

Sanford Blue Ribbon Panel

Police Department/Community Relations Assessment Report & Updates



COMPOSITION OF PANEL

The Blue Ribbon Panel was to consist of approximately 25 members representing a broad cross section of the community

Co-Chairs:

The Honorable O.H. Eaton Jr.
Pastor Valarie Houston, Allen Chapel AME Church

Mayor and Commissioners (two members each) 10

Urban League of Central Florida 1

NAACP 1

Interfaith Ministers Alliance 3

Sanford Chamber 1; Seminole County Bar 1

Seminole County Public School District 1

Seminole State College Criminal Justice Institute 1

Citizens' Advisory Board 2

Sanford Women's Club 1

Judiciary 1

Fraternal Order of Police 1

Hispanic Leadership 1

TOTAL 25

BRIEF BACKGROUND

On February 26, 2012, Trayvon Martin was shot and killed. There was no immediate arrest, although there was a suspect, George Zimmerman, who admitted the shooting claimed self-defense.

As more time passed without an arrest, members of the African American community reflected on their already strained relationship with the Sanford Police Department.

The Blue Ribbon Panel of citizens was tasked with studying police-community relations and making recommendations for improving the situation.

MISSION OF THE PANEL

In December of 2012 the Blue Ribbon Panel was given the following mission from the City of Sanford (hereinafter “The City”):

To assess the community’s perception of the (Sanford Police) Department’s ability to carry out its primary function to serve and protect the public as a whole and to identify strategies to transform the image of police-community relations in the City of Sanford from negative to positive and from insular to collaborative. To accomplish the purpose the Panel will be reviewing the following areas such as but not limited to:

Mission, Vision and Values
Code of Conduct
Department structure
Community Policing philosophy and approach
Police -Community relations philosophy
Community partnerships
Crime prevention initiatives
Recruitment, training and promotion
Complaint process
External Citizen’s
Internal Administrative
Investigative Procedures
Role and function of the Citizens’ Advisory Board
Discipline Procedure

THE PANEL'S EXAMINATION

Over the course of many meetings and several months, the following members of the City staff and the Sanford Police Department made presentations to the Panel:

Norton Bonaparte, City Manager

Lonnie Groot, City Attorney

Richard Myers, Interim Chief of Police

Cecil Smith, Chief of Police

Captain Darren Scott, SPD (operations, crime in Sanford)

Captain Jim McAuliffe, SPD (Community Policing and operations)

Captain Bob O'Connor, SPD (Diversified Services Division including investigations and support services)

Mr. Jim Krzenski, SPD (business side of SPD including budget, records and accreditation)

Sgt. Anthony Raimondo, SPD (demographics, chain of command and training)

Sgt. Paul Herx, SPD (Professional Standards and Internal Affairs)

Ms. Jennifer Blake, SPD (crime analyst)

Investigator Jonathan Hall, SPD (the Union)

Sgt. Greg Smith, SPD (the Union)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FUNDING

Conclusion

The Panel has concluded that SPD is underfunded and understaffed, particularly when compared with other agencies of similar size. For instance, SPD had to divert resources from other critical areas when establishing the new task force in Goldsboro in spring of this year. The division of resources has resulted in an unacceptable number of calls per officer, which affects response time, which could affect arrest rates.

Recommendation

The City should allocate sufficient funding so that SPD can fill the positions that are currently vacant. The City should consider additional funding for special task forces and other innovative activities.

Response

The department is in the process of recruiting new officers to fill the present vacancies within the department. We recently hire four new officers in August of 2013 and will swear in 10 new officers on January 21, 2014.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The compensation of SPD officers should be thoroughly reviewed by the City. There are nine police agencies in Seminole County and SPD entrance level compensation ranks eighth. The low pay could be affecting officer morale, which affects job performance. Additionally, SPD officers face challenges that officers of higher paying agencies do not face.

Recommendation

The City should bring salaries up to at least the average rate paid to other law enforcement agencies in Seminole County.

Response

It is our hope the present salaries will be reviewed during the 2014/15 contract negotiations. A salary study is being requested through the City Manager's office for all areas within the city.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICE PRACTICES

Conclusion

SPD does not have enough focus on the crime on the street, as the crime is happening. This Panel heard anecdotal evidence that officers will drive by as crime, such as gambling or drug offenses, occurs in plain view.

