

Town of West Seneca



# Policing Reform Plan

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WS Police Reform & Reinvention Task Force

Approved: March XX, 2021  
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# WS Police Reform and Reinvention Task Force

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## Members

Carol Quinnan  
Dianne Woch  
Nancy Aguglia  
Gary Gossel  
Tina Donovan  
Michael Hughes  
Elise Franco  
Richard Schunke  
Ray Ball  
Aimee Smart  
Stefanie Matta  
Patrick Braunscheidel  
Robert Deppeller  
Patrick Quinlivan  
Mark Vaughn

## Advisors

Gary Dickson, Town of West Seneca Supervisor  
Daniel Denz, Chief of Police  
Edward Baker, Assistant Chief of Police  
Brian Cosgrove, Captain of Patrol  
James Unger, Captain of Administration / Public Information Officer  
Samantha Lawicki, Hilbert College

## Facilitator

Amelia Greenan, Chief of Staff

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## **Executive Summary:**

In compliance with New York State Executive Order No. 203, West Seneca Town Supervisor Gary Dickson formed a Police Reform and Reinvention Task Force in December 2020. Comprised of a diverse group of local stakeholders and residents, the Task Force was required to conduct a comprehensive review of the West Seneca Police Department (WSPD) by evaluating the department's current policies and practices and addressing any racial bias or disproportionate policing of communities of color. At the conclusion of its work, the Task Force was charged with developing a "Policing Reform Plan" with a summary of the comprehensive review and recommendations to be approved by the Town Board. Following public review of the report, it must be certified as complete with New York State by April 1, 2021.

Supervisor Dickson appointed the members of the Task Force on December 7, 2020. An introductory meeting was held on December 15, 2020, and at the next meeting on December 29<sup>th</sup>, Chief of Police Daniel Denz provided an extensive presentation on the WSPD. Starting on January 5, 2021, the Task Force met weekly to review consider the governor's Key Questions and Considerations. This process was completed on February 2<sup>nd</sup> and recommendations were drafted on February 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. A survey regarding the WSPD was released to the public on February 4<sup>th</sup> and ran until February 28<sup>th</sup>. The draft report was approved by the Task Force on February 23<sup>rd</sup>. Two public listening sessions will be held on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and March 4<sup>th</sup>. The draft report will be finalized on March 16<sup>th</sup> and sent to the Town Board for approval.

Information gathered through public listening sessions, a public survey, and conversations with stakeholders and community members showcases a police force that is compassionately and proactively protecting and serving with the community and is also highly valued and well-regarded. The work of the department was described as "transformative vs. transactional". While findings show areas of excellence, the department is committed to implementing recommendations for improvement and was an active participant in collaborative discussion and review. West Seneca Police Chief Daniel Denz is fully supportive of the Task Force's mission.

The WS Police Reform and Reinvention Task Force utilized the "NYS Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Resources and Guide for Public Officials and Citizens" (Guidebook) to conduct a thorough and comprehensive review of the West Seneca Police Department. Recommendations included an increase in statistical data, embedding a social worker into the Police Force, hiring more police officers, creating an anonymous virtual mailbox for complaints or comment submissions, a "Community Outreach Liaison/Division" and a "Citizen Police Advisory Committee", posting an annual public survey and conducting extensive research on the potential funding of police body cameras.

After the Town Board approves the Policing Reform Plan, the Town Supervisor's Office will file Plan Certification Form, per Executive Order 203. Implementation of the recommendations will begin, and the Citizen Police Advisory Committee will work with the Police Department quarterly to follow up on measured progress.

## **Background:**

### **Town of West Seneca**

The Town of West Seneca (the “Town”) is located in Erie County, NY. The Town has a total area of 21 square miles and is bordered to the west by the Cities of Buffalo and Lackawanna, to the north by the Town of Cheektowaga, to the east by the Town of Elma, and to the South by the Town of Orchard Park. The population of the Town in 2010 was 44,711 persons of which 97.9% identified as Caucasian, 1.67% as Hispanic or Latino, 1.1% as Black or African American, with Asian, Native American, and other races making up the rest of the population.

The Town was originally established as a territory for Native American tribes displaced by the American Revolutionary War. It was officially established in 1852 by a communal religious sect whose trades were logging the area’s natural hardwoods and farming the fertile land between the numerous tributaries that lay within the town’s borders.

Today, the community is a vibrant first-ring suburb of the City of Buffalo, primarily made up of residential neighborhoods with some light retail and commercial development.

### **West Seneca Police Department**

The Town of West Seneca Police Department (“WSPD”) is a full time Police Department consisting of 68 sworn police officers. Due to a recent round of retirements, the current number of sworn police officers stands at 63. The department also employs 9 full-time and 9 part-time Public Safety Dispatchers and 4 full-time clerical staff. The WSPD operates around the clock, seven days a week, and provides innovative, professional police protection. It is led by Police Chief Daniel Denz, Assistant Chief Edward Baker, three captains, and 10 lieutenants. The WSPD includes a Detective Bureau, currently with nine full-time detectives. Five officers serve as “School Resource Officers” assigned to work with the various schools in the Town.

The WSPD provides a full range of police functions to the Town, including patrol and investigative activities, as well as numerous community policing initiatives. The department patrols over 150 miles of local roads and state highways and protects one of the largest school districts in New York State.

In 1993 the West Seneca Police Department received accreditation from the New York State Law Enforcement Accreditation Council. According to the accrediting organization, this signifies that the agency “is committed to excellence in leadership, resources management, and community policing.” West Seneca is proud to have been one of the first to receive this recognition and is one that it still holds today, having been re-evaluated by the council in June of 2018.

In 2003 West Seneca was the first agency in the Western New York Region to establish a School Resource Officer (SRO) program. West Seneca was also one of the first to create a crisis negotiation team and provide mental health response diversity and de-escalation training to West Seneca officers. The department is community-oriented with a full array of neighborhood watch groups, school programs, bike patrols, and a Stop, Walk & Talk program.

Recent incidents involving police officers in cities across the United States speaks to the need to continue along a path of evolution. The West Seneca Police Department is committed to working hand-in-hand with the Task Force to help bring about recommendations and reforms that reflect both the needs of the community, and those of the men and women who serve and protect the Town.

*West Seneca Police Department Mission & Values*

“The principal mission of the West Seneca Police Department is to preserve the rights of citizens while maintaining public confidence through the prevention of crime and the maintenance of order in public places. This basic mission will be accomplished by our members anticipating and responding to events that threaten public safety, thereby securing the protection of life and property.

It is essential that all members remember that in the execution of their duties, they act not for themselves, but at all times, for the good of the public. They shall respect and protect the rights of individuals they encounter and professionally perform their services with honesty, zeal, courage, discretion, fidelity and sound judgment.

West Seneca Police Officers shall seek and preserve public favor by demonstrating absolute impartiality, and by offering themselves to the service of all members of the community.”

## **NYS Police Reform & Reinvention Collaborative:**

One of the essential roles of government is to maintain public safety, which requires mutual trust and respect between police and the communities they serve. The success and safety of society depends on positive police-community relationships and policies that allow police to protect every member of the public. Government has a responsibility to ensure that all its citizens are treated equally, fairly, and justly before the law.

On June 12, 2020, the NYS Governor signed Executive Order 203 entitled, “New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative” which requires each local government in the state to adopt a policing reform plan by April 1, 2021. The order authorizes the Director of the Division of the Budget to condition State aid to localities on the adoption of such a plan.

Before adopting such plan, Executive Order 203 asks each local government entity to perform a comprehensive review of the current police force deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, and consider evidence-based policing strategies. The Supervisor of the Town is required by to convene the head of WSPD and stakeholders in the community to conduct the comprehensive review and create a plan to adopt and implement the recommendations resulting from its review and consultation. The reform plan must be offered for public opinion before it is proposed to the Town Board of West Seneca.

With more than 500 law enforcement agencies in New York, the Governor recognizes the uniqueness of each community and that there is no “one size fits all solution”. Executive Order 203 states that in coordination with the resources of the Division of Criminal Justice Services and the Division of the Budget, local governments may “increase the effectiveness of the criminal justice system by ensuring that the local police agencies within the state have been actively engaged with stakeholders in the local community and have locally-approved plans for the strategies, policies and procedures of local police agencies.”

In conducting the comprehensive review, the Town must evaluate the department’s current policies and practices to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color and promote trust, fairness, and legitimacy. On August 17, 2020, the Office of Budget released a Guidance Document to assist municipalities in the execution of the comprehensive review and development of a policing reform plan.

West Seneca Town Supervisor Gary A. Dickson formed a “WS Police Reform and Reinvention Task Force” to conduct the comprehensive review, seek public opinion and propose a policing reform plan to the Town Board. The task force utilized the Guidance Document from the State to conduct the comprehensive review and formulate the plan in accordance with Executive Order 203.

The Town must then transmit a certification to the Director of the Division of the Budget to affirm that the Town has complied with the Executive Order and the required local law or resolution has been adopted approving the Plan.

## **WS Police Reform & Reinvention Task Force:**

A key objective of the NYS Police Reform and Reinvention Committee is that the comprehensive review and development of the policing reform plan is collaborative. To comply, West Seneca Town Supervisor Gary A. Dickson formed a “WS Police Reform and Reinvention Task Force” to conduct the comprehensive review, seek public opinion and propose a policing reform plan to the Town Board.

The Task force consisted of stakeholders from the community, with an emphasis in areas with high numbers of police and community interactions, non-profit and faith-based community groups, the Town Supervisor’s Office, West Seneca Police Department, social work experts, and members from the healthcare, education, and business community. The Task Force was also in contact with the media, especially for the promotion of the public survey and updates to the public to promote openness and transparency.

The Task Force was required to:

- Review the needs of the community served by the WSPD
- Evaluate the relevant policies and practices of the department
- Identify standards and strategies that foster trust, fairness, transparency, accountability, and legitimacy
- Confirm or establish policies that allow police to effectively and safely perform their duties
- Involve stakeholders and community members in listening sessions and elicit input from the public
- Develop recommendations resulting from this review
- Offer a plan for public comment
- Present the plan to the local legislative body to ratify or adopt it
- Certify adoption of the plan to the State Budget Director on or before April 1, 2021.

