



City of Norwich Police Department Collaborative Improvement Plan

Prepared and presented by the Community Advisory Board

To Whom it may concern,

In response to the Governor's Executive Order, a Community Advisory Board (aka CAB) was formed to review the needs of our community and police department. Through, at minimum, weekly meetings from September 2020 to February 2021, we have utilized the [New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Workbook](#) provided by the Governor's office in order to conduct this work. Through internal polling, our team prioritized the table of contents topics and allowed that information to inform our weekly discussions. Additional topics of local relevance were added as necessary. Furthermore, this team utilized both police and community surveys (*links of the results are included below*), created a section on the City's website community members to submit input, and held a Public Forum in order to gather insights from as many contributors as possible. As a result of that work, the following focus areas were developed.

- Police Department Roles & Functions
- Community-Oriented Policing
- Department Culture & Accountability

This plan includes recommendations that we feel will be beneficial for all parties involved and identifies measurable short-term and long term goals in each of the focus areas. This work was accomplished through the collaborative efforts of our team, which includes representatives from the following sectors: community members, a local business owner, Norwich Police Department leadership, Norwich Police Department Union leadership, Office of the District Attorney, Office of the Public Defender, County Behavioral Health, a faith-based representative, as well as elected and City officials.

Therefore, in accordance with the directives from the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative as directed by Governor Cuomo, we hereby make the following recommendations to the City of Norwich Council members.

With Respect,

City of Norwich Community Advisory Board

Links to surveys conducted-

[Community Survey](#)

[Community Survey Results](#)

[Police Officer Survey & Results](#)



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[Please note: The Community Advisory Board has not completed their discussions of the following topic areas outlined in the Collaborative Workbook: Citizen Oversight & Other External Accountability, Internal Accountability for Misconduct, Reducing Racial Disparities & Build Trust, and Data, Technology & Transparency. Once the CAB concludes discussions in these areas, there will likely be additional recommendations added to the Collaborative Improvement Plan. Additionally, the CAB may make adjustments to the recommendations below based on Common Council and community input received following the January 19th Council meeting and January 26th public forum.]

Introduction

Our Collaborative Improvement Plan will be organized by broad areas of focus, each encompassing multiple topic areas from the Collaborative Workbook provided by NYS as well as locally-driven discussion points. Within each area of focus, we will provide a brief overview of the focus area, identify our strengths, outline opportunities for improvement as well as identify any existing initiatives or relevant resources that we're aware of. Finally, we will conclude each section with measurable short-term and long-term goals that we recommend for the Council's consideration.

Police Department Roles & Functions

In recent years, the City of Norwich Police Department has been significantly understaffed and only recently, in July of 2020 has been operating as a fully-staffed department as currently defined (20 full-time officers). Although now fully-staffed, 45% of the officers have less than three years of law enforcement experience. Given the relative inexperience of the Department, we can expect natural improvements over the next few years outside of the initiatives included within our plan.

Being a rural law enforcement agency brings along its own strengths and challenges. In addition to the expected areas law enforcement should cover in the prevention, deterrence and investigation of criminal activity, our Police Department also plays a significant role in our community's mental health system. CAB members from the City of Norwich Police Department estimate traveling to regional CPEP (Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program) centers about 2-3x a week, the closest of which is an hour one-way. Compounding the convergence of mental health and substance abuse with our local law enforcement is the relative lack of services our area has to serve those populations. In fact, "Mental Health Crises/ High-Risk Behaviors" topped the list of public safety concerns among our survey respondents, with "Substance Abuse/Drugs" a very close second. Comments from our surveys further illustrate:

"[What I dislike most about my job is] not having a solution for someone's problems yet having to deal with them. (For example, repeated problems with mental health and housing issues. The same people call and come to the station multiple times in a day for many days.)" - Police officer



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“Obviously substance abuse is a huge issue in our community which leads to theft, domestic abuse, child abuse, and disorderly behavior. These are not all issues that our police department should have to handle.”

