

Newton Police Reform Task Force

Town Hall Meeting: preliminary SWOT analysis presentation and discussion
 Wednesday, December 16th

A recording of the meeting can be accessed by [clicking this link](#).

Introduction

The Newton Police Reform Task Force and the Strategy Matters consulting team met with members of the Newton community as part of an ongoing process to develop reform recommendations for the Newton Police Department. The goals and agenda for the meeting are described below.

Goals:

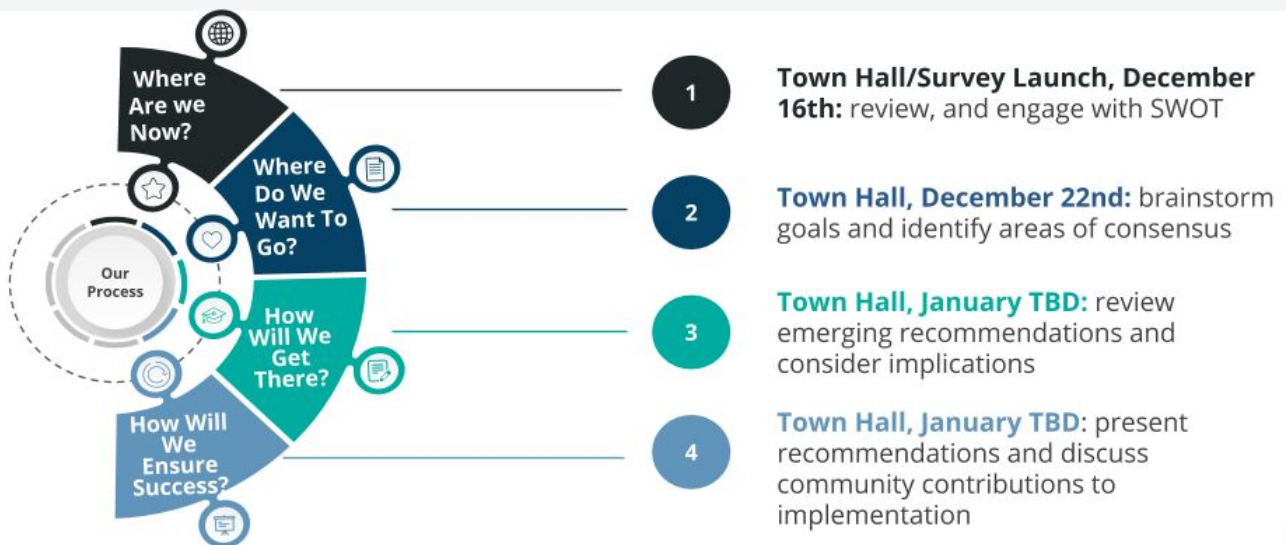
- Present the consulting team’s preliminary analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the NPD
- Ensure equitable opportunity for community participation and engagement related to themes emerging from the analysis

Agenda:

- Opening Remarks
- Review consultant role and process overview
- SWOT presentation
- Small group discussion with focus questions
- Large group debrief
- Closing comments

Overview of Community Engagement Process

December 2020 - January 2021



Group Discussions

The consulting team presented an early, summary analysis of findings from the work of the Task Force to date, and then asked meeting participants to work in small groups to answer several questions:

- *What do you appreciate most about the Newton Police and the way they do their work?*
- *What do you wish you could improve our change about the NPD and the way they do their work?*
- *What are the most significant challenges facing Newton that police could help address?*
- *How might police be good partners in addressing those challenges?*

A summary of results from small group discussions is included below:

What do you appreciate most about the Newton Police and the way they do their work?

- Glad NPD are not Minneapolis/Chicago/Boston police. They are different. Police can be scary and Newton Police are not.
- They are willing to participate in the process and engage with the Task Force.
- Prompt response in the case of emergency, per report of citizens to Newton's COO. Newton PD officers are extensively trained in first aid.

What do you wish you could improve our change about the NPD and the way they do their work?

- Be less defensive
- Reduce the stress of a situation as opposed to dominating a situation.
- See bigger picture of the desire to create an anti-racist police force
- Desire that Newton PD officers are trained in de-escalation techniques and protocols. Concern that de-escalation training is needed.
- Greater education and transparency about such training or protocols so there could be public confidence in the modus operandi of police as well as the ability for citizens to report if they perceive things AREN'T happening the way they should.
- Someone shared that Newton PD has a social worker that partners with the Police if needed and help address citizens once the situation has been calmed
- Campaign Zero was suggested as a resource
- Mental Illness: what's the best plan for response ?
- "public safety" needs more, but do they need to be police?

What are the most significant challenges facing Newton that police could help address?

- Police should be less involved in challenges. Stay out of schools. Get other professionals involved to address specific situations.
- Newton has a small POC community. PD needs to make specific and clear outreach to that community to establish themselves as allies/friendly resources BEFORE an acute situation arises.
- Concern that whatever changes are made here in Newton may be undercut or hampered by a statewide/union contract.

