

Northampton Policing Review Commission

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, September 29, 2020

5:30 PM - 8:30 PM

Remote Meeting

To join the remote meeting:

- **Video conference:**
<https://zoom.us/j/99679411677?pwd=a21iWnNSNGxYem5lNEExUTENobkRYZz09>
- **Or by telephone, call:** 1-929-436-2866, Meeting ID: 996 7941 1677, Passcode: 536413

1. **Call to Order** - Co-Chair Dan Cannity called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

a. **Announcement of Zoom Recording**

b. **Roll Call:**

Commissioner Lois Ahrens	present
Commissioner Elizabeth Barajas-Roman	joined the meeting at 6:05 p.m.
Commissioner Booker Bush	present
Commissioner Daniel Cannity (co-chair)	present
Commissioner Nick Fleisher	present
Commissioner David Hoose	present
Commissioner Alex Jarrett	present
Commissioner Carmen Lopez	present
Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido	present
Commissioner Dana Olivo (co-chair)	present but departed the meeting at 6:59 p.m.
Commissioner Nnamdi Pole	present
Commissioner Michael Quinlan	present
Commissioner Josey Rosales	present
Commissioner Cynthia Suopis	present
Commissioner Larissa Rivera-Gonzalez	present

2. **Public Comment (1 hour)**

Richard Hendrick of 30 Main Street, Northampton, was present and stated a recent New York Times article described how the pledge to dismantle the Minneapolis police collapsed. Richard stated the article seems negative but he felt positive about it because he admires the courage of the councilors that came forward and acknowledged the mistakes they made. Richard stated the most daunting part for the Commission will be the mission statement but pointed out there is a lot of good information on the internet and cited a few sources: Phillip Atiba Goff from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice; a report called, *New Era of Public Safety: An Advocacy Toolkit for Fair, Safe, and Effective Community Policing*; The Kerner Commission; the Support Team Assistance Response (STAR) program in Denver; the CAHOOTS program in Eugene, Oregon; and research from Campden, New Jersey. Richard furthered that the hard task will be convincing the younger

people protesting in the streets, who are smart individuals with powerful voices, along with the city council, the mayor, the police and the silent majority.

Amy Martyn of 17 Federal Street, Florence, was present and stated she is a parent of a high school student and a member of the Northampton Education Foundation group, Race, Equity, Action and Learning (REAL). REAL supports the redirection of tax dollars from the racist, punitive, criminal justice system that policing supports to actual systems of community care, public safety, and restorative justice. Amy stated she understands that the School Resource Officer (SRO) position has been eliminated this year but that it could be reinstated in the future. Amy mentioned the many studies that have been done that show the disproportionate harm SROs have on black and brown students nationwide. Students of color represent over 30% of the school system population and over 50% of the students being disciplined. Amy concluded by urging the Commission to look at ways of supporting public safety in the city and school system that teach non-violent conflict resolution methods and permanently remove the SRO position from the schools.

Jesse Hassinger, a resident of Ward 4, was present to make two points to the Commission. First, the 10% cut of the police budget needs to be spent towards community services that will replace police in emergency calls. These services include, mental health issues, wellness checks, overdoses, domestic issues, and a number of other calls that should not include deadly weapons. Second, the allocation of funds should be the first step towards the abolition of the Northampton Police Department so that well-trained individuals can humanely answer emergency calls. Jesse furthered that there is no excuse for officers to address every situation as combative which perpetuates the culture of fear, intimidation and terror from the hands of those who are supposed to be protecting individuals. Jesse concluded by saying the Commission should be a model for non-violence peace-keeping.

Joelle Ortego was present and stated there are a lot of homeless people in the streets that need help. Joelle stated he doesn't have anything negative to say about the police but the real issue is that there are a lot of homeless people with addictions and no resources to help them.

Jose Adastras was present and stated the Commission should be paving the way for abolition. Jose stated that there needs to be collaboration with community organizers to use the funds cut from the budget to house people. Jose stated he is sending his kids to Easthampton schools because there are no cops in the schools. He concluded by saying money and jobs should be redirected to homeless or ex-incarcerated people so that they can build a life instead of the police.

Sean Donovan of 59 Coolidge Avenue, Northampton, was present and stated he is a member of the Western Mass. Recovery Learning Community and for years has facilitated a weekly peer support group for suicide. Sean stated that feeling suicidal comes from feeling powerless and experiencing trauma. Sean stated that he has heard many stories of police being called for wellness checks and with guns being on the scene it does not help the situation. Sean stated he worries about police interrogating people on wellness checks and in public spaces in Northampton. The Commission should focus on assessing how policing operates in the city and to also look at how social services agencies are intertwined with the police force. Sean concluded by encouraging the Commission to be wise and move towards abolition and to invest in community housing and other resources such as peer mediators, advocates and other resources.