- Community Member

“The police force will be more successful with Mental Health in Chenango County stepping up— safe houses, treatment centers, etc. Chenango County Mental Health is a joke and makes the PD’s life much harder than it needs to be. [Mental Health] needs funding. Take care of the sick!” -Community Member

“*[What I dislike most about my job is]* checking welfare without support from MCAT or mental health.” - Police officer

Another large strain on our Police Department is the data entry associated with the Digital Evidence Management System. While both time-sensitive and necessary, especially under the State’s new Discovery guidelines, this administrative work is taking officers away from their patrolling duties, a key job function, which both the community and the department would like to see changed.

“Crime is only getting worse in the city, and with officers forced to do DEMS video, radio transmissions, and arrest paperwork, this is cutting down on patrol time” - Police officer

“Morale is okay, but sometimes we are more secretaries than officers.” - Police officer

When considering the roles and functions of our local Police Department one tedious and time-consuming task that may be better suited for a different government agency is the coordination and distribution of traffic barricades and placement of signage along city streets during events. “*[I hate]* placing and picking up signs and barricades”- Police officer. Similarly, the Department’s dedicated dog and traffic patrolman was eliminated from the staffing model quite a few years back which, if reinstated, could aid the City in the collection of dog licensing and parking violation revenue as well as free-up officers for more active patrol.

In the area of **Police Department Roles and Functions** we recommend the following initiatives be considered on a **short-term basis** (*implemented within 18-months*)

- Development and consideration of a new administrative position with job duties to include but not limited to: DEMS (Digital Evidence Management System) support, public relations, office management
- Fill the Detective position currently in the budget and staffing plans for the Department. This Detective would have the capability to participate in any felony investigations (*including, but not limited to: sex abuse, narcotics, etc.*). This would fill an important role for both the PD and the community since the Detective Sergeant would not shoulder the load alone, as is currently the case.



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- Reinstatement of the Parking Reinforcement/Animal Control position as soon as possible. It is also recommended that the previous duties of this role be re-evaluated in order to expand the position to include: a variety of animals and special details involving set up/tear down for community events.
- Continue community action group focused on pursuing telemedicine options for Mental Health evaluations (*utilizing existing connections with Chenango County Behavioral Health*) that includes representatives from the Norwich Police Department (Chief Marsh), community members, and possibly, elected City officials. There also may be potential for collaboration with other entities (MCAT, Catholic Charities, etc.) and municipalities. *Note: There is an initial meeting slated for late January 2021.
- Re-establish Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) group along the guidelines of the US Department of Health and Human Services. The Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) details how individuals with mental and substance use disorders come into contact with and move through the criminal justice system. Ruth Roberts of Chenango Co. Behavioral Health will be the point-person for this effort.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/criminal-juvenile-justice/sim-overview>

In the area of **Police Department Roles and Functions** we recommend the following initiatives be considered on a **long-term basis** (*implementation exceeding 18-months*)

- Add part-time Police Officers to the staffing model or expand the number of full-time officers allotted for in the current budget (20). Even when fully-staffed, the Council should consider that it is very likely some Officers will be out on leave, assigned light duty or otherwise unavailable. Like any other essential industry (e.g. Healthcare), our law enforcement needs to have plentiful staffing resources in order to meet their obligations to the community.
- Implement a more streamlined approach to addressing the needs of community members impacted by mental illnesses and substance abuse. This would be measured by less frequent trips to Binghamton General and less frequent calls utilizing the Police Department. The exact approach and logistics would be explored and discussed in the two groups identified in the short-term initiatives above: Community Action Group on telemedicine and SIM Group

Community-Oriented Policing

The CAB believes that community policing and engagement are essential to the success of the Department and can heavily influence the confidence and trust communities have in their law enforcement agencies. While there are many definitions of “Community Policing,” the primary goal is to develop strong relationships and collaboration between the police and the communities they serve. Instead of focusing solely on law enforcement outcomes, department processes (*the who, what, when, where, and why*) and public interactions are tailored not only to protect life and property but also to create a culture of community partnership, transparency and accountability.

