Alternatives to Policing Subcommittee of the Northampton Policing Review Commission

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, December 2
6:30-9pm
Remote Meeting

Join the Remote Meeting:
Video conference:
https://zoom.us/j/94246148115?pwd=cm9WL1hjdnlWTHM0UGVPZ2xPR2oyQT09
Or by telephone, call: +1 929 436 2866 Meeting ID: 942 4614 8115 Passcode: 970517

1. Call to Order by meeting chair, Booker Bush
    a. Announcement of Zoom Recording
    b. Roll Call
2. Public comment from 6:30 to 7PM
3. 20 minutes Discussion: How do we gain more representation by groups affected by policing
4. 30 minutes Discussion: How housing is related to alternatives to policing
5. 20 minutes Discussion: Document about mental health and policing
    Domestic Violence/sexual abuse
    Community based policing
    Restorative Justice
    Substance abuse
    Employment
6. Adjourn

1. Meeting is called to order.
Javier called the meeting to order. Commissioners present: Javier, Alex, Booker, Carol, and Dana.

2. Public comment:
Robert linked resources and access, and conflicts and climate change. Richard gave comment that confusion can be good, and the continuum of policing as part of a community. Dan commented that it will be difficult gain the meaning of police and policing. Ya-Ping emphasized that there is not a need to "prove" problems, and focus not on what we have and how to improve it, but to ask "what do we want regardless of what we have?" to unbound ourselves.

3. How do we gain more representation by groups affected by policing
Javier introduced the idea as important to get a better understanding of what the most marginalized people in Northampton need. Booker followed up by saying it's very important but he does not have solutions himself, but recognizes Carol might have more thoughts and has sent information about it.

Carol brings up the new legislation in MA and read it, and the law has a lot of opportunities for mechanisms that do not include the police, including reversing school-to-prison pipelines, and decertification. She referenced the number of people who showed up and stayed in the previous meeting and what is going on for vulnerable people. She hopes they'll be guided by those voices. She referenced the email sent to the commission by Sean from the Wildflower alliance. Carol wants to continue to reach out to people who are assisting or are advocates for people in marginalized groups so they can hear what they need to hear.

Javier says they'll be speaking with Pamela Schwartz and Sean Donovan to speak later that night.

The subcommittee recognizes Lois Ahrens. She says its important to think about people who are not on the streets, but thinking about domestic violence and what could be created for them since they're experiencing it all the time, and it's happening all the time behind closed doors. She wants to shift the attention from people who they can see to also include victims who can't be seen.

Booker says they are working on bringing other folks, and is thinking about what model might work in Northampton. It might include Safe Passage, or not. Booker doesn't think they can have something ready about it for the first report. Alex says he's also reached out to folks, but maybe they're interacting with Booker instead of him. He's also done some research and is interested in the current process, mandatory arrests, and to better understand alternatives. There's been pushback on restorative justice models here, but it's worked elsewhere.

Javier adds more context about what might be in Northampton and asks how response services would be housed, with a concrete plan that's doable. Going back to the main discussion, it can be hard to be anonymous because Northampton is a small place and even removing names might not anonymize a report. He invites people to think about that. He also mentions the importance of holding a day meeting and eliminating language barriers. Booker expands on barriers such as technology, timing, and knowledge. Booker asks about process and whether we want first hand accounts or trust community advocates.

Dana says if the only way to get stories from the community is to get them second hand, then it's worth it. And maybe there's a way to gather those stories through audio or other things. There are limits to what we can do though, and anonymity will always be difficult. Maybe even a message board. Alex says they had a message board in Florence and maybe doing something similar in Pulaski Park would help. Or if folks were comfortable going out in public, masked and distant, to collect stories.

Javier mentions that we should be as methodical as possible, and that people still may feel vulnerable. This could be avoided if we ask for a narrative and being asked what they need or want, and not just experiences. Carol discusses her experience and knowledge on qualitative research, and when you get into subjective experiences that is still data. This allows us to hear

and understand underrepresented voices. She also wants to explore a focus-group style interaction and participants can build on each others' experiences. Dana seconds that, and thinks it'll be important to ask what feels safe, or gets away from identifying information.
Javier proposes bringing the idea of a specific subcommittee to do outreach back to the full commission. Dana says she has already asked Noa to add this to the agenda. Alex brings up the question of how to navigate open meeting law since a gathering would require an announcement as an open meeting with notice, and then we run the risk of having too many people physically present. Booker brings up the panhandling report and asks Alex if he knows how that information was collected. Alex shares the report and how they operated but notes they were not subject to open meeting law because they were not a public body like the commission is.

Housing as it relates to policing.
Javier brings up how expensive and segregated Northampton is, and the roots of people being unhoused. Booker says he put it on the agenda and would like to hear Pamela sees things. Alex confirms Pamela will be joining at 7:30pm. Javier relates his experience working for fair housing and how in northampton he observed mistreatment firsthand, and how to think about people who were in the system being harmful.