Supervisor Dickson appointed the members of the Task Force on December 7, 2020. An introductory meeting was held on December 15, 2020, and at the next meeting on December 29<sup>th</sup>, Chief of Police Daniel Denz provided an extensive presentation on the WSPD. Starting on January 5, 2021, the Task Force met weekly to review the governor’s Key Questions and Considerations. This process was completed on February 2<sup>nd</sup> and recommendations were drafted on February 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. A survey regarding the WSPD was released to the public on February 4<sup>th</sup> and ran until February 28<sup>th</sup>. The draft report was approved by the Task Force. Two public listening sessions will be held on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and March 4<sup>th</sup>. The draft report will be finalized on March 16<sup>th</sup> and sent to the Town Board for approval.



## **Comprehensive Review:**

The WS Police Reform and Reinvention Task Force met weekly and used the “NYS Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Resources and Guide for Public Officials and Citizens” (Guidebook) to facilitate the “Comprehensive Review” of the West Seneca Police Department. Additionally, attendees were given presentations from the WSPD and other information on department’s policing procedures and policies to thoroughly investigate all areas of consideration described in the NYS Guidebook.

The Guidebook contains four topics of exploration with 2-5 subsections within each. The Task Force uncovered several areas of improvement and excellence within the West Seneca Police Department. Below is a summary of the findings most highlighted during discussion, which usually resulted in a comment or recommendation. More extensive details on the discussions that made up the Comprehensive Review can be found in the WS Police Perspective Responses in Appendix D.

**The first question that the Task Force was asked to consider is, “What functions should the Police Perform?”. Within this section, they were tasked with determining the “Role of the Police” and to explore the staffing, budgeting and equipment of the West Seneca Police Department.**

The principal mission of the West Seneca Police Department is to preserve the rights of citizens while maintaining public confidence through the prevention of crime and the maintenance of order in public places. This basic mission is accomplished by police members anticipating and responding to events that threaten public safety, thereby securing the protection of life and property.

The primary activities of police officers in West Seneca involve a proactive approach of patrolling neighborhoods, responding to, and investigating emergency calls and reports of criminal activity, and covering service calls related to quality-of-life issues.

Citizen complaints against actual misconduct involving WSPD police officers are very rare. The vast majority of complaints received are minor in nature, and usually involve a misunderstanding during a citizen interaction, or a complainant being unsatisfied with receiving a traffic ticket, or the response to a call that resulted in an outcome not of their personal desire. However, all complaints are investigated no matter the nature of significance of the accusation.

To better support the Police Department’s positive reputation and increase transparency and accountability, the Task Force concluded that statistical data should be included in the annual report from the WSPD regarding the number of complaints filed against the Police Department (and how many of those complaints were found to be valid).

The Task Force would also like to make it easier for the community to communicate issues, comments and complaints to the Police Department. Therefore, the Task Force is recommending that the department set up a “mailbox” on the West Seneca Police Department webpage (<http://wspolice.com/>) that is anonymous but allows the option to leave a follow up contact. This

virtual mailbox will be used as an opportunity for residents to submit a comment/complaint to the West Seneca Police Department. Mailbox submissions will be sent to the Chief of Police and will not be posted online for public viewing. Additionally, the number of complaints submitted will be included in the annual report.

The Task Force and the Police Department agreed that the West Seneca Police Department and community can significantly benefit from having social service personnel embedded into the Police Department. The West Seneca Police Department currently takes a proactive vs reactive approach to addressing many mental health situations. Most often these situations are “cyclical” and repeat. The West Seneca Police Department currently tries to implement preventative measures and build up a strong rapport and trust with repeat cases while the individuals in these situations are doing well. Doing so, creates a more trusted, cooperative, and productive interaction when the individual is not doing well.

Several committee members who had expertise in social work added that having the same social worker responding alongside the Police Department is crucial for not only the Police Force, but also for individuals who call the police for assistance on a regular basis. Experience has shown interactions are much more productive when the individual is familiar with and trusts the social worker, verses experiencing a different social worker each time who has also not worked with the Police Department before. Therefore, to increase resources to the West Seneca Police Department and community, the Task Force recommended that the WSPD hire or contract for one social worker to be embedded in the police force, pending the consideration and approval of the Town Board.

Members of the Task Force found that the West Seneca Police Department appears to be “transformational” verses “transactional” in their interactions with the public. Additionally, the Task Force learned that there is not a tremendous amount of violence in the Town, but there are numerous proactive programs. For example, the WSPD has a strong relationship with the schools through their School Resource Officer Program. This program has been extremely well-regarded and other Towns across the nation have modeled their program after West Seneca’s. Comments in the public survey sent out by the Task Force later illustrated the unanimous favor and positive regard for the program.

The West Seneca Police Department was also the first agency in Western New York to develop and institute a Youth Court Program. WS Youth Court was founded in 1985 with its purpose to act as an alternative to minors entering the legal system at an early age, via arrest and remand through Family Court. Participation is offered to West Seneca youth between the ages of thirteen and seventeen years-old with an interest in the juvenile criminal justice system and law. Members must be students in good standing and complete an in-house training program prior to participating. The members are provided opportunities to speak with both judicial and law enforcement professionals on court processes before final selection to serve is made.

To increase capacity and the opportunity to continue the positive work of the West Seneca Police Department, the Task Force recommended that the West Seneca Town Board consider hiring two additional officers, thereby increasing the Police Chief's recommended level of 68 sworn officers to 70.

The NYS Guidebook asked the Task Force to explore the Police Department's engagement in crowd control and military equipment.

The Task Force learned that the West Seneca Police Department does not have, nor has ever had a Riot Control Team or a SWAT Unit. Officers receive crowd control training in the police academy, however that is the extent of it. WSPD crowd control endeavors consist of major community event planning and annual occurrences. The current strategy is to seek outside agency assistance through mutual aid requests should the need arise.

The only military equipment that the West Seneca Police Department has is a Humvee vehicle, which is only used for search and rescue situations, like those of which involve flooding and snowstorms. The closest "equipment" tool the department has in addition to the Humvee vehicle is a "pepper ball" which is not comparable by any means to tear gas. Pepper balls are only used on rare occasion, for example when someone is barricaded in a house or a room, the police force may use this instead of force so that they can get the barricaded individual out and take them into custody.

**The second area the NYS Guidebook asks municipalities to explore is the topic of "Exploring Smart and Effective Policing Standards and Strategies". This includes, "Procedural Justice and Community Policing", "Law Enforcement Strategies to Reduce Racial Disparities and Build Trust", and "Community Engagement".**

The West Seneca Police Department has received training on procedural justice and implicit bias since 2016, before this became an unfunded mandate from NYS. The West Seneca Police Department is committed to meet all the requirements set forth by NYS.

The Task Force was challenged with investigating all of the policing strategies that have raised concern among the public, including "Broken Windows", "Stop and Frisk", "Discriminatory or Bias-Based Stops Searches and Arrests", "Chokeholds and Other Restrictions on Breathing", "Use of Force for Punitive or Retaliatory Reasons", "Pretextual Stops", "Informational Quotas or Summonses, Tickets or Arrests", "Shooting at Moving Vehicles and High Speed Pursuits", "Use of SWAT Teams and No-Knock Warrants", and "Less-Than-Lethal Weaponry such as Tasers and Pepper Spray".

The Task Force and the West Seneca Police Department recognize that there have been negative incidents in other communities by using the "Broken Windows" and "Stop and Frisk" policing strategies. However, West Seneca has never encountered an issue of abuse with these methods which have proved to be useful practices in the Town. According to the perspective of the police department, no individual group has been unfairly targeted in West Seneca using these strategies.

The Police Officers are trained to investigate “suspicious activity” based on observation of individual behavior, not because of race, gender, or other group factors. Officers are taught to observe unusual behavior that is out of place for a particular set of circumstances at hand and to investigate the situation impartially to determine whether criminal activity is afoot.

The Task Force examined “Discriminatory or Bias-Based Stops, Searches and Arrests” and understands this is a serious issue in other municipalities. As mentioned previously, all Town of West Seneca Police Officers are trained to conduct all citizen contacts based on behavior, not race, creed, age, gender, or other group orientation. All police officers have participated in an extensive Implicit Bias training session and are expected to conduct themselves accordingly. Any police action outside such scope is strictly prohibited and is never tolerated.

“Chokeholds and Other Restrictions on Breathing” have never been a part of the West Seneca Police policy and WSPD officers do not receive training regarding techniques involving chokeholds. Law enforcement use of chokeholds is now illegal in the State of New York per statute and is severely restricted by Federal Law as well.

Any police “Use of Force for Punitive or Retaliatory Reasons” is strictly prohibited and never tolerated. Per the Department’s “Use of Force” policy, Officers are mandated to intercede to stop another officer if they observe this occurring, they are mandated to report the occurrence to a supervisor.

Regarding “Pretextual Stops”, although these are not routine, this strategy is incorporated from time to time in West Seneca, to further investigations and ferret out suspected clandestine criminal activity. It is legal and an acceptable practice throughout the law enforcement profession nationwide.

The Town of West Seneca Police Department does not base enforcement measures on a quota system. The only place this appears is within the annual Employee Evaluation process for individual employees. The statistical data on the number of summonses, traffic tickets or arrests is solely used as one component to measure the overall performance of an individual officer. There is no baseline expectation standard, or comparison to other employees’ statistics, made during the process.

High-Speed Pursuits are extremely rare in the Town of West Seneca. The Task Force learned that the Supervisor can call off a chase anytime the chase is becoming unsafe for the public. The police will not jeopardize the public if they can avoid a high-speed chase. It is not the policy of the WSPD to shoot at a moving vehicle unless it is necessary in self-defense or if the occupants present an imminent danger to life if not immediately apprehended. If one of those elements is not present, an officer may not discharge a firearm for the sole purpose of disabling a vehicle.