Emily Coffin was present and stated the Commission should provide a road map for the city to defund the police and reinvest in the community because that is what city leaders asked for in June. Emily stated that Mayor Narkewicz said he would not reallocate funds if the city made the cut that the nation was calling for and he made true to that promise and hasn't allocated any of the funding. She furthered that the Commission

doesn't need to work to improve policing because improving policing means improving a system of violence and brutality. Emily concluded by urging the Commission to look at alternatives to policing rather than trying to reform the broken policing system.

Co-Chair Daniel Cannity played a recorded statement from Hildegard Freedman. The recording played a song from the last battle of the jazz era.

Alisa Klein, a resident of Leeds, was present and provided the following written statement:

"Good evening commissioners. My name is Alisa Klein and I live in Leeds. I'm grateful to you for your service to our community. I know how much of your precious time you will spend doing this work for us and with us. Thank you for allowing for this crucial period of public comment at your first working meeting. I do understand the concern that keeping meetings to a reasonable amount of time makes them more accessible to parents, people who work full-time, and others who can't stay on zoom meetings for hours and hours. I absolutely get that. But in this case, in launching a process like the one you're about to embark upon, it is essential that you hear from the community. Community input is what should shape your work. Your accountability is to all of your neighbors in Northampton, not just the mayor and city council. So, thank you for listening to us and responding to our requests as you pursue this important piece of work.

Angela Davis said about policing: "We need to get off of the treadmill of reform" – please listen to members of this community as we call for you to not just conduct a review, not just make recommendations for police reform, and NOT relegitimize policing. Rather, we call upon you to gather the evidence of why and how it is time to reduce the police budget next year, the year after, and the year after that and reallocate that funding to the ways our community can truly be safe until we no longer spend our precious community and taxpayer dollars on an institution that was founded to catch and police enslaved Black people and that continues to enforce a modern day system that binds and harms Black people, indigenous people, other people of color, gender-non-conforming people, poor people, and others from subjugated, colonized, and oppressed communities in our society.

I believe that we as a community need to be creative and inventive in imagining a future without policing, legal, and carceral systems that harm as much as, or more than, they solve problems. We need to invest in preventative, transformative justice-based structures, systems, and methods to keep our community safe.

As such, I am asking you to scrutinize this city's police budget and every single thing they are paid to do and every single piece of equipment they use to do it. I am hoping you can create clear "screens" and analytics to assess and determine what we need and don't need in this community for safety and well-being; what we want and don't want in this community; what is ethical and what is unethical in keeping our community safe; and how to eliminate practices, activities, and actions that are rooted in racial, class, and gender bias or that have potential to be. Your recommendations need to be both values-based AND guided by metrics. Does each and every activity you examine have a TRUE community safety purpose? Are each of these activities carried out without the potential for discrimination towards, or harm of, particular members of our community based on what they look like, their mental health status, their gender, where they live, if they are unhoused, or if they don't have access to certain ways of keeping themselves clean? Are lethal weapons actually needed for any community safety activities and actions? Police in our community are paid hefty salaries to do things like write up traffic accident reports for insurance companies, resolve disputes between neighbors,

deliver legal documents, conduct routine traffic stops, and other such things. Do we need to pay police for these kinds of activities?

I want you to help divest our taxpayer dollars from a policing and carceral continuum that is brutal, racist, harmful and largely unnecessary. I want my taxpayer dollars to be invested in public safety that is about transformative justice and community accountability instead of policing. We need you to research the programs and alternatives that are about supporting each other without having to call 911 and make recommendations to defund the police department and reallocate those funds to programs that support our community, not police it.”

City Councilor Rachel Maiore of Leeds was present and stated she hopes the Commission will spend its energy discussing alternatives to policing that are tailored and viable for the community rather than spending time reforming a law enforcement system that has inherent flaws. She hopes the Commission thinks about reimagining the process for what a community public safety system looks like. She concluded by saying she would appreciate practical guidance with specific actionable goals that include budgetary reductions and reallocation of funds.

Elliot Oberholtzer was present and stated that the content of the product that the Commission puts out is really important to pave a way towards abolition and to take the community into a future without policing. The important piece of the product is the way it is communicated because to the people. Elliot stated the process needs to build in significant collaborative learning opportunities because simply delivering a report isn't going to be impactful.

Ashwin Ravikumar, a resident of Amherst and Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies at Amherst College, was present and stated the Commission has a huge opportunity to invest \$700,000 into real alternatives to policing. Ashwin opined that police don't make people feel safer but instead they uphold white supremacy and bias. Ashwin concluded by saying there are better ways forward by looking deeply into the assets, skills, and physical health services that already exist to build alternatives.

