

Sussex County Southeast Regional Police Accountability
Committee Inaugural Meeting April 24, 2024, 10:00am
Ocean View, Delaware

Present:

Chairperson Ms. Gayle Driver,
Chief Jason Lovins,
Chief Ken McLaughlin,
Chief Michael Morrissey,
Lt. Cliff Dempsey,
Mr. Ian McCaulley,
Mr. Gregory Flynn,
Pastor Ethan McGee,
Mr. Denny Pridgeon,
Ms. Lauren Weaver,
Ms. Claudia Rodgers and Mr. Ed Klima on Zoom.

All those present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairperson Gayle Marie Brown Driver, introduced herself, and asked the police chiefs to introduce themselves: Chief Lovins of South Bethany, Chief McLaughlin of Ocean View, Chief Morrissey of Fenwick Island, and Chief Constance Speake of Dewey Beach was not present, Lt. Cliff Dempsey represented her. The Chair then introduced the rest of the committee members from the four towns.

Chairperson Driver introduced the first guest speaker, Mr. Chris Kervick, Executive Director of the Delaware Criminal Justice Council. Mr. Kervick offered some words on House Bills 205 & 206, and the impacts on small police departments. He said the Police Accountability Committees are especially important and provide enhanced transparency. He offered the CJC as a partner to the group and wished the four towns good luck in their PAC endeavor.

The second guest speaker was introduced by Chairwoman Driver as Chief Patrick Ogden, University of Delaware Police Chief. He stated was here to support the police chiefs with their new PAC.

The final speaker, Dr. Sean Moriarty, PhD, Executive Director of Police Officer Standards and Training. He spoke of the PAC as a collective strength, like a bridge between community and law enforcement. Dr. Moriarty's remarks were about POST, and police training and accreditation in the State of Delaware.

Chairperson Driver remarked that copies of House Bill 206 were included in everyone's packet, along with copies of Title 29, Chapter 100, Freedom of Information Act. She informed the members that the PAC group must abide by FOIA. This means agendas must be posted and meetings available to the public. The group is allowed virtual meetings and executive sessions as detailed in FOIA. The packets also contained information on Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) and the Sussex County Southeast Regional PAC. Chairwoman Driver noted in HB 206, Section 20 requires PAC members to complete twenty (20) hours of community training within one year of appointment, with the departments overseen by the applicable board, which may include ride-alongs or a citizen's police academy. They are to assist the Chiefs, not make laws or discipline officers. Dr. Sean Moriarty commented that the group should learn about what the officers do, go for ride-alongs, read crime reports, share resources, collaborate, find out what the public thinks.

Chairperson Driver asked everyone to introduce themselves and give a brief description of themselves or their town. Chief Jason Lovins, South Bethany, was the first to speak, he said that South Bethany was a quiet town. His biggest concerns were about pedestrian safety with four million cars passing by Route 1. Chief Lovins finds his community supportive, and he has a great council.

Chief Ken McLaughlin, Ocean View, stated he has been chief for 24 years and seen a lot of change over the years. He noted that his department was probably the largest with fourteen officers of the PAC group, they do all their own investigative work. He feels his community relations have always been good.

Chief Mike Morrissey, Fenwick Island, offered a synopsis of his career in law enforcement, and noted that Delaware has well trained officers. The standards of procedure are uniform and most professional. He stated that pedestrian safety is his number one concern, especially at crosswalks on Route 1. He has a total of seven officers 24/7.

Lt. Clifford Dempsey, Dewey Beach, was filling in for Chief Constance Speake who was out of town. He said that although Dewey is only a mile long and has 1,000 fulltime people, they swell to 35,000+ in the summer months. Dewey has thirteen fulltime police officers and twelve seasonal officers. This affords them two officers on each shift. The town works very closely with Rehoboth Beach, whose officers assist them on weekends.

Mr. Ian McCauley, South Bethany, stated he is an attorney from Wilmington who has lived fulltime in South Bethany since 2021.

Mr. Greg Flynn, South Bethany, stated he is in tech development and likes to fish every day.

Pastor Ethan McGee, Ocean View, said he is pastor at Ocean View Church of Christ. He agreed to be on the committee so he can give back to the community.

Mr. Denny Pridgeon, Fenwick Island, introduced himself as a Delaware State Fire Marshal. He feels being on the committee is a good opportunity.

Ms. Lauren Weaver, Ocean View, said she is the Executive Director of the Bethany Fenwick Chamber of Commerce. She moved to the area in 2013 and was a former high school teacher.

Ms. Claudia Rodgers, Dewey Beach, said she has lived in Dewey full-time for the last four years. She is an attorney specializing in federal regulations and is happy to be on the committee.

Mr. Ed Klima, Dewey Beach, has spent 30 years in the fire service at Dover National Speedway and is looking forward to helping with the PAC group.

Ms. Gayle Driver, Ocean View, stated that she is not a judge, she is an attorney specializing in the criminal justice system. She has lived full-time in Ocean View since 2020, and volunteers at the Ocean View Police Department.

Chairperson Driver asked if there were any suggestions for the twenty hours of training besides a citizen's academy and ride-alongs. Chief McLaughlin suggested going to Dewey Beach on a Saturday night to see the many demanding situations they face and the complex decisions they make. He said consider working with Chief Speake. Lt. Dempsey explained how they trained their seasonal officers and extended an invitation to all to come to Dewey Beach.

Dr. Moriarty suggested tours of all the police departments, citizen's academy, ride alongs, and visiting the four active State Police Academies. Chief Lovin's asked how the trainings would be documented. Dr. Moriarty suggested that the police chiefs manage the documentation required. Ms. Weaver questioned whether attending a court session, or police activities in schools, or in towns would count towards the twenty hours of training.

Chief McLaughlin commented that there was a bicycle rodeo in the afternoon at Lord Baltimore Elementary School. He also suggested that "use of force" training was

reviewed with different devices is very eye opening. Chief McLaughlin said it is a unique behind the scenes look at police work.

Lt. Dempsy noted how disruptive military leave, sickness and vacation time can be to a department. Chief McLaughlin agreed with him, saying the off season can be a real struggle.

Chairperson Driver stated that the committee needs to develop a website and a small budget. She said most all of them are volunteers, however, not everyone here is. They will need to pay someone for administrative duties like taking minutes. Mr. Flynn volunteered to manage a website. Dr. Moriarty offered help with any resources he can.

Chief McLaughlin introduced Donna Schwartz, Town Clerk for the Town of Ocean View, who was on loan to the committee for the meeting. He also noted that Carol Houck, Town Manager, was present at the meeting.

Ms. Weaver questioned whether there would be a waiver for the committee to sign before they did their twenty hours of training. Chief McLaughlin said yes, and that he would reach out to DELGIS regarding confidentiality waivers.

The Chairperson Driver opened the meeting to public comments.

Mr. Bob Herrington, Ocean View, stated how proud he was and pleased that the Chiefs are working together. He thanked everyone.

Mr. Harold Stafford, Health Initiative, also thanked everyone and said he was looking forward to working with the PAC. He noted that he is basically involved in high crime, low-income communities where they provide LED lightbulbs, installing over 18,000 lights. They have helped Milford with a 12% reduction in crime.

Mr. Ed Donnelly, Ocean View CERT, commended all the volunteers, and said that they are available to help with many situations. He wished the group the best of luck.

A motion was made by Ms. Weaver, seconded by Pastor McGee, to adjourn the meeting at 11:45am.