The West Seneca Police does not have, nor ever has had, a SWAT Unit. On the rare circumstance there is a need for a tactical team, WSPD has a shared services verbal agreement with the Town

of Orchard Park Police Department to use their SWAT unit, or the Erie County Sheriff's SWAT team is utilized under a mutual aid call out.

The Police Department does utilize "No-Knock Warrants", but on extremely rare occasions. These are very limited in scope per NYS Criminal Procedural Law and must reach a high level of competency before a Judicial Magistrate will issue one.

The deployment of all the "Less-Than Lethal Weaponry" utilized by the Department is covered under A-20.6 of the General Orders and Procedures Manual. Officers must go through an initial, extensive training program on each less-than-lethal weapon platform and be certified to use a particular item, then complete annual refresher course to maintain their certification.

The final policing strategy the Task Force investigated was "Facial Recognition Technology" that the West Seneca Police Department does not use.

The West Seneca Police Department conducts diversion programs, restorative justice programs and de-escalation strategies to reduce racial disparities and build trust. Some of these programs include programs discussed in the previous sections like Youth Court, School Resource Officers, and "Verbal Judo". The West Seneca Police Department illustrated to the Task Force how they effectively identify, investigate, and prosecute hate crimes.

The Task Force learned that there were already several community outreach activities, partnerships, contacts, and efforts executed and maintained at the WSPD. However, moving forward, these efforts should fall under one concentrated liaison or division that will intentionally maintain, strengthen, and increase opportunities for better communication, transparency, and trust with the community.

Therefore, the Task Force is recommending that the West Seneca Police Department create a "Community Outreach Liaison/Division" that must build and maintain partnerships with community organizations and faith communities, and develop and maintain contacts with limited English proficiency citizens, citizens with communication disabilities, LGBTQIA and immigrant communities. This Community Outreach Liaison/Division" will also plan and execute additional communications and public relations between the WSPD and the community and explore ways to increase citizen participation and involvement in partnership with the Citizen Police Advisory Committee.

The Task Force learned that there is no standing citizen advisory board or committee. Currently, the elected officials on the Town Board act in this capacity as representatives of the residents. The Task Force had gained significant knowledge and an understanding of the current operations of the West Seneca Police Department. It is important that there is also follow up action on recommendations submitted and approved by the Town Board. Therefore, the Task Force made the recommendation to use their current organized and informed membership and transition into a "Citizen Police Advisory Committee" after the Policing Reform Plan is approved. The new

committee will meet quarterly to follow up on recommendations approved by the Town Board and will be open to membership and involvement to anyone who is interested.

**Section 3 of the NYS Guidebook inspects the topic of “Fostering Community-Oriented Leadership, Culture and Accountability”. Subsections within this topic include, “Leadership and Culture”, “Tracking and Reviewing Use of Force and Identifying Misconduct”, “Internal Accountability for Misconduct”, “Citizen Oversight and Other External Accountability”, and “Data, Technology and Transparency”.**

When selecting the leadership of the West Seneca Police Department, the department must abide by Civil Service Law and requirements. Any evaluations must meet the standards set forth by NYS Accreditation mandates.

When officers report any use of force to their supervisors, this process is strictly governed within the West Seneca Police Department’s Use of Force Policy. When a significant use of force or misconduct case arise, the department will seek assistance from the Erie County District Attorney, the NYS Attorney General, or the United States District Attorney. As of April 1, 2021, it will be mandated by NYS law that the Chief of Police report use of force incidents that result in any death of an unarmed civilian directly to the NYS Attorney General.

The WSPD has created a culture in which every officer knows they are expected to report any misconduct of their employees. According to the Chief of Police, WSPD officers collectively take an enormous amount of personal pride in their work environment and profession. As a result, any “bad” officers are purged from the workforce. In addition, the Chief of Police is one of the lead Police Ethics instructors at the Police Academy and demands the utmost in officer conduct.

To increase community participation and gain a regular perspective from the community on their opinion towards the services of the Police Department, the Task Force is recommending that the Town of West Seneca post an annual survey (similar to the Police Reform Survey) on their website and social media on an annual basis. Doing so will help measure progress and identify issues in the future so that West Seneca can continue to maintain and strengthen a well-run and well-regarded Police Department that continues to strive for innovation and improvement.

The West Seneca Police Department presented to the Task Force on the research they have thus far conducted on body cameras. The department recognizes both the value and the cost of introducing this form of technology that can help ensure law enforcement accountability and increase transparency. The Task Force recommends that the West Seneca Police Department should conduct a long-term research study on body cameras in partnership with the Town Board. The Task Force agreed that body cameras can help with transparency, accountability, and protection for the West Seneca Police Department.

**The fourth and final section of the “Key Questions and Insights” offered in the NYS Guidebook was “Recruiting and Supporting Excellent Personnel”. This includes,**

**“Recruiting a Diverse Workforce”, “Training and Continuing Education”, and “Support Officer Wellness and Wellbeing”.**

There were no recommendations that derived from this section of the comprehensive review.

The West Seneca Police Department’s hiring process is regulated under NYS Civil Service Law. However, it routinely promotes and recruits for the department at events, through awareness in the local media, and with participation in local college job fairs. The WSPD is actively engaged with the youth in the local schools.

Regarding “Training and Continuing Education”, the WSPD is in compliance through mandates set by the NYS Municipal Training Council and the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services Accreditation Program.

Regarding “Officer Wellness and Well-being”, officers in the West Seneca Police Department are provided resources while in the Erie County Central Police Services Training Academy. This includes a segment through the Western New York Stress Reduction Program, which is an instructional opportunity both the officer and their loved ones.

In 2021, the West Seneca Police Department will be providing training in Procedural Justice through in-service training. This curriculum has a component which focuses directly on the root causes of stress in policing and strategies for reducing its impact.

Officers in the West Seneca Police Department are limited in their shift lengths to lower stress levels and officer wellness. Officers are not permitted to work back-to-back shifts (doubles) and are not permitted to work overtime of more than four hours in conjunction with their regular 8-hour shift, (unless a significant emergency exists). Additionally, the construction of the schedule for patrol officers through the collective bargaining agreement provides for rotating days off, which allows all officers to periodically have weekends off.

The West Seneca Police has officers assigned in peer support capacity through the Western New York Law Enforcement Helpline. The officers are trained to proactively solicit their services to other law enforcement personnel and are available in a confidential setting to provide guidance to those suffering from a multitude of problems, to include thoughts of suicide, problem drinking, substance abuse and dependency, among others. The Town of West Seneca also provides an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through Child and Family Services, which guides employees and their families into a myriad of confidential services should the need arise.

If a traumatic event occurs, the West Seneca Police Department does utilize the same services described above to provide assistance to officers. These officers provide guidance on what to expect emotionally after a traumatic event and provide resources in an effort to proactively address officer well-being. The West Seneca Police Department also utilizes mental health professionals to conduct debriefings in the immediate time frame following these events.

After concluding the comprehensive review, the Task Force spent two more meetings discussing and refining recommendations that came out of discussion during the review and presentations. Results from the public survey were also considered when developing each of the recommendations and evaluating any other areas of the West Seneca Police Department.



## **Public Survey:**

Through a partnership with Hilbert College, the Task Force offered a public survey on the Town and Police Department's webpage to gain the perspective of West Seneca Residents. The local media and Town and WSPD social media accounts promoted the survey which received 767 number of responses. The survey was posted on February 4<sup>th</sup> and concluded on February 28<sup>th</sup>.

Each week the survey was posted, the WS Police Reform and Reinvention Committee reviewed the responses and factored in the input of residents while conducting the comprehensive review and building the Policing Reform Plan.

The survey results below were provided by Samantha Lawicki from Hilbert College and added on March 1:

### **Number of participants: 767**

Of those **764 consented** to the survey.

Of the 764, **747 lived in West Seneca.**

### **Years of residency:**

Less than a year: 7

1-3 years: 42

4-6 years: 49

7-9 years: 49

10+ years: 600

### **Gender:**

Female: 464

Male: 279

Prefer not to identify: 15

### **Age Group:**

18-26: 32

27-35: 114

36-44: 138

45-53: 160

56-64: 184

65+: 130

### **Race:**

White/ Caucasian: 738

Black/ African American: 2

Hispanic/ Latino: 5

Asian or Asian American: 3  
Native American: 1  
Other/ Prefer not to say: 9

**Level of Education:**

High School/ GED: 179  
Associate's Degree: 171  
Bachelor's Degree: 222  
Master's Degree: 170  
PhD: 15

**Interactions with Department:**

0: 191  
1-3: 415  
4-6: 67  
7+: 85

**Treated Professionally:**

Yes: 552  
No: 18  
N/A: 188

**Treated Respectfully:**

Yes: 544  
No: 22  
N/A: 191

**Nature of Interaction:**

Traffic Stop: 121  
MVA: 84  
9/11 Call: 82  
Call for Service (non-emergent): 163  
Domestic: 16  
Report a crime: 128  
Random public interaction: 231  
Arrest: 3  
Community Policing: 145  
N/A: 184  
Other: 86

**Services that are the most beneficial:**

Investigating crimes: 613  
Narcotics Investigations: 229  
Targeted Patrol: 370  
Vehicle and Traffic Enforcement: 273  
Welfare Check: 169  
SRO: 197  
Desk Officer: 83  
Community Policing: 309  
Premise Check: 159  
Taking calls regarding individuals with mental health crisis: 135  
Responding to medical calls: 181  
Accident Investigation: 207  
Other: 24

**Greatest Public Safety Concerns (participants could chose up to three options):**

Theft: 511  
Burglary: 416  
Child Abuse: 127  
Domestic Violence: 275  
DWI: 269  
Fraud: 69  
Gun Violence: 63  
Drug Offense: 302  
Faster response times: 56  
Other: 31

**Likelihood to approach officer:**

Very likely: 586  
Likely: 122  
Unlikely: 31  
Very Unlikely: 18

**Suggested improvements to the service provided by WSPD and ways to build a better relationship (participants could choose up to three options):**

Community based policing: 406  
Enhanced Social Services: 170  
School and youth program involvement: 387  
Community Outreach Programs: 354  
Other: 96

**Ways to improve transparency and accountability (participants could choose up to three options):**

Body Cameras: 470

Dash cameras: 419

Released reports of police misconduct: 172

Officer complaints investigated by outside agency: 223

Citizens involvement of reviewing police policy: 125

Citizen review board to determine discipline: 92

Officer reviewboard to determine discipline: 114

Access to officer complaints by community: 108

Ability to track complaints made to agency: 130

Other: 53

**Witnessed or experienced a WS Police Officer discriminating or profiling:**

Yes: 20

No: 738

If yes, please describe the experience:

Planned Parenthood Incident.

