

# Summary of Recommendations from the Police and Community Relations Committee

## **a. History and Role of the Police and Community Relations Committee**

The Police and Community Relations Committee was formed by the direction of then Mayor Michelle De La Isla. Members of the Committee were selected by then Deputy Mayor Tony Emerson. Those Councilmembers selected by the Deputy Mayor were Karen Hiller, Sylvia Ortiz, and Michael Padilla. Sylvia Ortiz was selected to serve as the Committee's Chair.

In the wake of brutality against Black individuals, in particular the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, community police relations rose to the top of many people's minds. Topeka voices, including the local chapter of Black Lives Matter, brought specific issues to the attention of the Topeka Governing Body. The Committee was tasked to take input from citizens on policing as it was conducted by the City of Topeka.

The Committee listened to input from citizens who had expressed concerns about some areas of policy, enforcement, and training by the Topeka Police Department. Also to be considered were past incidents between Topeka Police Officers and persons of color. A list of demands and recommendations were received by the governing body by different sources.

Every aspect of policy, recruitment, training, discipline, and performance was reviewed. This review was straight forward in presentation with every intent to reveal possible areas for improvement while recognizing that positive changes have already been made.

Beyond the work of this Committee, Governor Kelly formed a larger group to review many aspects of the judicial system and law enforcement practices across the state with Executive Order 20-48 in June of 2020 which established the Commission on Racial Equity and Justice. The governor's committee put forth recommendations that were reviewed and considered by the Police and Community Relations Committee.

Committee Chair Sylvia Ortiz conducted public meetings monthly for over two years. Chair Ortiz was clear that every topic that had been brought to our attention would be covered in our meetings. Under her leadership, the Committee was resolved to avoid rushing ahead or missing any topic that had been brought to the attention of the Committee. The focus of the Committee's efforts was to meaningfully engage and inform the public.

It was important to the Committee to identify and resolve misinformation which undermines meaningful public participation and input.

## **b. Recommendations**

### **1. Topeka Police Department School Resource Officers**

School Resource Officers (SROs) play a significant role in building positive relationships with youth, schools, and parents. Selection of SROs must be based on an officer's suitability for daily interaction in a

school setting. SROs are not enforcers of school disciplinary actions. SROs are mentors and should continue to serve in this capacity. Specific training for this assignment must be ongoing and include the officer's role as communicator to youth. Recognizing that our youth are constantly evolving, training should also be evolving to best positively impact our youth. Training should incorporate the work of the National Association of School Resource Officers Association. Training should also be updated to reflect the current needs of students. ~~SROs and school staff should establish personal relationships with parents through meeting them early in the school year. Local school administrators and the city should meet quarterly to discuss how things are going and how practices can be improved.~~

## **2. No Knock Warrants**

No knock warrants have not been used for years by the Topeka Police Department. This is reflective of internal department policy and not of city code. Calls for an ordinance to prevent the practice were based on the idea that a future police chief could reinstate the practice. The Topeka Police Department's current practice of not using no knock warrants was codified in city code in July of 2020. See TMC 2.35.180.

## **3. Use of Force**

Current Topeka Policy 4.2.1- 4.2.13 addresses issues of concern regarding definition of force, type of force, de-escalation, reasonable use and duty to intervene. This body of policy was revised on 06-18-2020. With consideration for the topics addressed, it is recommended that this policy be reviewed with civilian input on an ongoing basis. This is an area of extreme concern to the public. Understanding how the department trains on decision making when use of force is necessary, and the safeguards in place to protect both the public and the officers, is critical to the mission of the police department in building trust with the community. Training must include critical thinking for officers in de-escalation.

As a component of Use of Force, it is recommended that continued training and certification of Crisis Intervention Teams with the use of mental health co-responders should be increased. ~~This will require funding and additional officers to supplement the current staffing levels.~~

## **4. Content of Officer Training**

Recruit training is the first opportunity to address issues of racial equity and justice. A curriculum that includes the history of policing in the United States and the impact it has had on people of color is essential. Training on Fair and Impartial Policing and Bias-Based Policing must be given as it relates to every aspect of police interaction with the public. Currently, the Topeka Police Department includes these topics in the academy. These topics need to be revisited during annual training as well.