Ya-Ping Douglass, a resident of Turners Falls, was present and hopes that the Commission can be the place to make recommendations and come up with a concrete plan to determine how Northampton can divest from policing and invest resources into actual alternatives to policing. Ya-Ping stated that the description of the Commission put out by the Mayor and City Council included a lot of topics to study like body cameras and policing reforms but those have already been investigated. Ya-Ping concluded by saying she hopes the Commission feels empowered to look at where Northampton should be going and not beholden to the description of the Commission.

Kala Garrido, 16, of Haydenville, stated that she hopes the Commission spends time creating a road map or a blueprint for the city to move away from policing entirely and redirect funding towards community based alternatives.

Haven, 16, of Deerfield, stated she hopes the Commission will pave the way for abolition instead of reform and also advise the mayor on reallocating funds towards community services.

Sascha was present and stated that the money reduced from the police budget for FY21 was actually \$882,602. Sascha urged the Commission to hold the Mayor accountable for the money and reminded individuals that this money was reduced to fund alternatives. Sascha concluded by saying that the Commission needs to get a commitment from the Mayor that those monies will be allocated for that purpose.

Dana Goldblatt was present and stated that the Commission needs to direct the Mayor to abolish the police because the armed paramilitary of authoritarian people who use violence towards mentally ill people or black people is disturbing. Dana stated the community is asking for abolition and didn't ask for it to be reformed. Dana pointed out that there is a lot of planning and steps that need to be taken because there are a number of functions that the police perform and shouldn't be. She hopes the report isn't about whether or not the police are sensitive enough because no one is asking for politically correct police, they are asking for less police.

Ruby was present and stated that the Commission's main goal should be to pave the way for abolition which includes a road map to wean away from police entirely and redirect resources for community based alternatives for safety and care.

3. Discussion: NPRC Charge and Work Plan Formulation

Nnamdi Pole stated it was very helpful to hear from the public during public comment because it was a clear coherent message of at least the first segment of the population.

Josey Rosales thanked those who spoke during public comment, in particular the young people for engaging in civic action. Josey's hope for the commission is to pave the way for the younger generation because the young folks are the individuals that will be inheriting this system.

Lois Ahrens thanked the public for its public comment and also asked if the Commission can discuss the use of names and titles before Commissioners start speaking.

Javier Luengo-Garrido stated it is important for people to keep talking and keep coming to the Commission meeting to remind everyone what is important.

Alex Jarrett stated it is the discretion of the chair to move an item on the agenda.

4. Discussion: Use of names, titles, and pronouns

This agenda item was taken out of order.

Lois Ahrens pointed out that during the first meeting, every time a role was called, the honorific title of that individual's name was included. Lois hopes that the titles could be dropped and Commissioners be called by their first names only.

Josey Rosales agreed with Lois's proposal.

Carmen Lopez stated that not everyone has the same background, which is great, but for this venue she would appreciate first names.

Alex Jarrett agrees with using first names only.

Michael Quinlan supports the idea of using first names.

Nnamdi Pole is completely fine with using first names as long as individuals can pronounce his name. Otherwise, individuals can address him however they'd like.

3. Discussion: NPRC Charge and Work Plan Formulation (continued...)

Lois Ahrens mentioned three topics for discussion. The first was whether the Commission should implement a Google translate feature that simultaneously translates meetings. Lois stated the feature is about \$1,000 a year and the entire city could use it. However, the translator would need to be paid each meeting for the translations. The second topic was whether the Commission wants independent counsel for issues that arise instead of discussing those issues with the city's attorney. The third topic was requesting that the Commission meet every week so that there can be a public comment period and more time for discussion.

Javier Luengo-Garrido agrees with the topics addressed by Lois. In addition, Javier wonders if material that the Commission releases should also be released in a different language.

Co-Chair Dana Olivo wondered whether the meetings should include closed captioning for people who can not hear the meeting.

Nnamdi Pole showed concern about the possible hijacking of the agenda because it could derail the process. Nnamdi believes the Commission should decide on how much it needs to adhere to the items on the agenda.

Carmen Lopez wondered whether agenda items that are not addressed during the set meeting, could be added to the following week's agenda. Carmen also likes the idea of having enough time in between meetings so there is time to think about and process the meetings.

Alex Jarrett suggested the idea of subcommittees to explore the various topics under the Commission's scope. Alex stated that then, each subcommittee, could do the research for each of the topics.

David Hoose stated it is difficult to get work done in a 15-person Commission so subcommittees would be a good idea. However, there is a concern that having a full Commission meeting every week doesn't give enough time for subcommittee meetings in between.

Co-Chair Daniel Cannity stated that everything that is being talked about is pertinent to the group's work plan formulation and all of the topics need to be sorted out because they will be the basis of how the group operates.

Michael Quinlan concurred in that the topics being discussed are part of the work plan. Michael also stated that items on the agenda must be adhered to because the agenda needs to be presented to the public 48 hours in advance of the meetings so that the agenda knows what will be discussed.