Regarding stops of persons of color.

Stopping kids when there was no cause.

**Satisfaction with overall performance of the WSPD?**

Very: 564

Satisfied: 145

Neutral: 35

Dissatisfied: 7

Very Dissatisfied: 6

**WS Police Officers treat people fairly:**

Strongly Agree: 507

Agree: 222

Disagree: 21

Strongly Disagree: 7

**Short Answer Summary**

**Role of WSPD:**

Majority of respondents stated protect and/ serve.

Keep the community safe.

Uphold the law

**Description of perspective/experience with WSPD:**

Overall, very positive remarks regarding the department as excellent, and one of the better departments. Generally, all positive comments encouraging the department to keep up the good work.

**Transparency and Accountability:**

Most participants stated this is extremely important. They want everyone to be held accountable for their actions. They also stated this means no secrets and again, that the WSPD does well maintaining transparency and accountability.

**Do you believe the WSPD is transparent and accountable?**

Most participants answered yes, with only a few seeking additional action.

**Improvements for future:**

Many did not respond or commented that the department was doing a great job. The top answers included more officers, body cameras, keeping up with social media, and keeping School Resource Officers.

**Ways to improve relationship between WSPD and the community:**

Many again did not reply, but responses included more community events/interactions, updates on social media and bail reform.

**Additional Comments:**

There were many positive remarks with high regard for the operations of the WSPD. Bail reform was mentioned a few times, as well as the use of social media. Overall, the consensus was to keep the community involved and updated. The results have shown that most of the community has a great relationship with the police department.

“Considering all that has been presented, I think the community should be offered more information regarding the actual operations of the police department. The community does not currently know everything such as trainings that the police department conducts for their officers. If they know the extent of what the department does, I believe the relationship will continue to strengthen. Perhaps those who were unsure of the department, might feel more comfortable with the officers if they know how much work is done internally and behind the scenes.

Before this reform project, the committee along with myself did not realize how much training and community events were held by the department. Overall, the results were remarkable considering how much the community trusts and respects the police department, as well as how much the department wants to involve the community and change to make it better for the residents they serve.” - Samantha Lawicki, Hilbert College

## Summary of Recommendations:

1. To increase transparency, the West Seneca Police Department will include statistical data on the number of complaints filed against the Police Department and how many of those complaints were found to be valid in their Annual Report beginning March 2022. Additionally, this report will contain demographic data on traffic tickets, like race and gender (found on the driver's license). The Annual Report can be found on the West Seneca Police Webpage (<https://wspolice.com/>).
2. To increase transparency and communication opportunities with the community, within 30 days of approval of the Plan, the West Seneca Police Department will set up a "mailbox" on the West Seneca Police Department webpage (<https://wspolice.com/>) that is both anonymous and allows the option for a follow up contact. This virtual mailbox will be used as an opportunity for residents to submit a comment/complaint to the West Seneca Police Department. Mailbox submissions will be sent to the Chief of Police and will not be posted online for public viewing. The number of complaints submitted will be included in the Annual Report. (See Recommendation #1.)
3. For an increase in resources to the West Seneca Police Department and community, the West Seneca Police Department, with approval of the Town Board and proper budgetary appropriation, will hire or contract for one social worker to be embedded in the police force.
4. To increase capacity and with proper budgetary appropriation, the West Seneca Town Board will consider the hiring of two additional officers, increasing the Police Chief's recommended sworn manpower from 68, to a total staff of 70.
5. Within 120 days of approval of the Plan, The West Seneca Police Department will create a "Community Outreach Liaison/Division" as a means of increasing communication, transparency and trust with the community. This liaison/division will:
  - build and maintain partnerships with community organizations and faith communities
  - develop and maintain contacts with limited English proficiency citizens, citizens with communication disabilities, LGBTQIA and immigrant communities
  - plan and execute additional communications and public relations between the WSPD and the community
  - explore ways to increase citizen participation and involvement in partnership with the Citizen Police Advisory Committee
6. The Town of West Seneca will form a "Citizen Police Advisory Committee" that will meet quarterly beginning in July 2021 to follow up on recommendations approved by the Town Board. The "Police Reform and Reinvention Task Force" will transition into the "Citizen Police Advisory Committee" but will be open to new membership. The recommended size of the committee is 9-13 members.

7. Every January, the Town of West Seneca will conduct an annual survey for thirty days to gain the perspective of the community on the West Seneca Police Department. The results will be provided to the Citizen Police Advisory Committee no later than March.
8. To increase both transparency and protection, the West Seneca Police Department will continue to research the implementation and maintenance of body cameras and the immediate and long-term costs and benefits thereof in partnership with the Town Board.



## **Appendices:**

Appendix A: Executive Order

Appendix B: Plan Certification Form

Appendix C: Presentations

Appendix D: WS Police Perspective Responses

## APPENDIX A

No. 203

### EXECUTIVE ORDER

#### **NEW YORK STATE POLICE REFORM AND REINVENTION COLLABORATIVE**

**WHEREAS**, the Constitution of the State of New York obliges the Governor to take care that the laws of New York are faithfully executed; and

**WHEREAS**, I have solemnly sworn, pursuant to Article 13, Section 1 of the Constitution, to support the Constitution and faithfully discharge the duties of the Office of Governor; and

**WHEREAS**, beginning on May 25, 2020, following the police-involved death of George Floyd in Minnesota, protests have taken place daily throughout the nation and in communities across New York State in response to police-involved deaths and racially-biased law enforcement to demand change, action, and accountability; and

**WHEREAS**, there is a long and painful history in New York State of discrimination and mistreatment of black and African-American citizens dating back to the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in America; and

**WHEREAS**, this recent history includes a number of incidents involving the police that have resulted in the deaths of unarmed civilians, predominantly black and African-American men, that have undermined the public's confidence and trust in our system of law enforcement and criminal justice, and such condition is ongoing and urgently needs to be rectified; and

**WHEREAS**, these deaths in New York State include those of Anthony Baez, Amadou Diallo, Ousmane Zango, Sean Bell, Ramarley Graham, Patrick Dorismond, Akai Gurley, and Eric Garner, amongst others, and, in other states, include Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Laquan McDonald, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, Antwon Rose Jr., Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, amongst others,

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**WHEREAS**, these needless deaths have led me to sign into law the Say Their Name Agenda which reforms aspects of policing in New York State; and

**WHEREAS**, government has a responsibility to ensure that all of its citizens are treated equally, fairly, and justly before the law; and

**WHEREAS**, recent outpouring of protests and demonstrations which have been manifested in every area of the state have illustrated the depth and breadth of the concern; and

**WHEREAS**, black lives matter; and

**WHEREAS**, the foregoing compels me to conclude that urgent and immediate action is needed to eliminate racial inequities in policing, to modify and modernize policing strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, and to develop practices to better address the particular needs of communities of color to promote public safety, improve community engagement, and foster trust; and

**WHEREAS**, the Division of the Budget is empowered to determine the appropriate use of funds in furtherance of the state laws and New York State Constitution; and

**WHEREAS**, in coordination with the resources of the Division of Criminal Justice Services, the Division of the Budget can increase the effectiveness of the criminal justice system by ensuring that the local police agencies within the state have been actively engaged with stakeholders in the local community and have locally-approved plans for the strategies, policies and procedures of local police agencies; and

**NOW, THEREFORE**, I, Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of the State of New York, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the Laws of the State of New York, in particular Article IV, section one, I do hereby order and direct as follows:

The director of the Division of the Budget, in consultation with the Division of Criminal Justice Services, shall promulgate guidance to be sent to all local governments directing that:

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Each local government entity which has a police agency operating with police officers as defined under 1.20 of the criminal procedure law must perform a comprehensive review of current police force deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, and develop a plan to improve such deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, for the purposes of addressing the particular needs of the communities served by such police agency and promote community engagement to foster trust, fairness, and legitimacy, and to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color.

Each chief executive of such local government shall convene the head of the local police agency, and stakeholders in the community to develop such plan, which shall consider evidence-based policing strategies, including but not limited to, use of force policies, procedural justice; any studies addressing systemic racial bias or racial justice in policing; implicit bias awareness training; de-escalation training and practices; law enforcement assisted diversion programs; restorative justice practices; community-based outreach and conflict resolution; problem-oriented policing; hot spots policing; focused deterrence; crime prevention through environmental design; violence prevention and reduction interventions; model policies and guidelines promulgated by the New York State Municipal Police Training Council; and standards promulgated by the New York State Law Enforcement Accreditation Program.

The political subdivision, in coordination with its police agency, must consult with stakeholders, including but not limited to membership and leadership of the local police force; members of the community, with emphasis in areas with high numbers of police and community interactions; interested non-profit and faith-based community groups; the local office of the district attorney; the local public defender; and local elected officials, and create a plan to adopt and implement the recommendations resulting from its review and consultation, including any modifications, modernizations, and innovations to its policing deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, tailored to the specific needs of the community and general promotion of improved police agency and community relationships based on trust, fairness, accountability, and transparency, and which seek to reduce any racial disparities in policing.

Such plan shall be offered for public comment to all citizens in the locality, and after consideration of such comments, shall be presented to the local legislative body in such political

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subdivision, which shall ratify or adopt such plan by local law or resolution, as appropriate, no later than April 1, 2021; and

Such local government shall transmit a certification to the Director of the Division of the Budget to affirm that such process has been complied with and such local law or resolution has been adopted; and

The Director of the Division of the Budget shall be authorized to condition receipt of future appropriated state or federal funds upon filing of such certification for which such local government would otherwise be eligible; and

The Director is authorized to seek the support and assistance of any state agency in order to effectuate these purposes.

