

Cambridge Human Services Commission  
Minutes of Meeting 12/13/2012  
5:30 – 7:30pm  
Citywide Senior Center  
806 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge

Commissioners present: Lori Likis, Claudia Hill, Rev. Lorraine Thornhill, Christine Elow, Khari Milner, Katharine Thomas

Regrets: Nan Stone, Ayse Atasoylu, Kati LaBraico, Christopher Hall

DHSP staff: Ellen Semonoff, Janice Alger, Jolyon Cowan, Jose Soares (recorder), Nicole Horton.

Presenters: Commissioner and Cambridge Police Deputy Superintendent Christine Elow and former Commissioner Dr. Marian Darlington-Hope presented on the Cambridge Police Department's new community engagement and dialogue process and facilitated a focus group with the Commission.

The Deputy Superintendent stated that the nationally publicized event in Cambridge which involved the police arresting Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates led the Cambridge Police Department (CPD) to re-evaluate its policy and procedures in their response to service calls. Dr. Darlington-Hope, in conversations with communities of color, found that many people felt that the police drive around in cruisers looking for people of color to harass. To address these concerns and perceptions, Dr. Darlington-Hope and Deputy Superintendent Elow designed a presentation and focus group with the goal to have the CPD improve its interaction with the Cambridge community, to develop better communication, and educate the public about the complexities of police work.

Two handouts were passed out: A Daily Journal Entries recording all the service calls the CPD received on December 1, 2012 from 12am to 12pm and a copy of the powerpoint presentation. The CPD responds to every call it receives. All calls are sent by Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) to the computer in an officer's cruiser. In 2011, the CPD responded to 117,000 service calls. Approximately 80-85% of these calls were quality of life, such as calls for noise complaints. On average the CPD responds to 300-350 calls a day. These service calls become the foundation for the officers' interaction with the public.

In Directed Patrol, a police officer will be dispatched to a specific area to enforce truck routes, speeding, and bicycling laws for public safety. Almost every day a bicyclist is hit by a motor vehicle.

Often calls are the result of a bystander's misperception. For instance some calls about kids playing in the park are reported as gang activity in the park. Police are summoned to investigate in a "park and walk" response to repeated calls for service. The caller's bias can impact the police officers' response and interaction as the police are pulled into the situation. People's perceptions of police work are generally informed by movies and television.

Communication is absolutely essential in the police officer's response to identify the nature of the call. In a motor vehicle stop, CPD officers are trained to introduce themselves, explain the nature of the stop, and to say what they are doing before asking for license and registration. The CPD's goal is to shift from

the police officer initially asking questions and taking control to the officer first communicating calmly and clearly why they are there as a response to a complaint. Officers develop public support by explaining what they are doing and why.

The CPD is testing different de-escalation techniques to move away from arrests for “disorderly conduct” when the situation might have gotten out of control. In some cases, de-escalation can help reduce danger by calming a person who is upset or unstable. Tactical Disengagement is another strategy being explored by the CPD to diminish the tension in the response to a service call when the situation encountered is unclear.

Some research has found that in procedural justice, whether a person believes the law is fair and enforcement is even-handed, a person’s feelings about an encounter with the police will depend more on whether they thought the officer was respectful and courteous rather than whether they received a citation or warning.

The CPD is looking at patterns of arrests for disorderly conduct in service calls to discern how to de-escalate situations and to prevent confrontations. In the case of disorderly conduct officers have to write more detailed information in their reports.

Commissioner Claudia Hill announced that this was the last meeting she was attending as her three year term had expired.

The next Human Services Commission is scheduled for January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

Meeting adjourned.