

Albany Democratic Club

Thursday, October 19, 2017 at 7:00 PM

University Village Four Corners Room

Meeting Minutes

7:00 pm Call to Order

Introductions

Chief of Police, Mike McQuiston

What's happening with crime? Crime has been coming down for about 20 years, which is similar in Albany for the last 11 years...because he became the chief then. In the last few years, crime in large cities has ticked up a bit.

Police Executive Research Forum focuses on opioid crisis. The number killed by drug overdose exceeds that of AIDS, car accidents, homicide. Fentanyl is becoming a really terrible problem.

Sanctuary City - In April, we became a sanctuary city in response to concern from citizens. We were out front on this issue. SB54 - California Values Act makes CA a Sanctuary State.

All Albany Police Officers wear a body camera. Full implementation was in 2013. Staff was requesting cameras, rather than pushing against it. Police are not required to turn it on for every interaction. The Chief feels that we must do this. He can review video when someone does complain. "Not substantiated complaint" was an issue before video became available. Video can be used as a teaching tool. The Chief does not release video.

Racial Profiling - Albany doesn't tolerate it. Bias-based policing is against the law and against Albany policy. Officers receive training on this. Post-Ferguson training includes implicit bias training hosted by Berkeley. Training is now focused on "thinking" rather than just mechanics.

RIPA, Racial and Identity Profiling Act. The Board is holding community meetings on what and how police should collect data on Stops. In 2020, Albany will be participating, after the implementation at large police departments.

How has policing evolved. He was hired in 1988, and he has worked here ever since. He feels that society may be changing more than police changing. He advocates for police reform to make it better. It is an unsettling time in his opinion. We are re-examining our institutions. People used to blindly trust the police, but now we are rethinking this. Ferguson prompted a national dialog, and other institutions may be under scrutiny, too. Technology has given people the ability to coalesce around these issues.

His wife experienced sexual harassment in two different police departments where she worked. The case of Weinstein's harassment is spurring on more examination.

Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson in 2014. Officer Darren Wilson's actions were reviewed by the local, state and federal level, and they found that Wilson's actions were OK. "Lawful but Awful." Training should be focused on what an officer SHOULD do, not just what they CAN do.

We are seeing positive change, but we are changing very quickly, and that could create disruption, according to Chief McQuiston.

Chief McQuiston thinks that his department is in good shape, but many other police departments are very broken. 90% of police departments have 25 or fewer cops. Most police work in large districts. Even local adjacent departments are very different from one another.

Corrupt police departments are indicative of corrupt City Hall. Oakland has made progress, but some of the Chiefs did not have enough time or support.

Q/A with Chief McQuiston - NOTE: Quotes are used to indicate the question, but not necessarily the exact words used.

"Body piercing ammo - where do you stand?"

McQuiston - Police are generally not favorable of armour piercing bullets. There are differences in urban v. rural districts.

"Military equipment for police?"

McQuiston - He thinks that it is important to have military-grade equipment because the criminals have it. There's a lot of military equipment that is non-aggressive.

"What are the top concerns you have?"

McQuiston - One is don't leave laptops and cell phones on the front seat of car. Don't even leave stuff that looks like it might be important. Criminals are detecting Bluetooth to find equipment in the car and in the trunk. The second part is about technology. It can help us do our job, but there are privacy concerns. Cameras in public places v. privacy requires a community and policy discussion about this.

"Community Meetings about policies, etc. - How challenging are things since last year's meeting? Unrest in the community?"

McQuiston - Staffing is a challenge, and people are retiring. There will be a significant wave of change. Unrest is challenging because they have limited staff and time, and there's been a lot of immediate needs. That's meant that they have not advanced as far as they would like on the Strategic Plan.

“Homeless population is increasing. Is there a homeless population and if so, how do you work productively with the population.”

McQuiston - The City is trying to make resources available for mental health and other needs. There is now a resource center open twice a week. It is a growing problem. He estimates that 40% of their time is sometimes spent on this issue. Target, The Bulb, parking in cars. It is a huge growing problem. Gilman was a problem spot long before the Albany Bulb...we didn't kick them out. Albany paid to settle a case brought by the people who lived at the Bulb. The problem is the worst now that it has ever been.

“No racial profiling. RIPA requirements. Black neighbor says they get pulled over a lot. It would be better to have statistics.”

McQuiston - We should have better statistics. 54% White 33% Asian 1.2% African American - what should the police stats be with a population like ours? Officers are becoming more aware of the impacts on people who can't pay fines. The police are at the front of the Justice System, which is a big system. Chief McQuiston has no evidence, according to him that there is racial profiling.

“This was a hot topic in the planning meeting. In 2020, we will have the stats. Can we institute the stats early? I would volunteer to be on the committee to help figure this out.”

McQuiston - I hear what you are saying, but what should the data look like? It's fraught.

McQuiston is not opposed to it, but needs a definition of what it should look like.