G I V E N under my hand and the Privy Seal of the State in the City of Albany this twelfth day of June in the year two thousand twenty.

BY THE GOVERNOR

Secretary to the Governor

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APPENDIX B

New York State  
Police Reform and Reinvention  
Collaborative



Town of West Seneca Police  
Guidebook Outline

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## Greetings from the Chief

Dear Town of West Seneca Police Reform Committee Members,

Thank you for playing a key role in the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative. You have been asked to join this very important venture because of your personal commitment to making our community the best place to live, work, learn, and play. Each of you brings a vast amount of knowledge and life experience, and I am sure when your individual perspectives are combined, the Committee's endeavor will culminate in a clear resolution.

As stated in the Governor's Resource guide, communities across the country are working to improve issues concerning their police departments.

We share a common objective to bolster police-community relations by reviewing our police department's operations and procedures in order to insure they are in line with the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative and the best practices for law enforcement moving forward in the 21st century.

The Town of West Seneca Police Department has always been a leader within the local law enforcement profession. We were one of the first agencies to become Accredited through the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, and have remained a model for other law enforcement agencies to follow ever since.

Recent incidents involving police officers in cities across the United States speaks to the need to continue along a path of evolution. The West Seneca Police Department is committed to working hand-in-hand with this Committee to help bring about recommendations and reforms that reflect both the needs of our community, and those of the men and women who serve and protect our Town.

This outline has been provided as an overview of Part 1, Sections I and II of the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Guidebook and is intended to serve as a resource which will give you insight into your police department. I hope you find this initial outline useful as a guide to assist you while making suggestions and achieving the goals of the Committee.

Together, we will continue to lead by example.

Daniel M Denz  
Chief of Police

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, New York State has enacted measures aimed at reforming the criminal justice system and ending mass incarceration in New York. As cited in the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Resources & Guide for Public Officials and Citizens (“the Guidebook”), these statewide measures have included the repeal of Section 50-a of Civil Rights Law, banning chokeholds, prohibiting race-based 911 calls, appointing the Attorney General as Independent Prosecutor for police involved deaths, measures to reduce prison population, bail reform, discovery reform, speedy trial reform, raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18-years-old, requiring videotaping of interrogations and permitting photo identification into evidence.

The following outline presented to the Town of West Seneca Police Reform Committee does not offer an opinion on the effectiveness of these measures nor any others. Instead, the information and data presented in this report describes the current functions and operations of the West Seneca Police Department in alignment with the topics and questions stated in Part 1, Sections I and II, of the Guidebook.

It is the intent of the Town of West Seneca Police Department to provide unbiased, factual information to the Committee to assist members in their formulation and submission of effective recommendations that will serve to improve police-community relations and public safety.

*“Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence” – Sir Robert Peel*

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## **PART 1: KEY QUESTIONS AND INSIGHTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **I. *WHAT FUNCTIONS SHOULD THE POLICE PERFORM?***

#### **Section 1 – Determining the Role of the Police**

##### **A. What role do the police currently play in your community?**

The principal mission of the West Seneca Police Department is to preserve the rights of citizens while maintaining public confidence through the prevention of crime and the maintenance of order in public places. This basic mission is accomplished by our members anticipating and responding to events that threaten public safety, thereby securing the protection of life and property.

##### **B. What are the primary activities of police officers in your community?**

The primary activities of police officers in West Seneca involve a proactive approach of patrolling our neighborhoods, responding to, and investigating emergency calls and reports of criminal activity, and covering service calls related to quality of life issues.

##### **C. How often are complaints made against the police in your community?**

Citizen complaints against actual misconduct involving WSPD police officers are very rare. The vast majority of complaints received are minor in nature, and usually involve a misunderstanding during a citizen interaction, or a complainant being unsatisfied with receiving a traffic ticket, or the response to a call that resulted in an outcome not of their personal desire.

However, all complaints are investigated no matter the nature of significance of the accusation.

**D. Should you deploy social service personnel instead of or in addition to police officers in some situations?**

Current protocol has WSPD coordinating services for emotionally disturbed persons with Erie County Crisis Services. Crisis Services is accompanied by police officers while performing welfare checks based on requests from family members and mental health professionals. If Crisis Services makes a determination an individual is in need of emergency treatment, they direct that the person be sent to the hospital under the authority of NYS Mental Hygiene Law.

In addition, our Family Offense Unit Detectives work hand and hand with advocates from the Family Justice Center, the Child Advocacy Center and Haven House to support families involved with Domestic Violence situations.

**E. Can your community reduce violence more effectively by redeploying resources from policing to other programs?**

**1) Community Based Outreach and Violence Interruption**

This is done through our School Resource Officer and educational programs.

**2) Parent Support**

This is accomplished through our Family Offense Unit Detectives working hand and hand with advocates from the Family Justice Center, the Child Advocacy Center and Haven House to support families involved with Domestic Violence situations.

**3) Youth Development**

• **Youth Court Membership**

The West Seneca Police Department was the first agency in Western New York to develop and institute a Youth Court Program. WS Youth Court was founded in 1985 with its purpose to act as an alternative to minors entering the legal system at an early age, via arrest and remand through Family Court.

Participation is offered to West Seneca youth between the ages of thirteen (13) and seventeen (17) years-old with an interest in the juvenile criminal justice system and law. Members must be students in good standing and complete an in-house training program prior to participating. The members are provided opportunities to speak with both judicial and law enforcement professionals on court processes before final selection to serve is made.

***(See Appendix #6 for a complete description of the program)***

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- **Youth Community Service**

Officers assigned to the School Resource Officer Program volunteer as coaches within the West Seneca School District athletic programs in conjunction to their duties at work. In addition, several other officers volunteer their time as coaches within Town's recreation programs of youth baseball, soccer and hockey. Their involvement in youth sport activities provides opportunities for positive interaction between local youth and members the Police Department, with the officers acting as role models for the participants to follow.

Furthermore, the Police Department assists many other youth activities in Town. Some examples are:

- a) The Town Recreation Department -Summer Play Kit distribution, Trunk or Treat, and the Enchanted Walkway
- b) The annual West Seneca Chamber of Commerce Kids & Families events
- c) National Night Out

#### **4) Addressing Trauma & Preventing Violence at Home**

This is accomplished through our Family Offense Unit Detectives working hand and hand with advocates from the Family Justice Center, the Child Advocacy Center and Haven House to support families involved with Domestic Violence situations.

#### **5) Design of Private and Public Spaces - Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design**

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, (CPTED), is based on the principle that proper design and effective use of buildings and public spaces in neighborhoods can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime, and an improvement in the quality of life. The goal is to prevent crime through designing a physical environment that positively influences human behavior. The process examines how environmental features create opportunities for crime and how those features can be adjusted to eliminate those opportunities.

Adjustments can be implemented to:

- a) Control or make access more difficult
- b) Deter offenders by increasing the risk of apprehension
- c) Increase visibility
- d) Increase or encourage guardianship
- e) Regulate or adjust behaviors and routines; or
- f) Reduce the rewards for crime.

Examples of environmental features that could create opportunities for crime include trees and shrubbery that block visibility; lack of lighting; traffic direction or lack of signaling; abandoned buildings; alleyways or cuts in between buildings; and empty lots hidden from the street.

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Adjustments that address these features may include cutting down shrubs to increase visibility; adding lighting to a dark alley; boarding up abandoned homes; or improving traffic conditions by adding signage, signals and crosswalks.

All WSPD police officers have received specific training in the methods and applications CPTED, and routinely advise residents and business owners on how to improve their surroundings. In addition, WSPD works closely with the Town's Code Enforcement team, Traffic Committee and West Seneca School District Administration to identify areas problematic to the community, so proper actions can be taken to insure that West Seneca is a safe place to live, work, learn and play.

**6) What functions should 911 Call Centers play in your community?**

**a. Who currently staffs your 911 call center?**

The West Seneca dispatch center is a 24/7/365 operation which falls under the direction of the Chief of Police and is located within the West Seneca Police Department. It is staffed by a hybrid of certified Police Officers and both full-time and part-time civilian West Seneca Public Safety Dispatchers. The hybrid model affords an efficient means of delivering police, fire and EMS call screening, assignment and dispatching. In addition, the current model gives members of the public an opportunity to walk into the police station during business hours and weekend days, and speak one-on-one with a police officer who can immediately take a report, answer a question, or give direction to any inquiry.

**b. Are all calls routed to law enforcement, fire, or EMS?**

Yes, all calls are routed to Police, Fire, or EMS. West Seneca is one of the 16 localized dispatch centers (PSAPs) supported by Erie County. The staff directly receives both 911 and non-emergency calls. All calls are prioritized and dispatched for police response and to the six (6) West Seneca Fire Districts as necessary. The dispatch center is also integrated with the local, privatized ambulance service, East Aurora Fire Control and the WS Emergency Operations Center when it is activated. However, there are many occasions where the Dispatchers will reroute, or make referrals, to specific calls to other outside agencies such as utilities, the SPCA, or the Town's Highway Department.

**c. Are there other social services that should be more fully integrated into the 911 call center and the triage process? Would call-takers need new training if your community wanted to shift response functions toward social services?**

That will be dependent upon any county-wide shift towards integrating social services into 911 call centers. PSD's and police officers are familiar with the current paradigm of using Crisis Services as the main resource for social service needs. If that system were to be replaced or overhauled, transitioning training would most likely be needed.

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**d. Should the 911 call center be operated by law enforcement, other social service agencies, or a combination of agencies?**

As previously stated, the West Seneca dispatch center falls under the direction of the Chief of Police and is located within the West Seneca Police Department. It is staffed by a hybrid of certified Police Officers and both full-time and part-time civilian West Seneca Public Safety Dispatchers who maintain focus on emergency and non-emergency calls for services.

