

Ashland Police Task Force Public Forum #3

Thursday, September 9th 2021 – 10:00 AM Vaughn Public Library

Meeting called to order at 10:00 by Mayor Deb Lewis

Present: Linda Calhan, John Kovach, Tom Lund, Cheyenne Otto, Stacy Craig, Jim (*last name not stated*), Deb Lewis, Marina (*last name not stated*), Katherine Morrisseau, Laura Negro, and Brandon Marten

Mayor Lewis gave a welcome and provides an introduction and passed the meeting to Cheyenne for a traditional blessing

Cheyenne Otto began by setting the stage and allowing for introductions of the task force members then reviewed the mission statement and community agreements

Stacy Craig gave background on Dylan's presentation and Chief Hagstrom's presentation from the first public forum. She detailed the commitment from APD to de-escalation tactics and community policing. Some upcoming policing events include an open house at the new APD station, email addresses for non-urgent concerns for the police, annual police community events. Main concerns at previous forums have included the opioid crisis in the region, mental health crisis in the region, and the concerns about people knowing and trusting one another and the police.

PUBLIC COMMENT

(Comments have been edited for clarity and length.)

Katherine Morrisseau asked for the list of task force members to be repeated. Otto listed the task force members.

John Kovach talked about working in law enforcement and being an officer in the Ashland community. He spoke about the community policing tactics he used while he served on the force, such as walking the beat, giving presentations in schools, and talking with residents. He suggested that when a new officer is hired their name, picture, and a short bio should be published so the public can get to know who they are.

Marina (*last name not stated*) asked Kovach a question about walking the beat and why walking the beat was discontinued as a common practice. Discussion occurred. It was acknowledged that Chief Hagstrom has stated that the Police Department would need an increase in funding in order to create and fund positions that would include foot patrols.

Tom Lund spoke about the importance of educating residents about what police officers deal with on a shift. He advised the importance of being educated about what to do at a routine traffic stop and the importance of following directions when one is stopped by an officer. He then stated that there is a neighborhood watch group forming on Chapple Avenue.

Otto asked those attending the forum on how to respect the mental health of police officers. Otto added information about how the Police Department in Superior deals with the mental health of their officers and that community members should not have to walk on eggshells because an officer is in a high stress situation. Brandon Marten outlined the mental health practices of the Ashland Police Department and stated that the department has very limited resources for their officers.

Marina stated that storytelling from both sides is important and that it allows for people to open up their hearts. She wanted to know if surrounding communities were offering the same type of policing public forums so that all residents of the Chequamegon Bay can come together for change. She also suggested moving away from the term “defund the police” to “refund the police”.

John Kovach spoke more about his time serving on the police force and how he was able to get to know everyone while living in town and walking both the day and night beat. He also stated that it is important for police officers to be excited and proud to be serving on the force but that can become difficult given everything the officers see and deal with throughout their shift. He stated that there needs to be assistance for officers to decompress they can't be expected to just go home and live a normal life.

Morrisseau spoke about how all humans have rights to be respected and that our small community needs peace officers not police officers. She stated that based on her experience police driving patrols do nothing to deter criminal activity. She questioned as to why the county isn't aiding the City Police Department when it comes to mental health issues to help make sure officers aren't being too strained. She also showed interest in being involved with a community watch group. She also informed the public forum participants about a Mental Health First Aid course for adults at the Bad River Casino on October 5th from 9am-4pm.

Jim (*last name not stated*) said that police officers are asked to do a lot but have limited funding. He added that the public should be educated about the duties and actions of police, and stated that the media is spinning stories about the police. People must be respectful to officers and do as they are told when instructed by an officer.

Morrisseau asks for equity and inclusion for the native community and there are different experiences for different people. She added that the community needs to work on the side of equity, peace, and inclusion.

Craig adjourned the meeting at 11:37 am and stated that the next session will be at the Bretting Community Center on September 23rd at 6 pm.