“I do work on data for water utilities. I think there are creative ways to look at data. An exact goal may not be needed, but how different policies or changes impact the data would be useful.”

McQuiston - He agrees. Do we only use Stop data? Or calls for suspicious person?

“We may not be able to define this now, but that doesn't mean that we can't.”

McQuiston - We are a bare bones police department, so we might not be able to do some of these things. We don't know what we will have to do in 2020. It's squishy right now.

“Staffing is your most pressing issue. How can new staff be selected and trained so that they will not be racially profiling.”

McQuiston - He has fired people for not meeting the standards. Culture is something McQuiston can impact, and his role is critical.

“Hate crimes. Is Albany police coordinating with Contra Costa or just Alameda County?”

McQuiston - We don't coordinate with Contra Costa, but we report hate crimes.

“Crime and statistics. Crime Reports - Pierce Street incident with the family has not been reported on the crime website, crimereports.com. Why?”

McQuiston - data is dumped. He checked it. The call came in as spray paint as graffiti, which probably got listed as vandalism. The official report is that it is a hate crime.

“The department website bi-annual report is 2013/2014. It would be great to have it updated. The data is required by policy for hate crimes. Are you only tracking this just internally, or can you report it to us. Can you at least report the hate crimes?”

McQuiston - Every month hate crimes are reported to the DA. The data isn't there because there are only two hate crimes this year, but there are more hate incidents. Two schools of thought - 1) Get the word out there. The Community needs it. 2) Hate crime is a message crime that can hurt a lot of people. Putting it out there spreads the message. He tends not to want to put a lot of information out there. Sometimes, information that the community is seeking is not their business.

“There may be a fear that some of these incidents, for example Instagram photos, a parent stated that no notes were taken by the officer so the incident wasn't classified as a hate crime. When things like this happen, then here's the same old Albany not disclosing it. Some may see this as zero accountability. Do you want to do another statement about hate crimes? Describe the penalties? Seeing your face may get to them more in a video. Also, include the issue of bullying.”

McQuiston - It sounds like a good idea. As a chief, I don't want to get in front of the policy makers at the City. We need to talk about how to get the message out there. The city is trying to get the message out. Also, at the high school, the incident was not a hate crime.

“What's the difference between a hate crime and an incident.”

McQuiston - The law is very specific about what acts, where they take place determines it. Swastikas on the BART path was not a hate crime because it was on public property. It was a hate incident.

“How many hate incidents have we had?”

McQuiston - Four or five. The point is that they are harmful, even if they are not hate crimes.

“Does Albany Police Department have an anonymous tip line?”

McQuiston - We use crimestoppers.com. They accept complaints by email or anonymous complaints.

“Other links and services - Conflict Resolution SEEDS. Will you be cutting ties with that organization?”

McQuiston - He has no ties with the organization, and they are not contracted.

“What can citizens do to help discourage hate crime?”

McQuiston - Put up posters. Have dialog. If you don't talk about it, then you are ignoring it.

“Everybody helps everybody, but we are united in trying to resolve things. Albany used to be extremely conservative and white. The community is different, now. We need to tout our community togetherness.”

McQuiston - The police department used to mirror the majority of the community. Now, it is much more welcoming. It is still happening. Albany is much more accepting, but we still have issues.

Committees

Federal

Review of current events done as a quiz with an award of a \$5 Starbucks gift card to the winner

City Council

Two meetings. Mayor made a statement about hate crimes. We will get consulting services for the EIR. Affordable housing funding discussion. Rules and procedures.

The task force to save Alta Bates will have a protest on November 5th. The East Bay Park District will have a public meeting on local funding for regional parks. Albany needs funding for Waterfront. Contact Rochelle at rnason@rochellenason.net if interested

Swing District - No Meeting

Other Business

Democratic County Central Committee - 2 delegates and 2 alternates are needed. Jan 27 and 28 is the meeting, and mail ballots are OK. The delegate will report what ADC decides. Amy Neil and Kathy Tomasic volunteered. Brian Beal and Bryan Martin will be the alternates.

Getting Involved in City Government on Nov 7th. It will be held in the Crossroads Room.

Nick is heading up the Assembly District 15 candidates forum on Monday Jan 29, probably at the High School. Right now, there are nine candidates. It will be from 7 to 9 pm.

Budget - \$933.70 in our account. We will be putting together budget for full approval. There are rentals and other things that we will have expenses for.

Democratic Club Fundraiser. We are looking at 2018. We may have a film and brunch.

The Holiday Party is Dec 14. Friends and family are invited. We will celebrate one year of existence.

The Democratic Club Platform and Goals. The Executive Club met to work on this. We will do some workshop events and may use a survey.

Closing Comments

Jennifer works at a burn foundation, and they've been hit significantly by the California wildfire. They are providing a lot of support for the victims. She wanted to acknowledge the loss of life, and she is grateful for our firefighters who supported the effort. She is proud to be a resident of Albany where people were so supportive.