

City of Albany Citizen's Police Review Board

Minutes of Meeting 12/14/2000
Albany Law School

Present: Manuel Alguero, Rev. Kenneth Cox, Morris Eson, Marilyn Hammond, Judith Mazza, Herman Thomas, Eleanor Thompson and Michael Whiteman

Absent: Paul Weafer

The meeting was called to order at 7:05pm by Chairman Cox with seven of the nine Board members present.

On a motion duly made and seconded, the Board adopted the meeting agenda proposed by Chairman Cox.

Michael Whiteman presented the minutes of the November 30, 2000 meeting for Board approval. The minutes were amended to reflect that Eleanor Thompson is a member of the Complaint Processing Form Committee. Michael Whiteman asked the Board members how they preferred that minutes be presented - a summary of discussion, just the report of action (as required by law), or a detailed report of all discussions. Discussion ensued and the consensus of the Board was that a summary of the general discussion along with a report of actions would be preferred. Judith Mazza moved to accept the minutes as amended. The motion was seconded by Marilyn Hammond. All approved.

Chairman Cox called upon the By-Laws Committee to give a report. Michael Whiteman reported that Paul Weafer had authored a first working draft of by-laws, and that the Committee had not yet met as a whole to discuss them. He reported that Committee members have been reaching out to some constituencies, and that the Committee would be meeting next week to work on the first draft for the purpose of sending it to Board members in advance of the next meeting. Michael Whiteman reminded the Board that under the law, the Common Council of the City of Albany must approve the Board's by-laws.

Chairman Cox asked whether there was a time frame for completion of the by-laws. Michael Whiteman said he was not sure, that the Committee would be meeting the following Thursday. Herman Thomas asked whether there would be a draft to give to the Common Council in January. Michael Whiteman responded that it was what the Committee was working towards.

Chairman Cox thanked the Committee for their work. He then called upon the Complaint Processing Form Committee for a report. Morris Eson referred Board members to Section 42-342 of the law dealing with filing of complaints. He noted that the CPRB has to approve the complaint form developed by the Albany Police Department. He reported that he has spoken with Commander Breen, who offered to work with the Board to fashion a form together. The Committee has highlighted some issues they would like addressed.

Morris Eson asked Eleanor Thompson to report on the Committee's discussion.

Eleanor Thompson reported that the Committee would like the complaint form to be available in various locations including, but not limited to: YMCA, NAACP, Legal Aid Society, Council of Churches, and Centro Civico. The Committee recommends that a paragraph be added to the complaint form advising complainants of the organizations willing to provide assistance if needed. She noted that this would require agreement of these organizations, which could include the NAACP and the Legal Aid Society. The Committee discussed a title change for the complaint form to "City of Albany Citizen Police Review Board & Police Department COMPLAINT FORM." The Police Department City shield could be added to the form and the mailing address for the CPRB should be added. The Committee recommends requesting that the media do free public service announcements advertising where these forms can be obtained. Lastly, she reported that the Committee discussed formalization of the complaint form process in terms of filing of forms and transmittal of the completed complaint form. She noted that the Committee would meet with the Police Department for their input as well.

Manuel Alguero noted that the Committee would like the form to comply with the spirit of the law as passed by the Common Council. Morris Eson thanked the Government Law Center for the packet of complaint forms used across the country. He raised the issue of whether there should be a commendation form or paragraph added to the form, although he did not believe this was the Board's responsibility. Michael Whiteman suggested the use of technology for the posting of the complaint form, stating that people should be able to get the form without going someplace to pick it up and also suggested the possibility of electronic filing of complaints. These steps could assist those who feel intimidated with a face-to-face encounter. Manuel Alguero agreed that these are good ideas. He asked what is the mailing address for the CPRB. Michael Whiteman responded that the By-Laws Committee is recommending it be the Government Law Center. Judith Mazza asked how the Board would have access to complaints. She said that the relationship of the Board to the Government Law Center was not clear. Herman Thomas said he has concerns with the complaint forms being transmitted to Board members or posted for review electronically. Morris Eson responded that the law says that the complaint forms can be filed with the Albany Police Department or with the CPRB. He added that the Board needs an address because he believes that most people would prefer to file with the Board. Chairman Cox asked the Patricia Salkin if the Government Law Center would agree to be the official address of the CPRB. She responded yes. Morris Eson asked if people would be able to pick-up complaint forms at the Government Law Center. Patricia Salkin said yes. Judith Mazza said she would be willing to reach out to the Capital District Gay & Lesbian Community Center to inquire whether they could provide assistance with the complaint form.