Recommendation

When SPD officers observe crime, even minimal crime, they should stop and investigate. This would result not only in the intervention regarding that individual criminal activity but also would prevent the escalation of criminal acts in that area.

Response

Officers have been instructed to take appropriate action when they observe crimes occurring. We have seen an increase in the number of arrest because of these actions and a better working relationship within the Goldsboro area.

(On-going)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Community Policing is defined as engaged policing that builds relationships and builds and engages the community, and is implemented throughout the City. Community Policing is implemented inconsistently in the African American communities, particularly Goldsboro. This Panel heard testimony that the people of Goldsboro do not have positive relationships with the police officers assigned to their area.

Recommendation

Community policing should be used throughout the City, but particularly with a focus on the areas of the City that have higher crime. Furthermore other citizens in Sanford, beyond Goldsboro, indicated to this Panel that they lack community policing as well. A substation has been recommended.

Response

The recommendation to locate a substation within the Goldsboro area is not financial reasonable at this time. SAO has established an office within the PD where citizens can come as speak with the SAO and officers regarding ongoing cases. The implementation of the Community Relations Division within the department has helped combat some of the community issues

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

SPD is not as thorough as constitutionally permissible in efforts to combat crime. DUI Check points are under-utilized. When checkpoints are used for DUI interception the officers should also check for valid licenses and proof of registration.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that the checkpoints be used consistently so that assertions of selective enforcement cannot be made. SPD and its legal advisors should research and develop methods for further investigation of crime, for example check points.

Response

As part of the reorganizational chart within the department, the Traffic Enforcement Unit will be conducting more DUI/Safety roadside checks. The reassignment of personnel into the unit has occurred and one new officer was added to this area

(On-going)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

SPD generates incomplete police reports that do not reflect positive and negative facts. The incomplete reports make the prosecutors' job in court more difficult, and failing to include exculpatory information could result in violations of the Constitution.

Recommendation

The Panel recognizes that preparation of arrest reports, especially under the stress of arrest and booking, is both time consuming and tedious. However, accurate arrest reports enable the prosecutors to properly determine the appropriate charges to bring and enhance the testimony of the arresting officer if called to testify at trial.

Response

As of the week of August 5, 2013 officers will begin training in courtroom testimony and innovative report writing classes. Many of these items were to be address after the trail and manpower (time off) was replenished.

(On-going classes are being held at roll calls beginning November 2013)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

SPD officers have a reputation of concluding that their job is complete at the point of arrest. According to the State Attorney, Assistant State Attorneys have “tasked” SPD officers for additional information, post-arrest, and SPD officers have responded “You have investigators, use one of your investigators to gather the additional information.” The officers are not working in cooperation with the prosecutors when they respond in this fashion.

Recommendation

SPD officers need additional training in their role and how they are to function with the State Attorney’s Office. An arrest accomplishes little if there is no conviction. SPD officers should investigate and assist prosecutors beyond the point of arrest, so that the prosecutor can meet his or her burden in court.

Response

Each of the Patrol officers will have a refresher on conducting and completing investigative reports. In some cases, I’ve found that this is an area which is lacking during the academy and FTO training sessions. As of September 1st, members from the Investigation Unit will conduct roll-call training on investigative reporting to the patrol officers. The SAO has offered to conduct in house training as well.

(On-going)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel has received reports that SPD has enforced the law inconsistently, and that this may be manifesting in a racially-biased dynamic.

Recommendation

SPD officers should be educated about “Fair and Impartial Policing” so that the law is enforced in a consistent manner, thus avoiding the appearance of racial bias. The Panel recommends that the City or the Federal Department of Justice fund the “Training of the Trainers” so that the appropriate members of SPD are trained to educate SPD officers on this important aspect of policing. The Panel believes this training will enhance trust in the agency. Upon completion of the Training of the Trainers SPD should establish a rollout plan to train the remaining members of SPD. A quarterly progress report should be provided to the Citizens’ Advisory Board to ensure timely compliance with the recommendation.

