

Community Advisory Board to the Essex Police Department (Vermont)

Mission Statement:

Our mission is to represent the diverse community of the Town of Essex and the City of Essex Junction in facilitating a positive, trusting, and effective relationship with the Essex Police Department (EPD). The Community Advisory Board (CAB) representatives will advocate for the systemically marginalized, disenfranchised and oppressed members of the community. The CAB will provide honest and open feedback and serve as a conduit between law enforcement and the community to support the EPD in continuously meeting the highest standards of engagement, professional service, and protection.

Vision:

We envision a safe environment where residents and visitors experience a strong positive trusting relationship between the community and law enforcement, maximizing the EPD's ability to serve its community effectively.

Goals:

- Break down barriers, generate trust, establish or improve relationships and foster understanding and communication between the Essex Town and City of Essex Junction communities and law enforcement.
- Foster active and robust participation, creativity and vision, and diverse representation among the CAB members. Diverse representation includes diversity based on race, ethnicity, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion/creed, and socioeconomic status, among others.
- Foster better policing by understanding the issues of the systemically marginalized, disenfranchised and oppressed members of the Essex Town and City of Essex Junction communities.
- Ensure application of equal protection under the law.

Description:

The EPD's Community Advisory Board (CAB) is an independent board made up of diverse community representatives, established in collaboration with the Chief of Police and EPD, whose primary goal will be to foster transparency and trust through:

- 1) Facilitating communication between the Essex community and the EPD.
- 2) Supporting the EPD on strategies and policy, especially around issues of equity.

The Essex CAB fosters two-way communication between the community and the EPD. As a resource, the CAB will assist in informing the community at large about the function and role of the EPD, as well as informing community members about department news, information, and

updates. The CAB also serves as a conduit for voicing community needs and concerns around police services. In its capacity as an advisory committee, the CAB is intended to be an expression of the communities' viewpoints. As such, when police-related incidents occur, the CAB will continue to serve as an independent voice for the community in response to such incidents. The EPD will partner with the CAB, to the extent they are able, to provide sufficient information surrounding police-related incidents to facilitate and allow for community feedback.

As an advising resource for the Chief and EPD, the CAB will continuously seek to learn about and understand the EPD's policies, procedures, and practices. To facilitate this understanding, the EPD will provide the CAB with relevant policies, procedures and practice updates, as well as quarterly and annual summaries of statistics such as the number of police uses of force, the number of police pursuits, crime rates, the number of citizen complaints received. Demographic data including race and other variables will be included in the provision of statistics to help monitor for potential biases in police work within the EPD. The CAB will provide advisory feedback designed to support police-community relations, improve EPD's operations, and address public safety issues to further enhance the quality of life in the community.

As identified by the EPD and the CAB, the CAB will focus on contemporary challenges that impact the community and its Police Department. Examples of topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Use of force
- Mental health response
- Criminal activity and trends
- Transparency
- Referrals to the Community Justice Center and other related restorative practices
- Best recruitment and retention practices
- Obstacles to effectively combating drug and gun crimes
- Support the EPD's Community Liaison staff
- Support crime victims

Structure:

The Essex CAB will be a committee with equal representation from the Town and the City Trustees.

- Members must be a resident of Essex Town or the City of Essex
- 16 years old or older
- Interested in public safety
- Be a good communicator
- Support the mission, vision and goals of CAB
- In terms of members, either 6 or 8 to start

- Be able to attend the majority of meetings (at least 80%)
- In the first year, include one community volunteer member from Essex BEST to help support the establishment of the Essex CAB

Notes:

1. The CAB will partner with the EPD's Community Liaison to complement, not duplicate roles and functions.
2. Although the CAB is expected to be proactive, it will not have power or authority to investigate, review or otherwise participate in matters involving specific police personnel or specific police-related incidents. It will not receive or review complaints initiated against personnel of the Essex Police Department, nor play any role in civil or criminal litigation.

Questions related to the Community Advisory Board

Background and why is this needed?

In 2020, municipal leaders in Essex invested in a multi-year engagement with Creative Discourse aimed at advancing anti-racism and inclusion. This effort was pursued in part because of increasing racial diversity among residents, which underscored the need to build a more inclusive, welcoming, and equitable community. National uprisings for racial justice that called for a re-visioning of public safety had ripple effects in Essex and also informed the decision to hire outside experts.

One of the first tasks that the Creative Discourse team engaged in was to develop and disseminate a survey of Essex residents which explored issues related to public safety, policing, and social equity. There were over 200 respondents who took part in completing a public safety survey and another 58 who attended 2-hour listening sessions including an affinity group for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and another for the Nepali community. *(Note: Of those who completed the survey, 36 identified as BIPOC, 145 identified as white, and 33 chose not to answer.)*

Data reflected different experiences in Essex based on the racial identity of the respondent. Fifty-seven percent of BIPOC respondents and 47% of white respondents observed or experienced racism in Essex, while the remaining percentage reported unsure. BIPOC respondents felt less safe than white residents, observed or experienced racism at higher rates, and had more negative interactions with police in general as well as in Essex. Nearly one-third (31%) of BIPOC respondents scored their feeling of safety as “less safe” in Essex scoring it a 2 or 3 out of 5 while only 10% of white residents reported feeling less safe.

Based upon the survey responses and the listening sessions, a Policing, Safety and Racial Justice Task Force renamed Essex BEST (Building Equity, Solidarity and Trust) was formed in late 2020 and comprised of over 20 community volunteers and municipal leaders.