Morris Eson moved that the Committee be empowered to continue working by moving ahead with the recommendations as outlined by Eleanor Thompson. Herman Thomas seconded the motion. All approved.

Chairman Cox thanked the Committee members for all of their work. Chairman Cox moved to the Outreach Committee, consisting of himself and Judith Mazza. He stated that it is important to reach out to the community. He suggests that the Board reach out to the following organizations: NAACP, NYCLU, Center for Law & Justice, 100 Black Men, Urban League, Capital District Gay & Lesbian Community Center, CANA, Council of Black Ministers, League of Women Voters, and the Tenant Leadership Council at the Albany Housing Authority. He stated that the Board should set up protocols for these outreach efforts, as well as a timetable. He suggested that teams of three Board members attend outreach meetings twice per month. He also suggested that the Chair, Vice Chair and Media Liaison be notified of all meetings. He believes these meetings should start in January, and that the Board should be proactive, not just reactive.

Judith Mazza stated that it is important as the Board does community outreach that discussions continue as to people's needs and expectations, and that protocols be informed by the community and by expectations. She also stated that it is important that there be a Board agenda and not a personal agenda during these outreach sessions. Morris Eson suggested that time be devoted to just what the message is – he would be uncertain at this point about what, if anything, to say. Manuel Alguero asked that Centro Civico be added to the outreach list. Herman Thomas reminded everyone that this is a volunteer board and they should just do their best. Morris Eson suggested adding veteran's groups to the list. Herman Thomas remarked that the Board members need to get through their time commitment of training as well. Manuel Alguero noted that an effort should be made to outreach to youth organizations. Morris Eson suggested that the Chair send a letter to the identified organizations. Eleanor Thompson suggested that the Board needs to have its house in order before it goes out. Judith Mazza noted that the CPRB law came about over a long period of time, representing a compromise of positions. She believes that as the Board is in the process of developing by-laws they should get a variety of perspectives as the process should include bringing more people into it. Eleanor Thompson agreed. Manuel Alguero suggested that the Board approach this as reaching out to inform on the tenor and workings on which the Board is engaged. That the Board should listen to concerns and try to incorporate them, and that the outreach could be an opportunity for all to develop realistic expectations.

Manuel Alguero moved to adopt Board protocols, Judith Mazza seconded the motion. All approved.

Chairman Cox reviewed the roles of the individual Board members as agreed to at the last meeting. He reminded everyone that the Board members are still learning. That members all contribute to establishing harmony and integrity of the Board. He asked how Board members want to be addressed, whether by formal title, first name, etc. Board members had no strong preferences. Chairman Cox stated that the Board members should not lose perspective and that they all must take their roles seriously and approach it with fairness.

Chairman Cox reminded the Board of the next Police Academy Training on January 8,

2001 at 5:30pm. He called upon Commander Paula Breen for any comments. She asked whether the Board desired to meet with members of the old Community Police Relations Board. Discussion ensued about the pros and cons of such a meeting. There was no consensus reached.

Chairman Cox called upon Patricia Salkin from the Government Law Center to discuss other training. She reported that the Government Law Center was in the process of putting together additional training for approval by the Common Council, and reminded the Board that there is still more than twelve hours to go on the current training.

The Board agreed to meet again on January 11, 2001 at 7:00pm. The Board preference is to meet at the Albany Public Library and if that is not available, then the Albany Law School.

Chairman Cox then moved into the public discussion part of the meeting.

Vera Michaelson commented that the CPRB may not want to meet with the old board since that board was, in her opinion, discredited and it could send the wrong signal to the community.

Anne Pope asked where the Board is receiving complaints. Michael Whiteman responded that the Board is not receiving complaints yet, and that they should still be filed with the Police Department. Morris Eson added that the new complaint form is not ready and that the old one is still being used. Anne Pope asked whether there was a time line for when the Board would be ready to accept and review complaints. Judith Mazza responded after the by-laws are passed by the Board and approved by the Common Council. Anne Pope asked how long that would take. The Board members indicated that they are working diligently on this and that they are trying to get started right.

Phil Little John asked whether the by-laws would have procedures for the monitors and investigators. Michael Whiteman responded that the By-Laws Committee is contemplating by-laws and separate operating procedures. Some discussion followed about what the law does and does not say with respect to monitors and investigators.

Chairman Cox moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Michael Whiteman. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:30pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael Whiteman
Interim Secretary