Current protocol has WSPD coordinating services for emotionally disturbed persons with Erie County Crisis Services. Crisis Services is accompanied by police officers while performing welfare checks based on requests from family members and mental health professionals. If Crisis Services makes a determination an individual is in need of emergency treatment, they direct that the person be sent to the hospital under the authority of NYS Mental Hygiene Law.

Additionally, WSPD has numerous officers trained as Crisis Intervention specialists. These officers are specifically dispatched to potential mental health interactions and are able to conduct on-site evaluations, independent of Crisis Services, and also have the ability to direct that the person be sent to the hospital under the authority of NYS Mental Hygiene Law.

WSPD Crisis Intervention officers make post treatment follow-up visits to those who they encounter on the street and had sent in for services. This allows for positive relationship building between the police and those served under non-volatile circumstances, ensures they are following treatment and medication regimens, and lessens tensions during future encounters with these individuals.

**7. Should Law Enforcement Have a Presence in Schools?**

**a) School Program:** The Town of West Seneca Police Department has a tradition of being at the forefront of partnering with both the public and parochial schools within its jurisdiction. Beginning in 1984, WSPD established the first level of integration by creating a School Program whereby uniformed police officers went into classrooms, presenting lectures on various topics. This was so successful that a permanent program was put into place in which the Department worked with educators to formulate specific age appropriate curricula and began conducting topical instruction for every grade, K-12. This program is still in existence and gives students information ranging from Officer Friendly to Driving Safety. Other subjects include Stranger Danger, Bullying, and Shoplifting Prevention, just to name a few.

**b) D.A.R.E:** As time went on, the police profession as a whole started to understand how building relationships with students at an early age resulted in a reduction in crime, increased community safety and positive outcomes when interacting with youth outside the school setting. Law enforcement recognized school programs presented a significant opportunity to help tackle the ever increasing crime and medical issues related to illegal drug activity. In 1992, WSPD formally introduced the nationally recognized Drug Abuse Recognition Education program. This program targets students grades 5-7 for a 10-week

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program designed to increase their self-confidence, while at the same time, teaching them strategies on how to avoid behaviors that increase the chances of drug and alcohol abuse. WSPD continues to present D.A.R.E. in the middle schools and is a program known throughout the community.

- c) **School Resource Officer Program:** In 2003, the Department recognized a cutting edge program being slowly implemented in other areas of the United States. The principle is to place a full-time police officer within a school building not as a security guard, enforcer, or solely as an instructor, but rather to act as a liaison with school educators, administrators, healthcare providers and social workers to help link students and their families to outside services, and direct them to these “resources” to improve their circumstances. With that in mind, WSPD, with the assistance of the West Seneca School District, launched a pilot program consisting of two full-time officers, one being placed in each of the high schools. The program became an immediate success. It has since developed into one of the most robust SRO programs within the State, having 5 officers assigned full-time to the District; one in each high school; one in each middle school; and one who travels between the elementary schools. It has become a model on which other police departments establish SRO programs for their agencies. Our SRO team has been asked to present at national law enforcement conferences and has been called upon to directly assist other municipal police agencies and school districts build out programs.

The SRO’s not only act as a liaison, they continue to conduct classroom presentations, work on development of school security plans, help with student intervention and mediation, conduct home visits, sit on Districtwide committees, assist students with class projects, and attend extracurricular activities. Although a School Resource Officer primarily conducts operations through mostly preventative and proactive activities, the SRO’s do in fact maintain their mission as law enforcement officers. There are circumstances in which an SRO has the duty to intervene and take legal action against a student, parent, or staffer. When having to do so, SRO’s are trained to constitutionally enforce the law, while at the same time, exercising a high level of discretion, confidentiality, and compassion.

It is also important to note that after a gunman opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle at [Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School](#) in [Parkland](#), Florida, killing 17 people and injuring 17 others in 2018, the State of New York instituted a mandate that every school district in New York partner with its local police department to establish security and response protocols (NYS Education Law 2801-a). Due to the long standing relationship with the District and the SRO program in particular, the West Seneca Police Department was, and continues to be, far ahead of the curve in this area.

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## **Section 2. STAFFING, BUDGETING, AND EQUIPPING YOUR POLICE DEPARTMENT**

### **A. What are the staffing needs of the Police Department the community wants? Should components of the Police Department be civilianized?**

The current call for police officer positions within the Town of West Seneca Police Department is currently sixty eight (68). This includes all sworn members, from the Chief of Police all the way to Police Officer on the beat. Due to retirements and other turnover, the staffing as of now, sits at sixty (60). The Town Board recognizes the need to be fully staffed and is working on measures to fill all of the open positions.

Furthermore, the Department employs many people in civilianized roles. In addition to the Public Safety Dispatchers previously mentioned, these positions consist of Court Security Officers, Matrons, School Crossing Guards, and several administrative professionals.

*(See Appendix # 1 - GOP A-2.1 - Organizational Structure)*

### **B. Police Department engagement in crowd control**

Over the past several months, the WNY region has seen multiple protests involving police incidents that happened outside of the area. Although there were no protests within the physical boards of West Seneca, the WSPD was engaged in our traditional role as support for adjoining municipalities.

The West Seneca Police Department does not have, nor ever has had, a Riot Control Team or a SWAT Unit. Officers receive crowd control training in the police academy, however that is the extent of it. WSPD crowd control endeavors consist of major community event planning and engagement for annual occurrences. The current strategy is to seek outside agency assistance through mutual aid requests should the need for civil unrest control arise.

#### **1. Adequate Resources without a 'Show of Force'**

That being acknowledged, it is also critical to have enough resources on hand to respond to any condition, without showing a large police presence. WSPD can, on short notice, summon and deploy its personnel in small groups to strategic locations – just enough to show a reasonable presence and to provide security. A larger field force using resources gathered from other agencies can be deployed to a formal staging area, as well as forward staging areas closer to the event and out of sight. WSPD has the ability for a solid, quick response and for undercover intelligence gathering through Detective Bureau personnel. Should the initial deployment fail in de-escalation of the given situation, the Department will be able to “hold down the fort” until it can coordinate a large-scale mutual aid response.

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## 2. Utilizing Specialized Units

Another key component of the response strategy rests upon the Department's Public Information Officers and Administrative personnel in achieving effective communication with organizers and participants in an effort to keep the crowds peaceful. While doing so, these officers will also gather intelligence that the command staff could use for planning.

# II. Employing Smart and Effective Policing Standards and Strategies

## Section 1. Procedural Justice and Community Policing

The West Seneca Police Department will be utilizing a New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services endorsed Procedural Justice training curriculum to provide training in two (2) eight-hour training modules. The first module is Procedural Justice 1 (PJ1). The curriculum focuses on the four tenets of procedural justice – treating individuals with dignity and respect; giving individuals a voice during law enforcement interactions; being neutral and transparent in decision making; and conveying trustworthy motives. Procedural Justice 2 (PJ2) focuses on implicit bias.

The West Seneca Police Department embraces Procedural Justice with the recognition that while highly publicized abuses of authority by police officers fuel distrust and erode legitimacy, less publicized, day-to-day interactions between community members and law enforcement are also influential in shaping long-term attitudes toward the police. Procedural Justice training for police officers has been found to be effective in lowering incidences of excessive force, overall number of complaints and substantiated complaints.

In November of 2020, the Department sent two officers to become certified to instruct this curriculum. The educational component is scheduled to be delivered to all WSPD officers via an in-service training schedule by the conclusion of 2021.

That being said, over the past several years, the New York State Municipal Police Training Council has mandated Procedural Justice training as part of the certification process for all newly hired recruits who attend any police academy across the State.

### A. Specific policing strategies that have raised concerns among the public.

#### 1. "Broken Windows" and "Stop and Frisk"

- a) "**Broken Windows**" policing rests on the theory that minor offenses committed in public, such as turnstile jumping or disorderly conduct, contribute to a degradation of society that, in turn, incubates more serious crimes. Under this theory, where these
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minor crimes and the individuals who commit them are stopped at the outset, then the conditions that create more serious crimes can be avoided. This strategy has been implemented and followed by the West Police Depart since the early 1990's and has served the community well.

- b) **“Stop and Frisk”** was an offshoot of the “Broken Windows” policing theory. Under “Stop and Frisk,” police departments adopted a policy of temporarily detaining individuals on the street based upon a “reasonable suspicion” of minor crimes and performed a pat-down search of these individuals looking for more serious criminal conduct, such as possession of contraband or weapons. The West Seneca Police has also been using this approach since the early 1990's, once again serving the community well. It should be noted that no individual group is a target of this strategy. The Police Officers are trained to investigate “suspicious activity” based on observation of individual behavior, not because of race, gender, or other group factors. Officers are taught to observe unusual behavior that is out of place for a particular set of circumstances at hand, and investigate the situation impartially to determine whether or not criminal activity is afoot.

*(See Appendix #2 - for complete law NYSCPL 140.50)*

## **2. Discriminatory or Bias-Based Stops, Searches and Arrests**

All Town of West Seneca Police Officers are trained to conduct all citizen contacts based on behavior, not race, creed, age, gender or other group orientation. All police officers have participated in an extensive Implicit Bias training session and are expected to conduct themselves accordingly. Any police action outside this scope is strictly prohibited and is not tolerated.

## **3. Chokeholds and Other Restrictions on Breathing**

Chokeholds have never been a part of the West Seneca Police policy and WSPD officers do not receive training in regards to techniques involving chokeholds. Law enforcement use of chokeholds is now illegal in the State of New York per statute and is severely restricted by Federal Law as well.

*(See Appendix #3 – GOP A-20.1 VII-C; pg. 5)*

## **4. Use of Force for Punitive or Retaliatory Reasons**

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Any police action of this manner is strictly prohibited and is not tolerated. Per the Department's Use of Force policy, Officers are mandated to intercede to stop another officer if they observe this occurring they are mandated to report the occurrence to a supervisor.

