

POLICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE TOWN HALL – Tuesday, December 6, 2022 -
7:00pm Georgianna Grant Meeting Room, Stanley H. Kellerhouse Municipal Building

Members in Attendance:

Police Advisory Committee Carolyn Whiting, Chair Earl DePass, Member Teri Lukin, Member Ian Murtaugh, Member	Croton-on-Hudson Police Department Chief John Nikitopoulos Police Officer Edwin Jandres Police Officer Jeremy Davis Detective Mark Fielding
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Police Advisory Committee Chair Carolyn Whiting welcomed all to the 2nd Police Advisory Committee and Police Department Town Hall. The Committee last spoke with residents at the March 15th Town Hall, and looked forward to updating the community on their continuing work. Chair Whiting then introduced each of the committee members and Police Officers in attendance.

Chair Whiting shared the following information on the topic of Domestic Violence:

No one deserves to be abused nor can you or anyone else cause someone else to hit or harm you. Abuse knows no economic, religious, cultural, age, or gender boundaries. It can and does happen to people from all walks of life. If you are being abused, the police are here to help you to:

- *Get to a safe place away from the violence.*
- *Get information on how the court can help protect you against the violence.*
- *Get medical care for injuries you or your children may have.*
- *Get necessary belongings from your home for you and your children.*
- *Get copies of police reports about the violence.*
- *File a complaint in criminal court and tell you where your local criminal and family courts are located.*

Carolyn Whiting then shared the policy of the Croton-on-Hudson Police Department on immigration status:

It is the policy of the Croton-on-Hudson Police Department to not inquire about a person's immigration status unless the status is important to a criminal investigation.

Police Officer Jandres, one of two active bilingual members of the Croton Police Department, then gave the following speech:

Officer Jandres: *Good evening everyone, I am Officer Jandres. I wanted to take this moment to thank everyone on this committee for their time and their effort that was put in to work with the Croton-On-Hudson Police Department. Apart from the content that you have heard and will be hearing of today, I would like to add some assurances. Today, there are two active bilingual members of the Croton-on-Hudson Police Department, and we would like to include the following message:*

En este departamento hay dos Oficiales que son bilingues. Nosotros estamos aqui para ayudar y para assitir a los residentesde esta comunidad. Yo entiendo que es el costumbre de uno de no llamar a la policia cunado nos encontramos con incidents que no queremos que se publiquen. Pero yo estoy aqui para affirmer que todos nosotros estamos aqui para ayudar y assitir a ustesdes. Si existen preguntas o inquietudes llo quiero que se sientan confiados que nosotros les vamos a poder ayudar. Espero que con tiempo podamos a crear relaciones y podamos trabajar juntos en qualquier aspect que nosotros podamos. Muchas gracias por su tiempo y por estar aqui con nosotros.

In short, I am here to re-affirm the fact that we are here to help the residents of this community. I understand that one might not always look at us officers as a helpful resource. However, I want to assure that we are here to help in any way that we can and are ready to answer any questions or concerns you may have. I hope that with time we can build relationships and work together in any aspect that we can. Thank you for your time and thank you for being here.

Police Chief John Nikitopoulos shared information about what the department has been doing since the last Town Hall in March.

Police Officer Jeremy Davis shared information about Community Police Events, including the 3rd Annual Toy Drive in partnership with Croton Caring, Cone with a Cop, and other youth initiatives.

Chief John Nikitopoulous then presented Police Officer Jeremy Davis with an Exceptional Service Award for his contributions to the Croton Community.

Police Officer Mark Fielding shared a Power Point Presentation on Croton Police traffic stop data. The full presentation is available [here](#).

Chair Whiting then gave the following update on the Committee's activities:

Since we last spoke with the community, we have had the opportunity to delve a little deeper into the 2021 community / police survey. Through what we have learned, we have developed strategies we hope will improve some of these survey numbers. We will adjust the 2023 survey to better target the needs and concerns of the community and send out another survey in March. The Department and Police Advisory Committee are always striving to listen to the community.