- Historically police have been/are perceived as part and parcel of white supremacy by some in the community (not just POC). Newton PD needs to be aware of that legacy (regardless of their feelings about the veracity of that perception) and will be more effective at their jobs and a more successful community resource if they proactively acknowledge that history and perception in their interactions with citizenry. Newton PD needs to take an active role as dismantlers of white supremacy.
- Whatever changes Newton PD makes, it will be challenged to message these changes in a way that resonates with citizens on both sides of the issue, those who are pro-police in its current state and those who advocate for change.
- we mostly discussed the role of police during a mental health crisis- we agreed that it might be useful to have a social worker present during such a crisis, but some were unsure of the role of the police in the case that situations escalate and violence arises. We talked about how we could bring in someone that is trained to deal with potential violence that isn't necessarily from the police.

How might police be good partners in addressing those challenges?

- We should create an independent agency to handle mental illness and addiction
- Resource allocation: are we spending in the right places?
- How does our police force interact with communities of color? This goes along with the Zoning discussion
- What do police do all shift? They should be assigned to productive and constructive tasks in the community
- No guns for police in schools

Preliminary Analysis

The following analysis summarizes the consulting team's early findings and interpretation of some of the efforts of the Task Force to date. Please note that this information has been collected early in the process and will be modified and augmented significantly by the results of continuing research and community engagement. The consulting team has assembled this information to provide a platform for discussion and to ensure transparency. The members of the Task Force saw this information for the first time in the meeting along with participants. **The information included below was used for purposes of discussion and does not reflect the final recommendations of the Task Force.**

Where Are We Now?

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

How are things going within the Newton Police Department? How is the relationship between communities across Newton and the Newton Police Department?

SWOT Analysis Data Informing the SWOT



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SWOT Overview Strengths

- **Community Safety:** Newton is a very safe community with a very low violent crime rate .
 - Safety: 3rd safest place in nation to raise children
 - Violent crime: 6 per 10K compared to 36 per 10K statewide.
- **Newton PD:** The department has few incidents of citizen complaints
 - ~150 sworn officers,
 - 8 citizen complaints in 2019 (none resulting in discipline)
- **Community-Police Relationship:** community supporters appreciate the officers' skills/ability to support many types of community needs, including mental health crises, medical emergencies.

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SWOT
Overview
 Weaknesses

- **General:** The nation is reckoning with structural and systemic racism in social system. This work, and the community conversations that attend this work, can be divisive and progress can be slowed by our lack of skillful analysis and thoughtful discussion.
- **Newton PD:** several recent incidents have provoked community concerns, and shaken community confidence in the Department’s ability to act fairly and impartially in responding to problematic officer behavior, and in holding officers accountable when/if such occurs.
- **PD/Community Relationship:** community interest in NPD engagement in conversation about systemic/structural racism as a factor in daily work/life and risk to resident well-being
 - NPD does not have a formal or informal body for this conversation.
 - NPD community engagement officers are events-driven, not relation not well-positioned to engage at this level.

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SWOT
Overview
 Opportunities and Threats

General:

- The Newton community has been actively engaging in the process of reconsidering the role of police, and their relationship to the Department
 - Diverse perspectives have been aired and shared (and this will continue)
 - This may offer a solid platform for building community/police agreement about changes ahead
- Aims of the Task Force:
 - Task Force takes seriously some of the concerns that have motivated groups to call for “defunding the police” including considering the potential benefits of changing or limiting the scope of policing:
 - e.g., leaf blowers, mental health, off-leash/barking dogs, etc.
 - Focus of the Task Force will be on recommending **improvements** and **changes** to the way the Department works and interacts with community residents (rather than defunding the police)
- Perceptions of the Task Force as supporting the “defund agenda” may undermine their to ability partner with police and unions on behalf of real, substantive reforms.

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SWOT Overview

Opportunities and Threats

Newton PD:

There are multiple opportunities for transformational change ahead. Examples include:

- the selection of a new Chief
- potential to implement Task Force recommendations
- a new collective bargaining agreement

Each of these is also a potential threat to success if:

- the NPD is not able to find the right leader for a new era
- the NOD is not able to embrace some or all of the Task Force recommendations
- Finally, the collective bargaining process is of great interest to the community. But there is no visible avenue for community engagement in that process. This leaves many with concerns about transparency.

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SWOT Overview

Opportunities and Threats

PD/Community Relationship:

The opportunity to build a stronger relationship between the Department and the community in general rests in the ability to increase community perception of both transparency into important police operations (e.g. the internal affairs process), and accountability amongst officers toward community members in important areas (e.g. fair and impartial policing).

The threat in this area is linked to some structural obstacles to meeting those requests, for example, the IA process is always a very closed process - for good reasons (personnel issues must be handled with care and confidentiality in any sector). But some in the community have lost confidence that the NPD can "police itself," and are asking for greater accountability and transparency.

To build this relationship, the NPD will need to be flexible, open, and creative, and community residents and the Task Force will need to be willing to work with some of the constraints shaping and sequencing the NPD's reform efforts.

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