Certain topics should be emphasized throughout training. These include, but are not limited to, de-escalation, multicultural understanding, speaking up if a fellow officer requires redirection, updates or clarifications regarding performance reviews, and an overarching goal that everyone comes home at the end of the interaction.

If not in place now, the Topeka Police Department, in conjunction with the City as a whole, should work to develop a specific course of training for supervisors. This could apply to the very first level of supervisory duties. This should continue with the supervisors to develop their skills and for review of responsibilities to reinforce department policy and practice.

## **5. Civilian Input in Training**

We recommend adding civilian participation into the process of developing the department training agenda both for the recruits and annual training for officers. Civilian participation would complement the efforts of the department. Looking at training topics planned through the eyes of non-law enforcement participants would help in validating the curriculum. Why is something being taught, how it is being presented, and what are the outcomes expected are questions which may have very different answers from civilians than from the police only training staff. The intent here is that the department through civic engagement and surveys will include training that is relevant to our community. While understanding that some topics are mandated by the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center, there is still an opportunity for the Topeka Police Department to customize elective hours of training. Groups that could be used for this include the Police Chief's Alliance Advisory Group, the Civil Service Commission, or teaching staff from the Criminal Justice Program at Washburn University. The civilians would not unilaterally set the training agenda but would work to complement the existing agenda.

Civilian participation could be useful in monitoring the progress of a recruit as they move forward into the academy, field training program and final recommendation to certify the recruit as an officer of the department. This would allow for citizen participation for review of the recruits seeking permanent certification as an officer. It could be an output measure for the Civil Service Commission. How many did they certify and how many completed the 18-month probationary period before certification. This is very different from how the Civil Service Commission functions now.

## **6. Civilian Oversight**

Topeka has a framework in place in the form of the current Civil Service Commission that can be expanded / updated to provide additional civilian oversight and allow for citizen input. The Civil Service Commission established under TMC 2.120.030 is made up of Topeka citizens. The city code regarding the Civil Service Commission should be updated to allow the group adequate access to information regarding policing practices, internal police reports as needed, to review reports of the Internal Police Auditor (or similar type position if expanded by the City), and hear citizen concerns that have not been resolved through other methods. We believe that small updates to the Civil Service Commission will allow the Commission to better service as a bridge between the public and the Topeka Police Department to help build trust and increase education in our community.

The Civil Service Commission members are appointed by the Mayor with consent of the Governing Body. The Mayor should strive to appoint individuals who represent the breadth of Topeka. Selection to serve should emphasize geographic diversity in council district residence, advocates for minorities and disadvantaged communities, advocates for policing, and advocates for youth. With some code changes, we feel the Civil Service Commission is the appropriate group to provide additional civilian input and oversight without additional layers of government through the creation of new citizen advisory committees.

Periodic Crime Summits may reinforce these efforts. These opportunities for deeper public input may be citywide or focus on a particular sector of the city. They may focus on certain demographics, experiences with policing, or issues as is deemed necessary.

## **7. Employment Decisions**

The City of Topeka should contribute to the overall quality of hiring choices for officers in Kansas. Topeka can support these efforts in part by continuing to comply with state law and alerting the Kansas Commission on Peace Officers' Standards and Training if an officer has been terminated or resigned while under investigation. The City should identify partners such as Go Topeka that can support efforts to recruit officers.

### **c. Conclusion**

The Police and Community Relations Committee has provided an opportunity for the Governing Body, the community, the Topeka Police Department, and others to contribute to the broad discussion on policing. The Committee supported the opportunity to highlight community recommendations and a deep dive into understanding the policies, laws, and functions of the Topeka Police Department. The Community was pleased to see that in many instances, the Topeka Police Department is already implementing policy and procedures at a higher level than what was expected or required.

As unpredictable as police work can be, it is even more imperative that a police agency be proactive in implementing safeguards to ensure the fair and equal respect of the citizens they serve as their primary responsibility. The Committee's focus was on Topeka while being aware of what was going on at the national level and adapting if necessary. The work of the Police and Community Relations Committee was to focus on just that. We would like to thank everyone who presented, emailed, or voiced their concerns to the Committee. Your patience and participation is greatly appreciated. We would also like to thank City staff.