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Last June 15, 2020, I spoke to Newtonians in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. I talked about how his death had brought to the surface the pain of generations of people of color suffering racism and bias, and unequal access to housing, jobs, education and health care opportunities.

I reminded everyone that systemic racism and unconscious bias surrounds us in Newton.

I called for all of us to forge a better Newton by eliminating racial disparities and building a more equitable Newton. I asked for help in healing racial divisions. I challenged each of us to dismantle our own privately held biases. I committed to working to ensure Newton is truly an inclusive, welcoming community where people of all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds can live and thrive, be safe and secure, and feel welcome and be supported.

That same night, I announced the formation of an independent Newton Police Reform Task Force. I wanted a group of our residents to look closely at policing in Newton and give me their feedback. I asked that they consider a wide range of policies and practices, from recruiting, hiring, training and promoting to services provided, misconduct and discipline, and accountability and oversight.

Last Friday, I received the final report and recommendations from the Newton Police Reform Task Force. This report is now posted on our website. Click [here](#). (Alternatively, on newtonma.gov, go to the Mayor Fuller homepage, click on Special Projects and Initiatives, and scroll to the Newton Police Reform Task Force.)

Our goal in Newton is to provide fair, just, respectful, safe and effective policing for our City. Our officers are dedicated to this mission and committed to continuously improving and learning from best practices. I have great respect and deep gratitude for the Newton Police for their professionalism and commitment. They have a demanding, critically important, and sometimes dangerous role.

I am reading the Newton Police Reform Task Force report thoroughly and thinking seriously about the recommendations. I am grateful to the members of the Newton Police Reform Task Force for the many hours they invested, their inclusive approach and their hard work. I want to thank Chair Sonja Spears, in particular, for her effective and caring leadership over the course of the past seven months. She did an admirable job during a challenging period both leading the Task Force and shaping the final recommendations contained in the group's report.

While the Newton Police Reform Task Force did their work, an internal group of Newton Police Department sworn officers and civilians undertook their own assessment. I met with them recently and I am grateful for their thoughtful insights and recommendations for improving a department for which they care so deeply.

Thank you, too, to the City Councilors, residents, businesspeople, City and School staff, and many groups (ranging from the Newton Coalition of Black Residents, Families Organizing for Racial Justice (FORJ) and Defund NPD) who have shared their experiences and ideas with me.

I also want to thank Interim Chief Howard Mintz and NPD Executive Officer George McMains. They have brought their years of experience, wisdom, judgment and love for the profession of policing, this Department, and our NPD employees to this important work.

I will be coming forward in the coming weeks with my vision and our plans for the Newton Police Department.

Even before we come forward with these future plans for the Department, we are taking several concrete steps, right now, to move forward. For example, we are starting a number of initiatives to strengthen our response to crises.

- We have created a Community Crisis Intervention Team (CCIT). Its primary objective is promoting communication and enhancing and improving the response of the City of Newton and private agencies when summoned to intervene with individuals who are mentally ill, developmentally disabled, struggling with substance use or experiencing trauma in their lives. This team will support Newton residents and their families. Our Community Crisis Intervention Team is co-led by staff from the Newton Police Department and Newton Health and Human Services, with partners from the Newton Fire Department, Newton Public Schools, the Newton Department of Senior Services, Fallon Ambulance, Advocates Newton Wellesley, Newton-Wellesley Hospital, the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, the Newton Housing Authority, and a local mental health agency, Riverside Community Care. They are beginning this week with monthly meetings.
- Staff from the Newton Police Department and Newton Health and Human Services are working with Judge Heffernan and the Newton District Court and knowledgeable residents (kudos to Rick Dinjian) to stand up a Mental Health Court. This collaborative will help people with mental illness navigate their way through the court system by partnering them with a case clinician to help them get specific treatment, medication, and preventative services. This alternative to the traditional court system connects defendants with rehabilitative services and support networks, thereby diverting them from incarceration, reducing recidivism, increasing public safety, and improving individuals' quality of life.
- Newton Police Officers will have access to Crisis Intervention Training, including de-escalation classes with the Norfolk County Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training & Technical Assistance Center. The CIT Training is a 40 hour course in which officers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to guide best practice response to individuals impacted by psychiatric illness, developmental disorders, and co-occurring substance use disorders. Officers will also participate in another set of simulation trainings to provide real life opportunities to practice de-escalation and best practices on use of force.

Perhaps the most important part of the process of moving forward is the hiring of a new Chief of Police. Interviews began last week by the Police Chief Selection Committee. I expect to announce who the next leader will be in early April. Here are a few of the qualities that I am looking for:

- An adaptive leader committed to continuous improvement
- A person who will hold herself/himself/themselves and others to the values of integrity, transparency, proactivity, innovation, equity, accountability, compassion, excellence and responsiveness
- A relentless commitment to training and professional standards, with an emphasis on implicit bias training, procedural justice, restorative justice, de-escalation pertaining to use of force options, and police legitimacy

As the new Chief takes leadership of the department, we will keep a close eye on important reforms coming from the State. In addition to a Commission on Civil Service and another on Qualified Immunity, a Massachusetts Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission (POST) is being created. It will put in place processes to increase transparency, accountability and follow-up on officer complaints.

I look forward to finishing my review of the recommendations of the Newton Police Reform Task Force and coming forward with a broad group of plans, policies and practices as NPD continues their work of ensuring fair, just, respectful, safe and effective policing.

As I think about our future plans, I know that virtually all the proposed changes will take a partnership with the Newton Police unions. I look forward to working with them. I know that some changes will take time, others are likely to require a financial investment, and we have a strong department filled with people committed to continuous improvement and focused on working with our community.

I look forward to sharing a more comprehensive vision for the Newton Police Department in the coming weeks and working with the new Chief on specific goals, objectives and action plans.

Warmly,
Ruthanne Fuller