In order to form stronger bonds between the community and the Police Department, we feel the two areas that will most impact our area are community engagement and education. According to our survey respondents, 42% said the Norwich City PD often or very often works at developing relationships with the community. While that’s a great



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start, it also means that 58% of respondents had a neutral or negative view of the PD's efforts to engage the community. *(It's interesting to note that 75% of the officers who responded to our police survey had a favorable opinion of the Department's community engagement).* Our community survey also found that while 33% think the PD is great at communicating with the community, 36% feel the Norwich City PD does "does little or nothing to communicate with community members," and the remaining 31% are unsure.

While there are opportunities for the community to engage with the Police Department *(through various initiatives by the PBA or ride-alongs, for example)* and those efforts do not go unappreciated, there are also concerns from both the community members and officers surveyed that they are not visible enough to satisfy our community needs. A more strategic effort in community-oriented policing should be a win-win as 83% of the officers surveyed said that engaging with the community and/or helping people is what they enjoyed most about their job.

"City PD needs to walk to city streets, mostly business areas like they used to in the 1980s and talk with the people. Not staying in the station waiting for a crime to happen....." -Community Member

"Formerly safe neighborhoods have deteriorated because of poverty-related crime and rampant drug abuse. Both issues are sadly neglected in Norwich. A visible on-foot police presence (beat cops) in known crime areas could help to develop relationships with residents and deter crime. An occasional patrol vehicle passing by is insufficient for this purpose" -Community Member

"Community policing events are always a plus" - Police Officer

"Would love more engagement in general with the community. We do see the officers' faces around town but only at large events." - Community Member

"There are a few officers that are very engaging with the community. There are also a few officers that have a negative presence." - Community Member

The CAB believes that with consistent public communication and outreach *(which would be incorporated into the public relations role of the above-mentioned administrative position and/or a trained officer)*, some community concerns can be easily addressed. Beyond that, in the area of **Community-Oriented Policing**, we recommend the following initiatives be considered on a **short-term basis** *(implemented within 18-months)*

- Incorporate Bike and Foot Patrol into the regular patrol rounds as staffing and weather allow
- Promote the opportunity for community members to participate in ride alongs
- In partnership with the PBA, expand community engagement programs to occur on a quarterly basis. Ideas could include the following *(many of these ideas mirror those suggested by the officers themselves as mentioned in the officer survey)*:



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- “Cram the Cruiser” (Drives: food, school supplies, bottles and cans, etc.)
- Annual Open House at the Norwich Police Department
- Badges vs Ballers annual basketball tournament (possible connection with Gus Macker)

- Explore the opportunity of establishing a School Resource Officer/ Mentorship Program within Norwich City Schools. While the idea of implementing an School Resource Officer (SRO) has a lot of support from both the community (*73.5% surveyed either like or love the idea*), current school administration and within the Police department itself, there are details the CAB feel need further exploration before we can make an informed recommendation. While there is consensus that having police officers serve as a mentor/positive role model for school-aged children could greatly benefit the community, other topics, especially in the areas of budget implications for the City as well as the role an SRO may play in disciplinary/ law enforcement activities within the schools needs further clarification.

- Continue the Community Advisory Board beyond April 2021 (*when the adoption of the CAB’s plan is due to the State*). Focusing on fostering community engagement and offering opportunities for citizen accountability, we recommend that the Community Advisory Board
 - Continue to meet regularly to ensure the implementation of the plan
 - Review stakeholder roles and add/remove members as needed in order to best serve our community (*ie: addition of School Board President, YMCA Director, other Government agency representatives (B.I.D.)*)
 - Review relevant department policies and make recommendations that will be shared with the Public Safety Committee and Common Council Board
 - Oversee community engagement initiatives