Booker says Pamela was hosted at the last Human Rights Commission, and that the focus was on the homeless because the eviction protections were about to expire. Alex says he met with Pamela and Jay and asked the question, "how can housing funding reduce the need for policing?", and how the places that receive government funding, and section 8 assistance are places of high contact with police and how can the commission hear from those people.

Alex introduces Pamela as a former city councilor, director of Western Mass Network to End Homelessness, and has done so much work moving things along in Northampton. Alex mentions a previous conversation and the current system works.

Pamela describes the work of her organizations including the span of folks brought together. The most effective response to homelessness to housing with support services, as opposed to shelters and the "housing ready" models. Data showed that people respond better and strongly to having a home, and it's now a national best practice. Continuum of Care is a HUD construct that gets federal funding into the area, and the Network sits over 2 CoCs in Western Mass.

Pamela describes a landscape rather than clear policy proposals. Groups do have an idea of what they're doing, but the question to ask is does the community have a phone tree ready to find and make available resources. Pamela thinks there's room for Northampton to create its own network, but also tap into existing networks so it's not reinventing the wheel. Folks could be involved including Hampshire Hope and the city planner and the Next Step coalition of providers that connect every month.

Carol comments about how exciting it is to have a network. And that this can be a way to overcome the siloing of efforts and services. She asks about the prohibition against having someone with a criminal record and the relation to public housing. Pamela describes it's not city

ordinance, it's state or federal regulation that jeopardizes the receipt of aid. And that federal rules are stronger than state rules which allow more discretion.

Pamela makes it clear networks need to be created by designated staff time by a paid employee to curate networks and develop them. But they need to be laser focused. Booker asks if Hampshire HOPE is already doing this work. Pamela says they are working on it, but she's not educated enough to know where things are. But they might need resources to do it. Booker asks if the role the commission plays needs to be an advocate. Pamela says yes, the city could do more and would likely be happy to be involved.

Booker asks for examples of these coordination models are in place, and how involved should police be. Pamela says she knows in general there are models and that it could be found quickly.

Javier asks about the feedback loop for organizations already. Pamela says she's not directly involved in that aspect of the work, so only knows on a meta-level what's happening, but not on quality of services. Typically it happens through advocacy work and they're the vehicle for feedback because they're advocating for the community based on the problem. She says she might be too removed to know and comment, and that maybe agencies have responses but she just doesn't know.

Pamela and Booker thank each other, but recognize that this all falls back to resource availability, and what is doable. Booker paraphrases and says that it sounds like the city needs a triage system like a health system. Pamela agrees and thinks it's important to know how to work with triaging for substance use and mental health as well. Javier asks about whether this could be something that lives in the city. Pamela says she doesn't have clarity about where it should live, but it needs to live.

The subcommittee recognizes Sean Donovan. Sean describes his work for RLC and how to create spaces of inquiry and safety without making assumptions. He describes peer-led responses and how they do not take power over people, and tries to do it outside of a fear-based way.

Booker asks for a case-study and what the process is. Sean says they have community spaces. Sean says people can just show up, but also have community meetings and groups. Riley says others might choose to stay at Afiya house for up to 7 days as an alternative to hospitalization. Riley describes a situation where someone was in Afiya house and expressed suicidal thoughts and the process of support for that person. Sean describes the process of policing and training, and how a security guard describes being trained to "be larger" and a police officer telling him he "stood out" and that this is the process of policing, to exert power.

Javier asks about feedback loops again because it is essential to avoid paternalism. He asks what the feedback loop is for RLC. Sean continues processes of ongoing conversation and consent and if there are big disconnects they are addressed at the community/group level. Carol describes the afiya website and what is unique and transformative about their involvement, and in this case people are encouraged to go out and then return to a stabilized environment.

Carol asks about relating about individuals in an extreme state. Sean says extreme states happen in context, and that an interaction can add to that extremeness. Interacting with authority can elicit a protective response.

Booker says he wants a triage ot other types of care, and asks if the RLC could be on the receiving end of calls that get triaged. And how can people access RLC. Sean says he has already
been involved in that, and there are ways to scale. All the relationships RLC have are voluntary, and so that might impact how the services might be offered. The RLC has been working with a number of groups and building up those relationships.

Alex asks about co-responders, like having a peer and an emt, and is there a place for a peer-response that doesn't involve police. Riley and Sean aren't sure what that would look like, and that there isn't a precedent in their models, but that doesn't mean it can't happen.

The commissioners discuss what the next meeting should be and how to approach writing and organizing speakers, and then schedule the next meeting.

Booker moves to adjourn. Alex seconds it. The meeting is adjourned.