*(See Appendix ##3 – GOP A-20.1 VI; pg. 4)*

#### **5. Pretextual Stops**

Pretextual stops are those where the officer uses a minor violation as a pretext to stop, question, or search someone suspected of involvement in, or having knowledge of, a more serious crime. Pretextual stops have been used in a targeted fashion to question individuals relevant to an ongoing investigation in a setting that may facilitate disclosure of information valuable to that investigation, and in a broader fashion by officers on patrol to question or search individuals based on the officer's observations at that time. Pretextual stops are distinct from Stop and Frisk policing as the former involves stopping an individual purportedly on one stated basis, when the real purpose is to investigate the individual for an entirely different and usually more serious crime. The latter, namely Stop and Frisk, when conducted legally, is based on the suspicion of a minor crime without a secondary motive by law enforcement.

Although not routine, this strategy is incorporated from time to time, in order to further investigations and ferret out suspected clandestine criminal activity. It is legal and an acceptable practice throughout the law enforcement profession nationwide.

#### **6. Informal Quotas for Summonses, Tickets or Arrests**

The Town of West Seneca Police Department does not base enforcement measures on a quota system. The only place this appears is within the annual Employee Evaluation process for individual employees. The statistical data on the number of summonses, traffic tickets or arrests is solely used as one component to measure the overall performance of an individual officer. There is no baseline expectation standard, or comparison to other employees' statistics, made during the process.

#### **7. Shooting at Moving Vehicles and High Speed Pursuits**

Both of these areas are strictly governed under O- 40.3 of the Town of West Seneca General Orders and Procedures Manual.

*(See Appendix #4 – GOP 43.4 II-C; pg. 1)*

#### **8. Use of SWAT Teams and No-Knock Warrants**

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The West Seneca Police does not have, nor ever has had, a SWAT Unit. On the rare circumstance there is a need for a tactical team, WSPD has a shared services verbal agreement with the Town of Orchard Park Police Department to use their SWAT unit, or the Erie County Sheriff's SWAT team is utilized under a mutual aid call out.

The Police Department does utilize No-Knock warrants, but on extremely rare occasions. These are very limited in scope per NYS Criminal Procedural Law and must reach a high level of competency before a Judicial Magistrate will issue one.

**9. Less-Than-Lethal Weaponry such as Tasers and Pepper Spray**

The deployment of all the Less-Than Lethal Weaponry utilized by the Department is covered under A-20.6 of the Town of West Seneca General Orders and Procedures Manual. Officers must go through an initial, extensive training program on each less-than-lethal weapon platform and be certified to use a particular item, then complete annual refresher course to maintain their certification.

*(See Appendix #5- GOP A-20.6)*

**10. Facial Recognition Technology**

WSPD does not utilize any Facial Recognition Technologies

## **Section 2. Law Enforcement Strategies to Reduce Racial Disparities and Build Trust**

**A. Using Summonses Rather than Warrantless Arrests for Specified Offenses**

The new Bail Reform and Raise the Age legislative initiatives have mandated a significant increase in the issuance of summonses and significantly decreased the number of warrantless arrests made by WSPD officers. Department personnel adhere to the legal measures enacted by the State legislative branch and signed into law by the Governor.

**B. Diversion Programs**

As stated earlier, the Town of West Seneca participates in a Diversion Program strategy through its Youth Court. The West Seneca Police Department was the first agency in Western New York to develop and institute a Youth Court Program. WS Youth Court was founded in 1985 with its purpose to act as an alternative to minors entering the legal system at an early age, via arrest and remand through Family Court.

*(See Appendix #6 for a complete description of the program)*

**C. Restorative Justice Programs**

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WSPD participates in Restorative Justice Strategies through the participation of School Resource Officers in mediation sessions involving youths in conflict, both inside and outside the school setting. In addition, Youth Court provides opportunities to apply Restorative Justice measures as well.

**D. Community-Based Outreach and Violence Interruption Programs**

WSPD does not currently participate in Community-Based Outreach and Violence Interruption Programs.

**E. Hot-Spot Policing and Focused Deterrence**

The current strategy utilized for Hot-Spot Policing and Focused Deterrence is through informational exchanges between supervisory staff, officer review of daily incident reports, and individual shift briefings. As “hot spots” are identified, deployment and investigative plans are developed to address problems as they arise. At times, WSPD will reach out to other local, state or federal agencies or use multi-jurisdictional task forces to assist, and compile intelligence data through the Erie County Crime Analysis Center.

**F. De-Escalation Strategies**

De- Escalation strategies have been trained on, and utilized by the Police Department for many years. Starting in the late 1990’s, an in-house program was introduced to all of the police officers, called Verbal Judo. This instructed officers in the use of specific de-escalation techniques to be employed during citizen encounters. These techniques are highly effective and still taught today.

In addition, de-escalation instruction is mandated in every police academy basic recruit school in New York State, and in 2015, the Erie County Association of Chiefs of Police pushed to have The Erie County Police Academy be the first in the state to integrate Critical Incident Team Training into the basic recruit school educational curriculum.

**G. Can Your Community Effectively Identify, Investigate and Prosecute Hate Crimes?**

WSPD can in fact effectively identify, investigate and prosecute Hate Crimes. Officers receive training on how to identify such crimes upon the arrival to a scene. The Detective Bureau follows up with thorough investigations, and collaborates with the District Attorney to identify the filing of proper charges to carry those cases to successful conclusions.

## **Section 3. Community Engagement**

**A. Community outreach plans**

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WSPD does not have standing Community Outreach plans established. However, members of the Police Department routinely conduct outreach programs with local citizen groups through public speaking engagements, and question and answer forums, whenever requested.

**B. Citizen advisory boards and committees**

There is no standing citizen advisory board or committee. Currently the elected officials on the Town Board as representatives of the residents, act in this capacity.

**C. Partnership with community organizations and faith communities**

WSPD has had a liaison assigned to the West Seneca Community of Churches and the Chief of Police has also had an honorary membership in the West Seneca Chamber of Commerce. There has also been a long standing partnership with the West Seneca Fire Commissioners and Fire Chiefs working groups.

**D. Partnering with students and schools/ Involving youth in discussions on the role of law enforcement agencies**

As been previously mentioned multiple times, there is a lengthy, solid relationship between the West Seneca Police Department and the West Seneca Central School District and collaboration continues on many fronts.

**E. Police-community reconciliation**

The Police Department has not encountered many difficulties in this area. However, the police administration is always willing to discuss concerns involving circumstances which create a relationship strain with any group that perceives they are marginalized by the police.

**F. Attention to Marginalized Communities**

The Police Department does not have consistent contacts with the types of groups listed in this portion of the Guidebook; (limited English proficiency citizens, Citizens with communication disabilities, LGBTQIA, and immigrant communities). However, officers have received specialized training in interacting with persons with disabilities, who are autistic, suffer from Alzheimer's, and mental health conditions. Also, WSPD does have an outside contact resource list for language interpreters, and numerous other assistance programs, should the need arise for their services.

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### **III. Fostering Community-Oriented Leadership, Culture and Accountability**

#### **Section 1. Leadership and Culture**

**A. Is your leadership selection process designed to produce the police community relationship you want?**

The leadership selection process is governed by a combination of internal interviews and Civil Service requirements. The filling of a promotional position is first determined through a ranking from a Civil Service promotional exam. The only individuals who can be interviewed to fill a leadership opening must have finished in the top three scores of the Civil Service exam given for that particular classification. . All positions, including the Chief of Police, are governed this way.

After Civil Service notifies us who can be selected, an interview panel is established and the process continues. Once all eligible candidates are interviewed, the panel makes a recommendation to the Chief of Police as to who they feel should be selected to fill the position. The Chief reviews the recommendation with the panel members and if the Chief is in agreement, the Chief recommends the candidate to the Town Board for final approval.

*(See Appendix # 7 - GOP A-15.1 – Promotional Process)*

**B. Does your officer evaluation structure help advance your policing goals?**

The evaluation structure used by the Department meets all of the standards set by the NYS Accreditation mandates. The Accreditation standards are designed to mesh with Departmental policing goals. Complying with the Accreditation standards ensures that officers are evaluated using a broad matrix of comprehensive performance characteristics, not only upon statistical data of arrests and summons issuance.

*(See Appendix # 8 - GOP A 13.1 & 13.1a – Performance Evaluation System)*

**C. What incentives does your department offer officers to advance policing goals?**

Once again, our incentive program is built within the mandates of NYS Accreditation. Officers are recognized annually at an Awards Ceremony whereby commendation are given by the Chief to officers who have performed exemplary work throughout the year.

*(See Appendix # 9 - GOP A-17.1 – Awards Procedures and Criteria)*

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**D. Does your hiring and promotion process help build an effective and diverse leadership team?**

Diversity is limited under current Civil Service Law. Refer to question "A" above.

**E. What is your strategy to ensure that your department's cultural-norms and informal processes reflect your formal rules and policies?**

Continuous training and close supervision of employees.

## **Section 2. Tracking and Reviewing Use of Force and Identifying Misconduct**

**A. When should officers be required to report use of force to their supervisor?**

This is strictly governed within the Department's Use of Force Policy which is as follows:

Members involved in use of force incidents as described below shall notify their supervisor as soon as practicable and shall complete a West Seneca Police Use of Force report ([A-20.1a](#)).

1. Use of force that results in a physical injury.
2. Use of force incidents that a reasonable person would believe is likely to cause an injury.
3. Where force is used to overcome active resistance.
4. Incidents that result in a complaint of pain from the suspect except complaints of minor discomfort from compliant handcuffing.
5. Incidents where a conducted energy device (CED) was intentionally discharged or accidentally discharged after being displayed.
6. Incidents where a firearm was discharged at a subject.

**B. What internal review is required after a use of force?**

All use of force incident reports are sent directly to the Chief of Police for personal review.

**C. Does your department review officers' use of force and/or misconduct during performance reviews?**

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Yes, this is part of the performance evaluation process.

**D. Does your department use external, independent reviewers to examine uses of force or misconduct?**

When a significant use of force or misconduct case arises, WSPD will seek assistance from the Erie County District Attorney, the NYS Attorney General, or the United States District Attorney. As of April 1, 2021, it will be mandated by NYS law that the Chief of Police report use of force incidents that result in any death of an unarmed civilian directly to the NYS Attorney General.