In the area of **Community-Oriented Policing**, we recommend the following initiatives be considered on a **long-term basis** (*implementation exceeding 18-months*)

- In partnership with the PBA, additionally expand community engagement programs to occur on a quarterly basis. Ideas could include the following:
 - Coffee with Cops (*an opportunity for community members to talk with officers in an informal setting*)
 - Citizens’ Police Academy (*re-establishing an interactive opportunity for community members to experience reality-based aspects of local police work*)
 - Community Seminars to focus on de-escalation strategies and community awareness when interacting with police officers

Department Culture and Accountability

As with any organization, culture and accountability play an important role in the overall success of our City Police Department. “Culture” can be difficult to define but generally consists of the attitudes, behaviors and morale of an



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organization. The National spotlight and criticism that the profession has recently faced, as well as past incidents within our own department, have likely affected the trust and respect the community has on the department and vice versa. Generally our survey found that the community has a favorable opinion of our City PD with 62% of respondents indicating they trust the department “often or always.” Also encouraging is that despite the national headlines, nearly 31% of respondents have had their attitudes about our local department improve over the last 12 months. However, there are some areas in which improvement is necessary. More than one-third of respondents (36%) feel the department is never or only slightly transparent. Some public comments worth highlighting are included below:

“I perceive the NPD as not being transparent at all. I believe there are things that happen that never make it into public view. Lack of civility when officers deal with people, suspects included (cursing etc). All these contribute to a negative perception of the NPD.” - Community Member

“Being out there and doing the right thing helps. Respect does not come with the badge. You also have to give respect. We pay your salary.” - Community Member

“The Norwich Police have always been respectful and polite to my family.” - Community Member

“I am a law abiding citizen, a USAF veteran and have never been arrested, but in the few occasions that I have interacted with the police in the city of Norwich, my experiences have not been good. They treat everyone like they are criminals and behave like they are judge and jury. I believe the amount of power that [they] have has gone to their heads.” - Community Member

“I have always had very good interactions with our PD . They are doing a fantastic job during this crazy time and I thank them EVERY time I have the chance.” - Community Member

Respondents from our officer survey further illustrate the varied opinions. When asked how the officers felt the community perceives them, answers ranged from: “Very well” and “mostly positive” to “they think we do very little because there is little information provided about what we do” to “poorly.” While it may seem difficult to overcome the negative perceptions, the CAB believes that by fostering a positive and open environment, great strides can be made.

Just as important as the community’s perception of the City PD, understanding the morale and attitudes of the officers themselves is vital in order to bring about changes. Officer well-being is a topic that is often overlooked but has a compounding effect on the culture and effectiveness of the department. Again, a variety of responses were received but when looking for ways to improve the Department, the Common Council should consider the following:



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“Morale is not the highest due to the amount of hours being worked by officers” - Police Officer

“There is no incentive to do anything above the minimum because there are no opportunities to strive for more...” - Police Officer

“Morale is average. We need more classroom (*not online*) training.” - Police Officer

Perhaps the area that had the most consensus among both officers and community members is training and education. Based on the police officer surveys, there is a desire to see training take place every one-two months, with an emphasis that these training opportunities should be reality-based, as opposed to online. The training budget for fiscal year 2021 is only \$6,000; it is unclear to the CAB whether this number is sufficient, but it seems inadequate. Training and education resources are not only important for the day-to-day functions of the department but can also be a catalyst for cultural change and ensuring accountability. Respondents from both surveys ranked “de-escalation strategies, mental health first aid and ethics/leadership training” as high priorities. Comments from both the community and the officers echo the importance training has:

“We need more classroom training.” - Police officer

“Training to include kindness and respectfulness of law abiding citizens, give people the benefit of the doubt especially if they’ve never had prior issues with them. Be approachable so kids see them as the good guys. Set an example!” - Community Member

“[Currently training is done] so infrequently that it’s a liability” - Police officer

“More education, more education, more education...we need thinkers and compassion to deal with the multiple societal problems that are thrown at officers on a daily basis...” - Community Member

In summary, a strong, values-based culture can ensure officers have a balanced, authentic mindset about their role and influence on society, enjoy a healthy work-life balance and insulate an organization from negative external influences. As one officer notes, “[The City PD is] on the verge of being the biggest success or the worst failure the department has seen.”