The committee reviewed components of Essex’s public safety programs to determine whether and how changes should be made to improve public safety and assist the Essex Police Department in working toward the goal of a safe and thriving community. We reviewed data from EPD and engaged in informational interviews with a range of social service entities including the EPD, 911 Dispatch, EPD Dispatch, Howard Center’s Community Outreach, Howard Center’s First Call, the Community Justice Center, Aunt Dot’s, and CVOEO.

The culmination of these efforts was to establish mechanisms that would create pathways for communication and input from the community about EPD to hear from those who are most impacted. It is important to note that Essex BEST considered a range of models from a complaint department to a citizen oversight committee. We met with other groups in Vermont pursuing similar pathways and researched national models. The establishment of a Community Advisory Board was determined to be the most appropriate given the size of our communities, the existing foundation of the EPD to serve its citizens, and the desire within Essex BEST for the

Community Advisory Board to operate as a partner with the EPD while still maintaining independence from the EPD.

It's also important to note that this process has been a partnership hand-in-hand between community members and members of the EPD, in particular the Police Chief and the Lieutenant as well as more recently, the Community Affairs Liaison. The partnership within Essex BEST over the past 2+ years has only confirmed that this is the most appropriate path forward to achieve our stated goals.

What do you need from us and how will the Selectboard and Trustees be involved?

1. BEST would ask for the Selectboard and Trustee members to vote in support of forming and sustaining a Community Advisory Board as defined in the working document.
2. BEST has provided a framework for how CAB members will be chosen. When the Selectboard and Trustees vote in favor of establishing the CAB, we would ask them to recruit applicants to serve on the CAB and select 3 residents of the Town and 3 of the City to serve as described in the working document.

How might they announce openings to recruit and what might application process look like?

We would ask that the Selectboard and Trustees engage in their usual methods for recruiting community members to Boards, Commissions, and other similar groups. We would ask the following be included in any recruitment materials:

- What the CAB is and its purpose
- First 3 people for each would have 1-year, 2-year, and 3-year terms. After the first 3 in each community are appointed, each subsequent member would serve a 3-year term. This initial set up of staggering terms would ensure greater constancy over time of members.
- Criteria for consideration to serve as a CAB member is as follows:
 - Members must be a resident of Essex Town or the City of Essex
 - 16 years old or older
 - Interested in public safety
 - Be a good communicator
 - Support the mission, vision and goals of CAB
 - Be able to attend the majority of meetings (at least 80%)
 - In the first year, include one community volunteer member from Essex BEST to help support the establishment of the Essex CAB (Jody Kamon, a resident of the Town has volunteered for this role)
- We anticipate that municipal staff attending the CAB would include the EPD Community Affairs Liaison and as needed, the Police Chief.

****Importantly, when considering members, we would ask the Selectboard and Trustees to work to ensure intersectionality of diversity so that the perspectives and voices of marginalized and/or underrepresented groups are represented.***

MEMORANDUM

TO: Town of Essex Selectboard
City of Essex Junction Council
Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Regina Mahoney, City Manager

FROM: Ron Hoague, Chief of Police

DATE: February 13, 2023

RE: Proposed Community Advisory Board and the Essex Police Department

Issue

Informing the Selectboard and Council of the initiative by Essex BEST to form a Community Advisory Board to partner with the Essex Police Department.

Discussion

Since 2020, the Town of Essex and the Essex Police Department have been working with the Essex BEST group to study methods and policies that foster the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion. Many of these initiatives have been or continue to be implemented by EPD. To this end, the BEST group has focused on the formation of a Community Advisory Board that will partner with the police department to facilitate a positive, trusting, and effective relationship between the community and the department.

The EPD's Community Advisory Board (CAB) is proposed to be an independent board made up of diverse community representatives, established in collaboration with the Chief of Police and EPD, whose primary goal will be to foster transparency and trust through:

- 1) Facilitating communication between the Essex community and the EPD.
- 2) Supporting the EPD on strategies and policy, especially around issues of equity.

The Essex CAB will foster two-way communication between the community and the EPD. As a resource, the CAB will assist in informing the community at large about the function and role of the EPD, as well as informing community members about department news, information, and updates. The CAB will serve as a conduit for voicing community needs and concerns around police services. In its capacity as an advisory committee, the CAB is intended to be an expression of the communities' viewpoints. As such, when police-related incidents occur, the CAB will continue to serve as an independent voice for the community in response to such incidents. The EPD will partner with the CAB, to the extent they are able, to provide sufficient information surrounding police-related incidents to facilitate and allow for community feedback.

The formation and operation of this board will be similar to other boards and committees under the auspices of the Selectboard and/or Council. A key difference is that there will be representation on the board from both the City and Town, with six members being appointed by the respective boards, three City residents and three Town residents. The members will each serve either a two- or three-year term after this initial appointment, and a three-year term for each subsequent appointment.

After considering many factors and other models of citizen boards, Essex BEST has come to the determination that an advisory style board is most suitable for this initiative.

Cost

There may be costs associated with the offer of stipends for the members similar to other committees. This will be for the consideration of the council and selectboard to decide whether this is appropriate.

Recommendation

The Council and Selectboard are recommended to vote in favor of the creation of a Citizen Advisory Board to partner with the Essex Police Department and instruct staff to create qualifications, advertise for members and facilitate the effort.