Response

The officer will begin the Fair and Impartial Policing “Train the Trainer” training in November of 2013. The departments Command Staff took part in the training in May of 2013. Officer will also be attending training on “Verbal Judo”. Learning how to “Engage and Disengage when dealing with the public.

(In Progress-Training begins Nov 11 2013)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The new Task Force in Goldsboro has been a success but the Panel is concerned about the long term use of the Task Force.

Recommendation

The Panel encourages SPD to invest in the Goldsboro Task Force on a long-term basis, and use data collected to show long-term results.

Response

Goldsboro new "Task Force" the NRU Neighborhood Response Unit will continue working in the area.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The citizens of Sanford complain of problems regarding response time to calls for service.

Recommendation

Supervisors should make sure that the lack of a speedy response is not caused by unmotivated officers. Dispatchers should comply with standard operating procedures established by the Seminole County Sheriff's Department and be trained on an acceptable protocol to explain to the callers that there is a prioritization of calls, and the possibility that they may have to wait for a response to a non-emergency call.

Response

With regards to response time to call, we are presently working with the Sheriff's office to the prioritization, call volume and CSA's regarding this issue. We have explained the need for more dialogue between the callers and the dispatchers.

(In Progress)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

TRAINING

Conclusion

SPD is vetting the officers well at the point of hiring but continued training and periodic evaluation of new officer performance is sporadic.

Recommendation

SPD should continue the vetting of new hires but should require additional training of new officers either by extending the probationary period for the new officers or establishing a regular training schedule. The Panel is concerned about the implementation of the training on the street. Training should include impressing new officers with the attitude of protection and peace towards citizens and conveying a sense of community service rather than an “us versus them” mentality.

Response

As part of the new officer training they will be expected to spend additional time during their training time working and speaking within the community. Additional time on investigative report writing, crime scene/evidence collection, interviewing has been included with the training. Some of these items will be included in the daily roll-call training for all patrol officers.

(August 2013 and forward)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Body cameras can be an accountability system and training dynamic. SPD has body cameras they cannot use because the City does not have enough bandwidth to support the cameras.

Recommendation

The City should acquire the band width and cameras necessary to place body cameras on more of the officers.

Response

The “Body Camera” issues are being resolved. The additional 10 cameras were issued the week of September 12 and the purchase of an additional 40 has been made.

(As of December 31, 2013 44 are in operation)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

MANAGEMENT

Conclusion

Just as there are excellent performers as well as underperforming employees in every industry, SPD has some underperforming officers.

Recommendation

The Chief of Police should assess which officers are not performing and create a dynamic to encourage those officers to seek other employment. The Chief will need the support of City government to back up the decision to replace officers who do not measure up to standards.

Response

As we've moved beyond the trail phase within the department and City, as noted above we have begun the weed and seed within the department. The reorganization of the department, reassignments within divisions, the required training and shorter more directed discipline structure will set the tone for a more professional department.

(Completed October 2013)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

SPD keeps detailed statistics as required by the FBI but, according to the information supplied to the Panel, the statistics do not provide meaningful information for SPD management to use to assess criminal activity in Sanford. Lack of data on drug crimes is an example.

Recommendation

SPD and its crime statistics should serve multiple purposes. Not only should SPD keep statistics (as required) in order to report to the FBI, but it should also keep statistics so that SPD management can track and measure crime, including data on drugs. The SPD management could then ascertain which crime or crimes deserve additional resources.

Response

With the graduation of Jennifer Blake from crime analysis school her duties are to extract and interpret crime statistics and patterns to direct data driven targeted policing.

(Completed August 2013 with continuous updates)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Grievances against SPD's officers can help management ascertain who is performing appropriately or not on the street. If the public understands how grievances are filed the public's trust in SPD will increase, due to the opportunity to be heard.

Recommendation

SPD must take as many steps possible to alert the public of the grievance process. Citizens who file grievances or complaints should be kept informed of the progress and outcomes of their grievances or complaints.

Response

The "Commendation and Complaint" information regarding the conduct of any SPD personnel is available on the website and within the lobby of the station. Citizens can also contact the Office of Professional Standards directly if they feel uncomfortable speaking with a supervisor. The department's new PIO will update the information on department's website.

(Completed October 15 2013).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

SPD's morale could be improved.