It is encouraging to note that there has already been some forward progress in the area of Department Culture and Accountability, as evidenced by the following

1. Adaption of new/updated HR policies for the police department and all City employees which include:
 - a. Social Media Policy (*note: The City PD has their own additional policy on social media which is more stringent; the two policies work congruently*)
 - b. Anti-Discrimination & Anti-Harassment Policy



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- c. Violence in the Workplace Policy
2. A Reality-Based Training resource has been made available through SUNY Morrisville. This will enable officers to practice potential scenarios in real-time.
3. An officer attended “Principled Policing- Train the Trainer,” which is based on the concept of procedural justice and how it strengthens the relationship and trust between police agencies and the communities they serve. As a result, the officer will be able to offer this training to our local PD.
4. Chaplaincy Program- There is a plan being developed to utilize Pastor John Albrecht of the cvfree church as a Chaplain for the Norwich Police & Fire Departments at no cost to the departments. Pastor John has been endorsed by the Free Methodist Church Chaplains’ Association and is a member of the Network of Emergency Chaplains. He will be available to the officers and firefighters as a confidential, trusted source for processing, decompression, listening, etc... in both personal and professional matters.

The adaption of the staffing recommendations previously mentioned (*adding an administrative position, filling the vacant Detective role and adding part-time officers to the staffing model*) will contribute significantly to a better work-life balance for our officers. Additionally, in the area of **Department Culture and Accountability** we recommend the following initiatives be considered on a **short-term basis** (*implemented within 18-months*)

- Adapt the updated mission statement below (as suggested by CAB) and promote it widely throughout department publications, website and educate officers to the change

“The mission of the Norwich Police Department is to protect the lives and property of the citizens of the City of Norwich; to prevent crime and to reduce the fear of crime; and to enforce the law with impartiality, respect, and fairness. Through a commitment to professionalism, and working in partnership with all residents, we will continue to provide the best service possible to all those we are sworn to serve and protect.”
- Develop a training calendar for 2021 and create a tracking system for documenting each officer’s training record. This document should be published as part of the Annual Report.
- Continue expanding on State-mandated officer training to ensure inclusion of the following focus areas: Mental Health First Aid for Law Enforcement, Verbal De-escalation, Culture and Diversity
- On an annual basis, the training budget line item should be evaluated to ensure it is meeting the needs of the community and the department.
- Update the shift-swapping policy in order to allow officers to swap shifts (*within the same pay period*) in order to increase officer wellness, as well as save money from the overtime budget.
- Finalize the Chaplaincy program mentioned above by creating a written agreement among the City PD, PBA, and cvfree church in order to make expectations and parameters clear.
- Develop a strategic communications plan that is proactive, inclusive and educational. The execution of which can be included in the above-recommended administrative position or satisfied by an officer trained in this area. Small, yet meaningful changes like those suggested below can make a huge difference



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- In addition to acknowledgement on social media of Veterans Day & Law Enforcement Appreciation Day, this role could also acknowledge occasions such as MLK Jr. Day and Women's History Month
- Highlight positive interactions and outreach efforts the department has with the community
- Give statements condemning the actions of law enforcement officers/agencies that make the National news

In the area of **Department Culture and Accountability** we recommend the following initiatives be considered on a **long-term basis** (*implementation exceeding 18-months*)

- Every five years, revisit the mission statement (*with the input of community members*) to make sure it's still relevant to the goals of the Department and a community as a whole.
- Conduct officer and community surveys on a regular basis in order to maintain a pulse on community confidence as well as officer morale and well-being. This could become a function of the permanent Community Advisory Board as recommended previously.