From the 2021 survey:

- *The good news is that 75% of our residents believe the police show concern for the residents.*
- *83% believe the police are respectful*
- *86% trust the police*
- *On average, 89% of residents have not been dissatisfied with our police department through their interactions, whether an emergency call, a non-emergency call or a community policing event.*

However, there is some concerning data that the survey brought forward

- *Only 55% of people believe the police communicate regularly with the public.*
 - *Only 55% believe they can make suggestions or share concerns*
 - *Only 60% believe the department works with the community and engages in community policing.*
 - *Only 67% believe the police treat people fairly.*
 - *Only 58% of people believe the police are proactively preventing crime.*
 - *Only 60% of people believe the police are addressing problems of concern.*
- The areas of greatest concern to our residents are*
- *Traffic issues were the # 1 concern, by far with 72% mentioning this concern.*

However, there were other areas of concern mentioned by between 15% and 21% of respondents.

- *Driving while Intoxicated*
- *Drug abuse*
- *Underage Drinking*
- *Fraud and ID theft*
- *Auto burglary*
- *Bicycling*
- *Illegal dumping*
- *Illegal parking*

To address our resident's belief that the police do not regularly communicate with the public, the Police Advisory Committee and the Police Department worked on various strategies to increase communication. Many of the concerns expressed by the residents, are being addressed by the police, but the actions of the Department have not been shared enough. We believe through improved communication; our fellow residents will better understand how their concerns are being addressed by our police department.

We worked with the Chief to implement 10 new strategies:

1. *This Town Hall is one of those strategies. Holding a yearly Town hall is also part of the Village Board Directive for this committee. We thought it was important to have two town halls to help with increased communication.*
2. *The New York State Police Reform Task Force recommended a Community Service Award. The Police Advisory Committee further recommended this award be given. Officer Jeremy Davis was given this award this evening.*
3. *The Chief has created a new Welcome letter to be shared with new residents through the Croton Welcome Wagon*
4. *Police officers spent more time on foot patrol in our upper village, to include summer evening hours, day care pickup times and Sunday Church service times.*
5. *The block party permit now includes a check box to invite an officer to your block party to chat with residents and let children and adults see and sit in the police car. I can vouch for how wonderful it is to have an officer at your block party. We had Officer Jandres and Officer Pece at our September block party. The adults loved getting to know the officers in a relaxed and fun atmosphere and the kids loved seeing the police officers and the police car. I must say though, I don't know who had more fun using the siren, the kids, or the adults. The officers were truly a fun and wonderful addition to our yearly block party.*
6. *Traffic ticket data will now be available monthly on the Village Police Department website*
7. *The new police patch has been completely phased in and the old patch is no longer a part of the uniform.*
8. *While not fully implemented, the department is starting an outreach effort to address local civic groups, with the first outreach held last month with the Senior Recreation club. The topic covered was Identity theft, an area seniors expressed a concern about in the 2021 survey.*
9. *Officers made extensive outreach efforts to our Hispanic residents. Unfortunately, they were not as successful as we had hoped. However, the department and committee continue to work on strategies to engage with our Hispanic community.*
10. *We made numerous attempts to add two high school students to our police advisory committee but unfortunately, we have been unsuccessful. However, we have not given up and will continue to work to add student's voices to our important committee. Our student's voices are vital to our committee and to our community. If you are a student in grades 9 – 12 and are interested in serving on our committee, please send an email of interest to: croton police advisory committee at gmail.com*

Along with these 10 new strategies, we worked on another important project. Members of the Committee, Ian Murtaugh, Teri Lukin, and myself spent April through November, gathering suggested topics of interest to our residents, interviewing our officers on those topics, and writing this information in what we call "articles" to share this information with our fellow residents. These articles are available on the Police Department web page through a link on the left-hand side of the page. The articles range in length from

approximately 500 words to 2000 words, depending on the topic. We had a great time interviewing our officers and we learned far more than we could have imagined at the start of this project. The officer's depth of knowledge and extensive training was truly impressive. Our officers were extremely open to the project and assisted in any way possible. We are grateful for that assistance and their kindness. For yes, not only were they helpful but they were truly enthusiastic about this project, proud of their training and work, and were excited to share all we asked with the residents of the village. And we are now excited to share this information too.

We covered approximately 37 topics, some combined into one article, some were stand alone. We consider this a work in progress, with more topics to be added as residents express concerns or interests in additional topics. A new article will be released weekly on the website and the Village's social media.

While there are too many articles to mention each one at this moment, some topics covered include:

- Identity Theft prevention, Crime prevention for the elderly, and crime prevention at college.*
- Stop DWI program*
- Community policing*
- NY State gun laws*
- School safety*
- De-escalation training*
- Staffing*
- Officer Wellness*
- Arrests, arraignments, trials*
- Domestic Violence*

Committee Members Ian Murtagh, Teri Lukin, and Carolyn each gave a brief overview of the topics they wrote about. These articles will be available on the Village website.

