

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
HELD ON THURSDAY, JUNE 13, 2021 VIA ZOOM TECHNOLOGY.

The meeting began at 7:39pm.

Members participating were: Rick Ransom, Kevin Hammett, Dan Hamlin, Rev. Raymond Raysor, Sudhanshu Sinha, Lisa Lake and Tim George, Staff Liaison.

Also participating: Chief Richard Bowers, City Manager Nicole Ard, Dale Worley, Kyla Hannington, Bob Snyder and Bill Orleans.

Welcome and Introductions

There were introductions. Rick Ransom opened the meeting with general introductions and Kevin Hammett read the Community Pledge.

CRAB Discussion/Planning of Future Forums on Fair & Just Policing

Rick stated that he had spoken with Dr. Marsh and she was happy to do the Forums online and good with the questions submitted. Her advice was to do one (1) forum with the police department and one (1) forum without so that all residents would feel comfortable sharing. She also recommended sticking with the dates and moving on.

Rick asked Chief Bowers to briefly discuss the event that he was planning. Chief Bowers reported that the PD had just been through diversity and equity training and he wanted to take that into the community in a forum with police involvement.

Rick transitioned the discussion back to the CRAB forums.

Rick discussed setting time limits per participant so it didn't become a free-for-all, an idea suggested by Dr. Marsh. As an opening into the discussion, Rick felt it important to for the discussion to" 1) have PD coordination, 2) set the dates and times, and 3) discuss next steps and talk about publicizing the forums.

Rick asked Chief Bowers to provide additional detail and background on his event.

Chief Bowers – discussed that he had met with Dr. Ray with the University of Maryland who had conducted diversity and equity training for the PD. The PD is working with Dr. Ray to develop a forum to discuss these issues with the community and police together. One suggestion was to offer pre-registration to help the moderator with approximate numbers for setting up break-out rooms. Dr. Ray is also working with the police on analyzing traffic stop data in an effort to get a better sense for community issues. Analysis will consider type of stop, time of stop, racial background and other factors. Chief Bowers mentioned there is a difference between speeding/traffic violation stops and general equipment/bad tags stops that need to be factored into the analysis.

Dan – stated that CRAB was committed to Dr. Marsh and “strongly endorses” her planned approach and only having the PD at one of the two sessions. Chief Bowers stated he was not suggesting they move away from Dr. Marsh but was providing information on the work they have been doing with Dr. Ray.

Kevin – agrees with Dan and also doesn’t want to interfere with what the police are planning.

Chief Bowers – they had planned to do the event in August but could move it to September to allow time for the CRAB events to go before.

Rev. Raysor – agrees with only having the PD at one of the CRAB forums. The residents of Franklin Park are forming a “council of residents” made from each of the 240 buildings. They will break the buildings into 8(?) areas and select members from each section to serve on a council. Issues within the community will be brought before the FP council. The idea being that they need to be proactive in their community and not reactive. Rev. Ray also talked about the fact that despite its size, there were no members of the City Council from the Franklin Park and they were unrepresented.

Lisa Lake – She believes the police should be involved in all the forums in order for them to be useful. The PD needs to hear the complaints directly, be questioned and be able to respond so that they can get into conversation with the community. Otherwise it’s just a gripe session.

Dan – **Motion** that CRAB move forward with the forums as outlined by Dr. Marsh and attached to the meeting agenda, restating that the police only be invited to one of the forums. Seconded by Rev. Raysor.

Rick asked if all the board members were ok with the dates/times before moving to subsequent discussion and the vote. All in attendance indicated the dates/times were acceptable.

Bob Snyder – He was concerned that denying access to a particular group (i.e. Greenbelt police) might be against having an open meeting. Because this is a public meeting can they restrict who attends?

Rick – when the police participate in the forum(s) they should be out of uniform.

Rev. Raysor – agrees and states that some residents are intimidated by the police, not any specific Greenbelt officers, but in general so attending only one forum and in civilian clothes would be important to getting good feedback.

Lisa Lake – agrees that there can be intimidation felt, but if there is an issue with our Chief (the example Rev. Raysor gave was about Prince George’s County residents feeling intimidated by former Chief Stawinski), then Chief Bowers should be there address the issues. Same would apply to other officers. If the Chief doesn’t know what the issues are, he can’t address them.

Chief Bowers – discussed that it is important for the PD to be present in these forums so they can hear first-hand what the issues are and be able to speak directly to those affected. Often the heart of the issue is lost when the situation is retold by a third party.

Rick – feels it is important to have dialog between the police and those who wish changes to be made in the police department operations or staffing.

Dan – we hired an expert (Dr. Marsh) and should follow her advice. Kevin stated agreement.

Nicole Ard – it's important to be able to have follow-up, especially on critical issues. In previous forums they had break-out sessions where individuals could discuss issues specific to them and then when the groups regathered, the group leader would recount what was said but not attribute the comments to a particular person. This allowed for anonymous feedback

Rev. Raysor – this issue is about the police treatment of black men. This committee is made up primarily of white men. There are only two black members of the board and one of those is a female. He wasn't suggesting anything in particular, just drawing attention to the board's composition.

Sudhanshu Sinha – (he made a few comments but I didn't get them down)

VOTE on Dan's Motion: Yes – 4, No – 2. Motion passes and CRAB will proceed with the forums based on Dr. Marsh's recommendations.

Citizen Input

Rev. Raysor – evictions are big problem and he feels some are taking advantage of COVID to remove unwanted tenants. His group (missed the name) voted in their last meeting to increase the rental assistance grants to \$3,000 per person. He is anticipating that more funds will be available from the County with new funding heading their way.

Lisa Lake – mentioned that something needs to be done to give the youth more options for activities and recreation.

Rick – asked the board if they were available to meet in two weeks (June 24th) to finalize planning and logistics for the forums. Those present indicated that the 24th was ok. This meeting would only cover the forums and no other issues. The draft proposal Jamie wrote on the Winter Lights Festival would have to be differed until after the forums were conducted.

Bill Orleans – Requested that CRAB send a request to the City Council to have a meeting/town hall with resource providers that help with rental assistance and housing issues. Participants would include: County Housing Authority, County Legal Services, DHCD and other stakeholders. Rev. Rayson and Lisa Lake agreed.

Rick – he will call Bill after the meeting to get his words and will draft the request. Lisa Lake offered to help draft the request as well. Time is of the essence as the next regular Council meeting is the next Monday, only a few days away and the request would need to be submitted tomorrow (6/11). This idea was supported by all CRAB board members on the call.

Nicole Ard – concluded the meeting by mentioning the upcoming meetings on Beltway Plaza.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:15pm