**E. Does your department leverage Early Intervention Systems (EIS) to prevent problematic behavior?**

WSPD does not currently utilize an EIS product. These have been investigated and determined not to be cost effective for this Department.

**F. Does your department review “sentinel” or “near-miss” events? Does the department respond to questionable uses of force with non-punitive measures designed to improve officer performance?**

These events are reviewed and in-service training is provided to assist officers to have more positive future outcomes.

### **Section 3. Internal Accountability for Misconduct**

**A. What does your department expect of officers who know of misconduct by another officer?**

WSPD has created a culture in which every officer knows they are expected to report the misconduct of other employees. WSPD officers, as a whole, take enormous personal pride in their work environment and profession. This has resulted in “bad” officers being purged from the workforce and built confidence in the community.

In addition, the Chief of Police is one of the lead Police Ethics instructors at the Police Academy and demands the utmost in officer conduct.

**B. Does your department have a clear and transparent process for investigating reports of misconduct?**

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All reports of officer misconduct received by the Department are investigated immediately upon receipt.

**C. Does your department respond to officer misconduct with appropriate disciplinary measures?**

Yes. Disciplinary action is taken based upon the severity of the offense and through a progressive disciplinary model recognized by the NYS Public Employee Relations Board.

**D. What procedures are in place to ensure that substantiated complaints of misconduct and settlements or adverse verdicts in lawsuits are used to reduce the risk of future misconduct?**

All officers are informed of the outcomes of internal investigations and corresponding disciplinary measures. This reinforces expectations and attains voluntary compliance to the Rules and Regulations of the Department.

**E. What controls are in place to ensure impartiality when reviewing potential misconduct or complaints? When appropriate, are cases referred to either the District Attorney or another prosecutor?**

The Department follows the legal processes established under the Governor's Executive Order 147 and the legislation, NYS Executive Law 70-b, which will go into effect April 1, 2021.

**F. Does your department expect leaders and officers to uphold the department's values and culture when off-duty?**

Yes. This is governed under the WSPD Rules and Regulation. Officers have been, and continue to be held accountable for off-duty misconduct.

## **Section 4. Citizen Oversight and Other External Accountability**

**A. Does or should your department have some form of civilian oversight over misconduct investigations or policy reform?**

This sitting Town Board acts in this capacity as elected representatives of the residents.

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**B. Is there an easy, accessible and well-publicized process for members of the public to report complaints about police misconduct?**

The process for members of the public to report police misconduct is not particularly well-publicized. However, the public can do so by calling or stopping into the Police Station and asking for a supervisor, emailing the department through its website, or posting a complaint on our other social media platforms.

**C. Are investigation outcomes reported to the complainant? Are they reported to the public? Should the department or the citizen complaint review entity, if any, accept anonymous complaints?**

1. A complainant is informed as to whether or not the officer was found to be in violation of the Rules and Regulations of the Department. However, they are not informed of the exact disciplinary measures imposed.
2. Under the new FOIA regulations, the results can be requested and the Police Department must provide the results under those guidelines.
3. Although there is no citizen complaint review entity per se, the Department investigates all complaints against officers, even if they are anonymous.

**D. Does your local legislature engage in formal oversight of the police department?**

This sitting Town Board acts in this capacity as elected representatives of the residents.

**E. Should any changes be made in the legislature's oversight powers or responsibilities?**

None is needed.

**F. Is your police department accredited by any external entity?**

Yes, the Department has participated in and been accredited through the NYS DCSJ Accreditation Program since 1993.

**G. Does Your Police Department Do an Annual Community Survey to Track Level of Trust?**

The Department does not do an annual community survey of this nature, but has done so intermittently in the past.

## **Section 5. Data, Technology and Transparency**

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**A. What police incident and complaint data should be collected? What data should be available to the public?**

This should be discussed during a Committee meeting. We currently collect numerous types of statistical data which is posted on the Departmental website monthly, and listed in the Police Department's Annual Report.

**B. How should your law enforcement agency leverage data to drive policing strategies?**

WSPD is currently in compliance with the Governor's guidance in this area.

**C. How can your police department demonstrate a commitment to transparency in its interactions with the public?**

WSPD is currently in compliance with the Governor's guidance in this area.

**D. How can your police department make its policies and procedures more transparent?**

WSPD is currently in compliance with the Governor's guidance in this area.

**E. How can your police department ensure adequate transparency in its use of automated systems and "high-risk" technologies?**

WSPD is currently in compliance with the Governor's guidance in this area.

**F. Should your police department leverage video cameras to ensure law enforcement accountability and increase transparency?**

WSPD does not currently utilize these technologies however, this topic should be explored during a Committee meeting.

## **IV. Recruiting and Supporting Excellent Personnel**

### **1. Recruiting a Diverse Workforce**

**A. Does your agency reflect the diversity of the community it serves?**

Yes, it appears to be reflective of the demographics of our community.

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**B. What are ways in which your agency recruits diverse candidates that better represent the demographics of the communities you serve?**

WSPD does not have an “official” recruitment program. However, we routinely promote the Department through public speaking engagements, awareness through local media sources, and participation in local college job fairs hosted by their respective Criminal Justice departments.

**C. What are ways in which you can re-evaluate hiring practices and testing to remove barriers in hiring underrepresented communities?**

WSPD has no control over this process. As has been stated previously, WSPD hiring practices are regulated under NYS Civil Service Law. Adjustments for concerns listed in this portion of the Governor’s Guidebook must occur at the State level.

**D. How can you encourage youth in your community to pursue careers in law enforcement?**

In addition to participating in job fairs at the college level as listed above, WSPD sends officers to participate in the annual Career Day hosted by both WS High Schools.

A Police Cadet program is mentioned in the Governor’s Guidebook. However, this is not cost effective for WSPD. Although a program of this sort may enlighten and direct youth of the community into the law enforcement profession overall, due to current Civil Service regulations, there is no direct path to job opportunities within the West Seneca Police Department.

The creation of a Police Cadet program here would result in the police department investing significant time, resources and funding into a program where most, if not all, of the participants would end up at other agencies.

**E. What actions can your agency take to foster the continued development and retention of diverse officers?**

WSPD does not experience retention issues with officers voluntarily resigning from service to pursue alternative career paths.

## **2. Training and Continuing Education**

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**A. How can you develop officer training programs that reflect your community values and build trust between police officers and the communities they serve?**

WSPD is in compliance with this section through mandates set by the NYS Municipal Training Council and NYS DCJS Accreditation Program.

**B. What training policies can you adopt to ensure that police officers continuously receive high-quality, relevant in-service training sessions?**

WSPD is in compliance with this section through mandates set by the NYS Municipal Training Council and NYS DCJS Accreditation Program.

**C. How can leadership training improve community policing and strengthen relationships between your police department and members of the public?**

WSPD is in compliance with this section through mandates set by the NYS Municipal Training Council and NYS DCJS Accreditation Program.

**D. How can your police department use its training programs to avoid incidents involving unnecessary use of lethal or nonlethal force?**

WSPD is in compliance with this section through mandates set by the NYS Municipal Training Council and NYS DCJS Accreditation Program.

**E. How can your police department use its training programs to avoid potential bias incidents and build stronger connections with communities of color and vulnerable populations?**

WSPD is in compliance with this section through mandates set by the NYS Municipal Training Council and NYS DCJS Accreditation Program.

**F. How can your training program help officers effectively and safely respond to individuals experiencing mental health crises or struggling with substance abuse?**

WSPD is in compliance with this section through mandates set by the NYS Municipal Training Council and NYS DCJS Accreditation Program.

**G. What practices and procedures can you put in place to measure the quality and efficacy of your police department's training programs?**

WSPD is in compliance with this section through mandates set by the NYS Municipal Training Council and NYS DCJS Accreditation Program.

### **3. Support Officer Wellness and Well-being**

#### **A. What steps can you take to promote wellness and well-being within your department?**

Officers in the West Seneca Police Department are provided resources while in the Erie County Central Police Services Training Academy. This includes a segment through the Western New York Stress Reduction Program, which is an instructional opportunity both the officer and their loved ones.

In 2021, the West Seneca Police Department will be providing training in Procedural Justice through in-service training. This curriculum has a component which focuses directly on the root causes of stress in policing and strategies for reducing its impact.

#### **B. Are there ways to address officer wellness and well-being through smarter scheduling?**

Officers in the West Seneca Police Department are limited in their shift lengths in an effort to lower stress levels and officer wellness. Officers are not permitted to work back-to-back shifts (doubles) and are not permitted to work overtime of more than 4 hours in conjunction with their regular 8 hour shift, (unless a significant emergency exists). Additionally, the construction of the schedule for patrol officers through the collective bargaining agreement provides for rotating days off, which allows all officers to periodically have weekends off.

#### **C. How can you effectively and proactively address the mental health challenges experienced by many police officers throughout their careers?**

The West Seneca Police has officers assigned in peer support capacity through the Western New York Law Enforcement Helpline. The officers are trained to proactively solicit their services to other law enforcement personnel and are available in a confidential setting to provide guidance to those suffering from a multitude of problems, to include thoughts of suicide, problem drinking, substance abuse and dependency, among others. The Town of West Seneca also provides an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through Child and Family Services, which guides

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employees and their families into a myriad of confidential services should the need arise.

**D. How can you address the well-being of an officer after a traumatic event?**

The West Seneca Police Department does utilize the same above listed officers to provide assistance to officers that have responded to traumatic events. These officers provide guidance on what to expect emotionally after a traumatic event and provide resources in an effort to proactively address officer well-being. The West Seneca Police Department also utilizes mental health professionals to conduct debriefings in the immediate time frame following these events.

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## **APPENDIX C**

The following presentations can be found as PDF attachments to this document on the West Seneca Town Website:

- West Seneca Police Department Overview
- West Seneca Police Training
- Preliminary Research on Body Cameras

These presentations were created by the West Seneca Police Department to provide ample information to the West Seneca Reform and Reinvention Task Force as they conducted the “Comprehensive Review” and discussed possible recommendations.

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