Teri Lukin discussed mental health and the County's Police Reform and Reimaging Plan, as well as various safety plans available to the community:

Mental health emergencies have increased nationally and locally over the last several years. According to the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a 25% increase in anxiety and depression in Americans and one in five Americans experienced mental illness in 2020. Suicide is now the second leading cause of death in children 10 to 14.

In response to this crisis and as part the County's Police Reform and Reimaging Plan, Westchester County launched Project Alliance in 2021 to address the needs of Westchester County residents with behavioral health challenges. The program has five prongs: 911 Dispatch Diversion; Enhanced Training for EMTs on behavioral health issues; Enhancement of Countywide Behavioral Health Crisis Response Line; Crisis

Intervention Team Trainings; and the formation of Mobile Crisis Response Teams (MCRT).

Now when you call 911, there is a fourth option. Along with police, fire and emergency medical services (EMS), mental health calls can be diverted to the Crisis Network Team, staffed by St. Vincent's Hospital crisis personnel. Calls can either be transferred or conferenced (so the dispatcher can stay on the call).

911 dispatchers and police officers have received additional training to identify and transfer calls from individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis, so they receive immediate and appropriate assistance. Our dispatcher and all officers have participated in the training to learn how to fully assess the situation and triage calls to the appropriate resource.

Though many of the crisis calls diverted to the Crisis Network Team can be successfully resolved on the phone, each situation is unique, so Croton Police and EMS may also respond if they or the Crisis Team think it may be necessary. Depending on the level of the emergency, the dispatcher, Crisis Network Team or first responders can also deploy the Mobile Crisis Response Teams (MCRT). MCRTs consist of staff who have substantial training and experience in addressing mental health conditions and substance use disorders. They support law enforcement in addressing mental health crisis by rapid engagement, assessment of needs, providing short-term support and linkage to necessary services. The County has established eight teams, each serving a defined area, providing 24/7 crisis response. The MCRT serving Croton is based in Peekskill and supports Peekskill, Cortlandt, Croton and Yorktown

All Croton police officers receive training on how to handle mental health emergencies. In addition to their regular training, through Project Alliance, Westchester County also provides enhanced training for EMTs and Crisis Intervention Team Training for law enforcement agencies. This in depth 40-hour training prepares officers and other first responders to effectively manage crises involving people with mental illness. The training also improves their understanding and accessibility of the public mental health system, while promoting officer safety and the safety of the individual in crisis. Several Croton police officers have already participated in this extensive week-long training, and the Department plans to continue to send officers to the trainings as they are offered in the future.

Now, I'll briefly mention some safety programs. The Chief already mentioned the Child Safety Seat Program which offers child safety seat installations and safety checks. Four officers are certified car seat technicians who assist with the proper installation of child safety seats. They look for improperly installed, broken or recalled safety seats and will demonstrate and explain the proper selection, installation, and use of car seats, booster seats, and proper use of seatbelts to caregivers. To schedule an appointment, please contact the Croton Police Department at: 914-271-5177.

Dark House: If you are going on vacation or will be away from home for a period of time, call the department at 914-271-5177 and let us know. Officers will periodically check your property while you are away.

Special Needs Registry: If you or someone in your household may need special assistance in an emergency, please consider signing up for our voluntary Special Needs Database. The Police Department and other first responders will use this information, which remains confidential, to better assist residents with special needs. This could include a variety of things from needing assistance with ambulation to not using a siren if someone with special needs would become agitated by the sound. This information allows officers to better understand the needs of our community and respond appropriately and sensitively. You can find the registry on the Croton Police Department website.

Surveillance Camera Registration: The Croton-on-Hudson Police Department is committed to utilizing every resource to prevent and solve crimes and to protect citizens and their property. Many residents and businesses are now utilizing surveillance cameras and these cameras may capture persons and events without the owner's knowledge which may help the police department solve crimes and help keep the village safe. The Croton-on-Hudson Police Department asks residents and businesses to voluntarily register their privately-owned surveillance camera systems. As our officers respond to reports of criminal activity in our community, they may be able to use the information or footage captured on these security cameras to assist in the apprehension and prosecution of the criminals involved.

