livingstone for the presentation; asked about responses to questions that were submitted in advance of the meeting, use of riot gear, and a Police Stops Committee.

Chief Livingstone spoke about equipment purchased in response to officer injuries; recognizes that use of riot gear is not helpful unless absolutely necessary.

Councilor Pam spoke about use of firearms and physical force.

Chief Livingstone responded that chokeholds and knee holds are against the law, are not taught to officers, and are not allowed.

Councilor Ryan asked about the frequency of use of force and historical data related to stops and arrests.

Captain Ting responded that data is not published but is public information.

Captain Young stated that the number of instances of use of physical force are very low and are reviewed each year.

Councilor De Angelis spoke about the Police Stops Committee, Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing guidelines, active citizen oversight of design and policy of the Police department.

Chief Livingstone responded that oversight currently is on the state level and that he hopes for additional community-level involvement.

Councilor Schreiber spoke about pending legislation, an Act to Save Black Lives, an Act to Secure Civil Rights, and a Facial surveillance moratorium.

Chief Livingstone responded that there is a need for a system for annual certification process, mechanisms to weed out officers who are not behaving properly, statewide regulations so agencies abide by the same rules. The APD does not use tear gas.

Councilor Bahl-Milne asked about the “Eight Can’t Wait List.”

Chief Livingstone responded that APD has not engaged in those activities for many years, APD has never allowed chokeholds.

Councilor Bahl-Milne asked about the APD adventure camps.

Chief Livingstone spoke about the history of the camp, which is a popular youth program that has been cancelled this year due to COVID-19.

Councilor Bahl-Milne asked about the percentage of calls that are crisis intervention and crisis management.

Captain Young responded that APD responded to 362 calls for people in crisis last year, and spoke about the APD relationship with Clinical Support Options in Northampton, and officer training about trauma, autism, and other issues.

Councilor Hanneke asked about screening of officers for bias.

Chief Livingstone responded that there is not a screen for bias, and that it is dependent on training and supervision.

Councilor Hanneke asked about racial bias in stops and charge statistics.

Chief Livingstone responded that tracking is based on vehicle stops, APD tracks criminal charges and arrest numbers, and could see if an officer is stopping or arresting a certain demographic at a higher rate.

Councilor Hanneke asked if there is a dedicated officer for juveniles.

Captain Young responded that he just rewrote the juvenile policy, there have been sweeping changes on the state level, there is an APD juvenile officer who serves as liaison to the juvenile court system, there were less than 10 charges for youth last year, and spoke about juvenile victims.

Councilor Pam asked if there is an APD policy of shooting to stop rather than kill a suspect.

Chief Livingstone responded that the standard is not that specific; if force is needed officers are instructed to shoot the center of mass.

Captain Young added that APD policy is to shoot to stop not shoot to kill.

Councilor Bahl-Milne asked about the role of police unions and about demographic data.

Chief Livingstone responded that data is a public record but is not posted online; unions have a role in protecting officers if there is an internal investigation. In Amherst, the relationship between police administration and the union is strong.

Councilor Schoen asked about staffing a community mental health professional rather than an officer for crisis intervention.

Chief Livingstone responded that there is a civilian advocates in the department, which has been a very successful program; APD is also looking to add an in-house mental health advocate.

Councilor De Angelis spoke about instances of calls to APD in response to Black residents engaging in normal activity, specifically about a recent incident where Black teenage boys were playing outside in the

afternoon and police were called. Councilor De Angelis asked what happened and how the white person who called was dealt with.

Chief Livingstone acknowledged that happens in Town and APD must work with dispatch to screen and vet calls, and consider policy changes.

Public comment

Lydia Irons, Amherst resident, commented that the majority of calls are non-violent, spoke about policing differently in different parts of Town, constant patrolling in apartment complexes, the high number of officer-initiated calls on North Pleasant Street where Puffton apartments and Craig's Doors Shelter is located, and about APD spending on gas.

Mattea Kramer, Amherst resident, asked if there will be efforts to solicit feedback from affected communities, and that those voices need to be part of the conversation.

Irv Rhodes, Amherst resident, spoke about police serving as social service agencies, training to deal with mental health, drug addiction, and domestic abuse issues, and implicit bias training.

Rick Last, Amherst resident, stated that an armed officer is not the best thing to de-escalate a situation, spoke about the cahoots program in Eugene, OR and the effectiveness of the program, and police killings in mental health situations.

Terry Mullen, Amherst resident, read testimony from an experience with police from someone who did not feel safe enough to call themselves; the statement accused an officer of harassment via unfounded wellness checks, that complaints have not been taken seriously, stated that unnecessary use of force was used in a situation involving youth.

Alysha Desharnais, Amherst resident, spoke about frequent interactions with APD and UMass PD, stated that there are other ways of addressing new members of the community regarding noise and "suspicious behavior" in a more collaborative way, spoke about police-initiated calls, and urged the Council to look at proactive policing.

Nathan Diplock, Amherst resident, stated that one of the challenges is that police are highly visible, spoke about use of tasers during mental health crises, the need for transparency and oversight, the need to rethink the role of police in society, spoke in support of defunding and disarming the police and reinvesting in community support.

Jamie Fisher-Hertz, Sunderland resident, spoke about ideas to make Amherst a safer place for all people, spoke in favor of a task force, and stated that there are several agencies in Amherst doing the work in the community where funds can be redirected.

Zoë Crabtree, Amherst resident, spoke about officer salaries, which is significantly higher than teacher salaries, spoke about gas costs and vehicle maintenance, and the use of vehicles in relation to the Council's climate change goals.

Councilor Steinberg stated that, as chair of the Finance Committee, considered making funds available for other agencies, the Town is more tightly budgeted than previous years due to COVID-19. Additional information is needed about coverage for three police shifts if there is a reduction in staffing. Councilor Steinberg stated that there is concern about the idea to transfer money to take on different approach as a feasible alternative.

Councilor Pam expressed appreciation for the young people who spoke.

President Griesemer thanked Chief Livingstone and Captains Young and Ting for the presentation, and stated that this is just the beginning of a conversation about policing in Amherst.

4. Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated by the President 48 Hours in Advance of the meeting

5. Adjourn

President Griesemer declared the meeting adjourned at 9:56 p.m. on July 6, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Athena O'Keeffe".

Athena O'Keeffe

Clerk of the Council

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented

07-06-2020 FINAL Special Meeting of the Town Council on Public Safety

APD Presentation FINAL 7-6-20

Memo regarding public safety and policing in Amherst 6-29-20