Recommendation

SPD should put a system in place which publicly recognizes and awards officers for their excellent work and achievements. This could be accomplished through an annual award ceremony, and through choice assignments, promotions and commendations.

Response

Since May 1st, we began reorganizing the recognitions and awards program within the department. We have on a number of occasions recognized several officers publicly for the outstanding work they've done. The police memorial program is a shining example of such a program. We began a promotional and retirement ceremony. Since May, we have promoted 1 Deputy Chief, 2 Captains, 3 Lieutenants and 3 Sergeants. Two additional Sergeants will be filled in late January 2014.

(May 2013 on-going)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

A competent Internal Affairs Department protects the department and the citizens.

Recommendation

SPD should continue training and adherence to standards and best practices in order to maintain professionalism.

Response

The Sergeant position within Internal Affairs reclassified from a Sergeant to the rank of Lieutenant. The goal here is to allow for greater structure and decision making ability during an investigation.

(Completed Sept 15, 2013)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

REPORTING OF CRIME

Conclusion

Law enforcement cannot be in all places at all times. Officers often must rely upon information reported by private citizens. However, some citizens believe that officers do not take their reports of crime seriously. Local residents have concerns about SPD protecting their confidentiality when reporting crime. Some citizens feel that they are unnecessarily put at risk of reprisal and the concepts of community policing are undermined.

Recommendation

SPD should, when possible, protect reporting citizens' confidentiality. The Panel recognizes that the identity of reporting citizens may ultimately have to be disclosed if they become witnesses in a criminal case

Response

Confidentiality, is an area of training that we are working on. It is of great importance that we continue to develop and maintain the trust and confidence of those we serve. It is a matter of changing the mindset within the department.

(In Progress)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Cameras in neighborhoods could deter crime.

Recommendation

SPD should investigate the possibility of installation of cameras in neighborhoods with high criminal activity. SPD should recommend the installation of cameras to the City government if it appears that cameras could be an effective crime detection tool. There is reported success with the use of cameras in Orlando.

Response

The use of cameras as a deterrent for crime is a great concept. The problem right now is its cost prohibited and manning the cameras will require additional manpower, I.T. services, storage capacity and list goes on from there. I will gladly recommend utilizing cameras but I would prefer having the bodies on the street working with the people first.

(Conversation continues)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Neighborhood Watch groups can assist the deterrence of crime.

Recommendation

Neighborhood Watch should be expanded. Involving local residents in Neighborhood Watch in the various neighborhoods would create scenarios where citizens are in dialogue with law enforcement. Additionally information could be passed anonymously to law enforcement, through the Neighborhood Watch officers. The reporting of criminal activity as it is happening could result in a greater number of arrests and fewer unresolved cases. Neighborhood Watch programs tend to become inactive without the support and participation of police as part of community policing.

Response

We have developed a new Community Relations/Crime Prevention Unit within the department. The unit will address Neighborhood Watch, Police Volunteers, Citizens On Patrol and many other community based programs within the department.

(Completed September 2013)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMUNITY

Conclusion

The citizens of Sanford may need explanation of the laws periodically. (See, for example, the immunity concepts of the “Stand Your Ground Law.”)

Recommendation

Educated citizens who do not understand the division of responsibility among the various elements of the criminal justice system are less likely to respond negatively to police action in tense situations. The Panel has been informed that the City of Sanford has hired a public information officer to assist in the future and that is a positive step in the right direction. SPD, in conjunction with the State Attorney’s Office, should be in dialogue with the community about criminal laws, and the criminal process.

Response

Education is one of the key components to improving communication and community relations. We are working with the SAO to compile information for the community regarding how the laws affect them. An in house Citizen Police Academy will be offered to the community. The goal is to allow the community the opportunity to see the inner working of the police department. The program will begin in the **early 2014**.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

SPD lacks a victim advocacy program and one should be established.

Recommendation

The only contact person with SPD the victims currently have are the investigating officers who should not be responsible for this function. Victims are not getting follow-up information from SPD and this contributes to a lack of support or lack of trust. Victims are in need of both information and respect. The Victims Advocate position could be so valuable to the Department that eventually this could be a paid position instead of volunteer position.

