



POLICE CHIEF'S COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP

June 8, 2010

Agenda Overview

- 1.) Fair and Impartial Policing Policy
- 2.) Using Social Media as an Outreach Tool
- 3.) Special Event Party Application at City Facility

Recent Cases

Chief Burns briefly spoke about recent cases that have been in local newspapers. The range of the cases shows that officers can't anticipate what a day will consist of and there are always different issues.

Fair and Impartial Policing Policy

Lieutenant Sandra Brown provided some background on the Police Department's process of developing the policy. Lieutenant Brown visited Seattle Police Department to discuss its similar issues and policy, as well as attend training with their command staff. Palo Alto PD's policy has had several titles, such as racial profiling, bias-based, but both have a negative tone and are unclear as to what they mean. With the Department's goal to treat everyone the same, the new and current phrase is "fair and impartial," which has a more positive tone and is easier to understand. The Police Department conducts stops based on reasonable suspicion or probable cause. It is not our policy to stop someone based solely on their race, but may be necessary when race has been given as a descriptor from a reporting party. Officers are also being taught that when making contact with an individual, they should tell the person the reason for the stop, introduce themselves by providing their name, and hold the person as long as necessary in order to issue the citation or warning and then release them. Officers are encouraged to spend time explaining the stop and the process of paying or contesting a ticket. Officers should be courteous during stops and should not be asking questions such as, "Where are you going?" or "Where are you coming from?" If the person who is stopped wants to file a complaint, the officer should provide their name and business card.

The question was asked what the response would be if a caller reported a suspicious black man in their neighborhood. Lieutenant Brown said that our Dispatchers are trained to ask the caller what is suspicious about the man. The Police Department's policy is that officers won't respond unless there is suspicious activity occurring. By asking the caller questions, we are educating the community about what is suspicious and what warrants a response. Officer Villaescusa said that callers will sometimes exaggerate the circumstances to ensure a response.

Another question mentioned that is asked by officers on stops is, "Do you know why I'm stopping you?" Lieutenant Brown said officers do ask that question, especially with traffic stops because the driver's response assists them when they attend court as the statements are admissible.

The State mandate is five years for refresher training, but if the Police Department is able to do it more often we will. With all of the other mandated and non-mandated training necessary, it is not always possible to conduct it more than the five year requirement. A member spoke about non-law enforcement training that is sponsored by Stanford professors regarding cultural diversity and those types of subjects. Lieutenant Brown provided a brief overview of Continuous Professional Training (CPT) and regular briefing training that officers receive.

The policy has already been implemented and training provided to the officers. Supervisors were required to review the policy with their teams and officers were to sign that they understood it. Agent Savage stated that it is important for supervisors on the street to be involved with their teams and ensure policies are being adhered to. Officers are being trained to have a new thought process when making stops, such as explaining the reason for the stop in order to relax the person. With the Mobile Audio Video (MAV) system in the police vehicles, an officer can be exonerated if a complaint is made about his/her behavior, but it can also show where additional training needs to occur or some form of discipline, depending upon the situation.

The Independent Police Auditor's (IPA) contract requires reviews of MAV when it relates to a complaint, an internal affairs investigation and/or a Taser activation. The IPA would be overwhelmed if they were required to view every stop, and the Police Department does not have the staffing resources to copy every stop to be sent out for review.

After tonight's discussion, Chief Burns feels that more information may need to be added to the policy to hold ourselves accountable. The Police Department will soon be distributing a revised version of our policy manual.

Social Media

Agent Savage spoke about researching the use of today's social media as an outreach tool to improve how the Police Department communicates to the community. Agent Savage has been checking sites such as Twitter and Facebook to reserve the name now. People who are interested in receiving notifications or viewing information would have to voluntarily sign up and the Police Department would not make "friend requests," send mailers or make phone calls. The sites would be used to broadcast information, similar to the City's Community Alerting Notification System (CANS), but could also send lost child alerts, advertise community events, and press releases.

Agent Savage asked for feedback from CAG members on how the sites should be used, and what to include or not. This could be a positive tool to increase transparency within the community. A suggestion was to include a "question and answer" page, but the workload would probably be too much for personnel to handle.

Information relating to a crime could be disseminated immediately depending on available technology and the availability of Public Information Officers (PIO). Officer Villaescusa explained that there is a protocol that PIOs follow when doing a press release so as not to compromise a case. If the Police Department was to go in this direction, this would be an additional responsibility for PIOs, along with their regular duties in their respective assignments.

Agent Savage also explained that "joiners" of the groups would not be allowed to post comments on the site, as this would be restricted to Police personnel only. Mountain View Police Department uses Twitter, and Agent Savage is looking to see what other agencies are using, if any. The Police Department is looking into bringing in trainers for a session on social networking for law enforcement.

The TipNow program has increased tips and they have been credible, with two arrests to date. Agent Savage needs suggestions on how to advertise it and get the word out. Some suggestions were to put it on the back side of business cards for officers to hand out, put it on the police vehicles, do a "scrolling" ad on the Media Center's local channels, and provide local newspapers with a small ad to use as "filler" in their papers.

Some youth might be intimidated to provide tips or to use a social network site for fear of harassment by others. A suggestion was made to go to the schools to talk about it with students and form a base group, who could then spread the word. Two sites were recommended, one for 25 years and up and one for 25 and under.

Due to the workload involved in researching and developing a page, it was suggested to promote a contest to have someone design it for the Police Department.

Special Event Party Application at City Facility

An overview of a recent issue was discussed. A group of Palo Alto High School students scheduled a club party at a City facility. Once some research was done, the City and Police Department canceled it. The students didn't know the reasons for the cancellation and they were unhappy about it. This decision went against improving youth relations with law enforcement. The person/Department responsible for canceling the party should have notified students through various publications at the high school.

Chief Burns spoke about the event from the public safety aspect. The party was scheduled away from school grounds because breathalyzers are used at school events. The event location only holds 200 people and the group sold over 300. This group has had parties at this location in the past and neighbors have complained about noise and fights in the parking lot. Community Services (department responsible for the location) solicited the Police Department's opinion on going forward with the event. The Police Department felt that the risk was high and Community Services made the final decision. The City canceled for liability reasons, as well as for the safety of the youth attending. City and Police representatives met with the family who reserved the location and eventually all parties agreed it was best to cancel. The Police Department explained situation to local papers and it was suggested it should have gone to the Campanelli rather than the Voice or other publications. It was suggested that the responsible City department should have taken responsibility, not the Police Department. The Police Department supports youth events but when people don't follow the rules then we need to intervene.

Upcoming Events

Special Olympics: The Police Department is participating in the following events to support the Special Olympics:

- Law Enforcement Torch Run, Monday, June 21st at 3:40 p.m. – the run will begin on El Camino in Los Altos and end in Menlo Park.
- Tip a Cop, Tuesday, June 22nd from 4-8:30 p.m. at the Olive Garden Restaurant on El Camino. Police personnel will be cooking and serving customers to raise funds for Special Olympics.

Clash of the Heroes: Football fundraiser between Police and Fire personnel from Palo Alto, East Palo Alto and Menlo Park, Saturday, July 10th at 4:00-8:00 p.m. and will be held at Palo Alto High School. The youth group coordinating the event needs assistance and Officer Villaescusa has volunteered to help with by contacting the other agencies. The event is being sponsored by Coca-Cola and proceeds will be given to Project We Hope.

Meeting Adjourned

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.