By registering with the Croton-on-Hudson Police Department, officers can quickly identify nearby cameras that may have captured criminal activity.

After registering your camera, you would only be contacted by the Police Department if there is a criminal incident in the vicinity of your security camera. Police personnel, if necessary, may request to view your camera footage in order to assist in the investigation. You are not obligated to comply with this request, it is at your discretion to be used only as a tool to aid the investigation.

24-Hour Tip Information Hotline: Call 914-271-0706 to leave information about a crime or incident that happens in the Village that you feel may require police follow-up. Callers may leave a message on the Hot Line answering machine and may remain anonymous if they so desire. The detective division will review all calls. Do not call this phone for emergencies. Dial 911 instead.

Committee Member Carolyn Whiting discussed interviewing various Police Officers from the Croton Police Department:

While we were interviewing officers about topics of interest, we also did an officer profile of each officer. We also interviewed the police department's dispatcher and the full-time

parking enforcement officer. These profiles are available on the Police Department website page too.

The one thing that stood out with all the officer profiles was how much our officers love working for our wonderful community. When asked why they became an officer, every officer expressed the desire to help people as their number one reason for becoming an officer. They greatly enjoy the chance to help people and to meet people from all walks of life. To quote more than one officer I spoke with about working in Croton "It's the best job in the world!"

We had such a good time getting to know a bit more about these officers. We learned about previous job experience, education, and even asked about their off-duty hobbies and were surprised to learn we have such varied interests among our officers. Off duty hobbies include, musician, working on cars, travel, hiking, exercise, watching sports, biking, photography, carpentry, golf, fishing, coaching youth sports, reading, boating, scuba diving, snowboarding, motorcycle riding, and horseback riding. However, the one activity every officer mentioned first and foremost was spending time with their family, something we all can relate to. If you see an officer out and about, feel free to chat and find out what hobbies or interests you might have in common.

The committee also did some community outreach to hear from all of you. We worked alongside our officers at Summerfest, Coffee with a Cop, Dunk a Cop, and Fall fest.

Trustee Gallelli, the committee's Village Board liaison, gave brief remarks regarding the ongoing efforts of the committee.

Residents were then invited to come up to the podium and share concerns, thoughts, or ask questions.

Summary of resident concerns and comments:

Resident # 1 expressed concern about several topics:

1. Lack of police traffic enforcement on Route 9
2. Lack of Roadblocks to check for traffic enforcement, DWI, Drugs
3. Wished to know more about general crime statistics, not just traffic statistics.
4. Wants a DARE and School Resource Officer in the schools
5. Concerned about drug abuse in Croton

A Resident # 2 emailed her concerns about traffic / commercial vehicles speeding on Route 129/ Maple Street. She asked the Chief to address the following:

1. Are speed bumps possible? Chief explained that it is a NY State road and speed bumps are not permitted

2. Why is the area around 129 and Gerstein St. not a school zone? Chief explained that it has to be contiguous to the school and heavily traveled by children, as is the case at PVC and Maple Street. PVC property abuts Maple Street and the crossing is used by a large number of students. The crossing for CET at Route 129 does not abut school property and it is not heavily used by students walking to and from school.
3. Can the speed limit be lowered to 25 mph on Route 129 / Maple Street? Chief said it is a major road connecting parts of the county and as a NY State road, the speed cannot be lowered by the Village
4. Is there a way to deter commercial vehicles? Chief said no, it is a major route for traffic.
5. Can the police department commit more enforcement in this area beyond school hours? Chief will review with his staffing availability and strategic use of traffic enforcement vehicle and electronic speed signs.

Chair Whiting gave the following closing remarks:

We sincerely thank all of you for taking the time to attend or watch at home. Our committee represents the interests of you, our fellow residents.

We thank the Board of Trustees and Manager Healy and Assistant to the Manager Emily Mancini for your continued support of our committee and the Police Department.

We thank the officers who were so helpful with all our communication initiatives. For not only were they helpful, but they were also excited to increase communication with all of Croton and beyond.

I'd like to take a moment to thank Chief Nikitopoulos for his incredible commitment to and support for our committee. He always has a "can do" attitude. He is open to any and all suggestions and does his best to implement all suggestions, if possible. His officers clearly genuinely like and greatly respect him. I think I can speak for the entire committee when I say we all enjoy working with Chief Nikitopoulos.

Chief Nikitopoulos gave closing remarks, and the meeting concluded.