Response

We are working with the County regarding the development of a Victims Advocates program within our department. We have spoken to an advocate who is willing to assist with grant development to get the program up and running. Our goal is to have the program within the year.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

SPD must develop a closer partnership with the citizens of Sanford. Relationships would serve both the community and SPD. Law enforcement is profiled by the community as well; relationships would help the community understand who the officers are as well.

Recommendation

Partnership requires communication. Communication between SPD and the public can be enhanced via community newsletters, and community awards from SPD to blocks that are free of crime for a particular period of time. SPD could create opportunities to mingle with citizens of Sanford via “Meet and Mingle” events, held in different parts of Sanford each month. The officers in SPD should be encouraged to participate in more community outreach programs, beyond the current scenario of merely Neighborhood Watch and the boxing club, which is affiliated with the Seminole County Police Athletic League (PAL.) .

Response

We are in the process of putting together a mobile sports vehicle where assigned officer will be able to go into the community and interact with the kids in those areas. Permanently assigned officers are attending community events within their assigned area and they will be required to develop at least one event a year in those areas.

(November 2013)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

SPD should develop a closer relationship with the citizens of Goldsboro.

Recommendation

The City should invest in the Goldsboro area so crime will dissipate. This investment should be in bricks and mortar and building a city, but it should also include the soft skills of people power, and human capital. Crime prevention can come in many forms; one method of crime prevention is investing in the youth by giving the youth an alternative to criminal activity. Funding programs that keep the youth busy and stimulated will alleviate the issues that provide youth with the incentive to commit crime. This investment in the community will build trust which will result in relationships. If the relationships are enhanced citizens who know about crime will give information to the police, and citizens who are witnesses to crime will be more likely to come to court to testify.

Response

I would agree that crime prevention can come in many forms and one of those forms comes from trust within the community. Investing in the community is a great conversation starter but we have to be willing to meet somewhere in the middle, community and City.

(On-going)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Law enforcement should be proactive in trying to prevent crime. The City of Sanford should take steps towards giving Sanford's youth opportunities that keep them on the right path. These opportunities can cost money, and the entire community (not just government) can support crime prevention activities for youth.

Recommendation

SPD and the City of Sanford should actively work with corporations and businesses to seek sponsorship of and support for the SPD efforts in youth programs, such as Save the Youth Initiative and Young Men of Excellence, in order to decrease the amount of crimes involving youth in the community

Response

SPD is currently working with the **Young Men of Excellence** and some local business to sponsor initiative within the community.

(In Progress)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

SPD currently engages in informal mediation between complaining citizens and police officers. Supervisors may intercede and use a form of mediation on the street if there is an assertion that an officer was rude or inappropriate.

Recommendation

Citizens' complaints or allegations of rude or inappropriate conduct on the part of law enforcement should be documented in order to identify repeat offenders.

Response

If a citizen wishes to speak with an officer's supervisor at a scene or within the station regarding the officer's conduct, we will provide that venue to take care of the issue immediately. If the citizen chooses to file a formal complaint we will take the complaint and track it for proper follow up.

(Completed)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Sanford Police Department does not currently have an active Citizens' Advisory Board.

Recommendation

The City through the City Commissioners should empanel a new Citizens' Advisory Board, which would serve not as a group that micromanages SPD but instead would provide the Chief a sounding board. The Citizens' Advisory Board would consist of both law enforcement members and lay people. The Advisory Board would provide (a) accountability (b) credibility and (c) visibility

Response

Presently SPD does not have a **Citizen Advisory Board**. The previous board we disbanded prior to my arrival and establishing a new board **will be revisited in 2014**.

ADDITIONAL BLUE RIBBON PANEL MEMBERS

Kenneth Bentley
Allie Braswell Jr
Carsandra Buie
Wanda Chandler
Sylvester Chang
David Charlton
Reverend Samuel Duncan
Robert Guy
David Johnson
Former Mayor Linda Kuhn
Silvia McLain
Apostle Cheryl A. Moore
Ann Peterson
Chris Ray
Oscar Redden
Ada Reneau
John Wright

CONCLUSION

We would like to thank the Blue Ribbon Panel for working diligently in make recommendations which are improving the relationship between the Sanford Police Department and our community.

Cecil E. Smith
Chief of Police