Javier Luengo-Garrido feels that making items accessible is part of the work plan and if subcommittees are decided on, need to be careful that voting on subcommittees will not necessarily move the conversation faster because subcommittees are still subject to open meeting law.

There was a brief discussion about open meeting law, posting agendas and the topic of "new business".

Larissa Rivera-Gonzalez liked the idea of subcommittees so that the work keeps moving forward. Larissa also concurred with the idea of weekly meetings unless that isn't enough time for the subcommittees to meet.

Co-Chair Daniel Cannity read the charge of the Commission for the record.

Cynthia Suopis wondered how much access the Commission has to things like the police budget and police protocols. Cynthia questioned how much data is available to the Commission.

Co-Chair Daniel Cannity stated that most of the documents, data, and resources are public records or they can be requested from city agencies.

Co-Chair Dana Olivo left the meeting at 6:59 p.m.

Lois Ahrens asked to discuss the subcommittees and each of the names. Lois suggested a “policing practices” subcommittee, an “alternative to policing” subcommittee, and a “big budget” subcommittee which would include contracts and everything having to do with money.

Elizabeth Barajas-Roman questioned the scope of the work because some of the charges in the Commission's description aren't necessarily issues but more of suggestive solutions. Elizabeth believes it is appropriate to talk about the approach of whether individuals have an abolitionist view or a reform view.

Josey Rosales stated that the Commission owes it to the people to look for revolutionary perspectives and would like to see the Commission push towards police abolition. Josey pointed out that there are hundreds of years of data suggesting police reform doesn't work so the Commission has to be willing to take the scary first step to get the mayor and the city council to commit to reallocate money to alternatives to address the causes of criminality in our communities.

David Hoose liked Lois' suggestion of three subcommittees and asked her if she could restate her ideas in the form of a motion.

Cynthia Suopis pointed out that every subcommittee is subject to open meeting law. Cynthia also would like to know the personal view of each Commissioner, whether it be reform, reimagine or abolition, so that the Commission can work towards that goal because if everyone is operating under a different lens, it will be hard to get this job done.

Co-Chair Daniel Cannity asked if Commissioners were comfortable with identifying where they stand.

Josey Rosales stated they are comfortable working towards police abolition. Josey stated that they have felt, seen, and studied, the effects of policing and have seen how it is implemented. Josey concluded by saying the teeth need to be taken out of policing because reforming the “wall” isn't going to work, it needs to be torn down.

Elizabeth Bajas-Roman stated that Commissioners should be thinking about their personal approaches but 15 people is not indicative of the entire Northampton community. Elizabeth wonders if subcommittees could explore the different approaches of reform, abolition and reimagine, so that more data, information and best practices can be researched. Elizabeth concluded by saying legitimacy is important and the report should have the level of scrutiny in that all other approaches have been scrutinized so that community voices are being heard.

Nnamdi Pole believes that the Commission must have at least one foot in the realm of reform because that is the charge of the Commission. The charge states a variety of matters that need to be studied and he doesn't feel comfortable with getting rid of those. However, the ideas of reimaging and abolition can always be added to the study topics.

Lois Ahrens stated that in addition to finding examples of “alternatives to policing”, the subcommittee can also look at abolition, reform and reimagine, as part of the alternatives.

Javier Luengo-Garrido agreed with Lois' suggestion and believes it is productive for people who are leaning towards reform, to learn more about what abolition consists of. Javier pointed out that the biggest challenge is to create a report that is incredibly concrete and applicable so that the city, or anyone, has no excuses for not applying the recommendations.

Michael Quinlan pointed out that he too had put the Commission's charge into two categories: 1. What does the police do now (including civilian oversight review models) 2. Alternatives to policing, transitioning, mental health calls, etc. Michael stated that the Commission has been asked to recommend reforms and ways that the city can deliver policing.

Alex Jarrett stated he loves the idea of a community that doesn't need police but also recognizes there are severe public safety needs where police are the only option. Alex stated he wants to make sure the Commission identifies solid alternatives because there will be a lot of push back. Alex liked the idea of subcommittees and proposed the following subcommittees: Policing Practices; Alternatives to Police Work; and studying how spending elsewhere reduces the need for policing. Alex concluded by saying he loves the idea of looking at abolition, reimagine and reform as best as the Commission can.

Booker Bush stated he likes the idea of subcommittees. Booker also stated he recently learned about what it meant to abolish the police and originally found the idea upsetting and uncomfortable. Booker stated that he believes policing is another terrible institution that used to exist, much like psychological hospitals which were oppressive and did terrible things to many people. These hospitals were subsequently abolished and patients were released without any services and now police are dealing with the residua of that decision. Booker would like to move towards this approach and recognized that people will need to be properly serviced. Booker asked members of the audience to email him examples of communities successfully decreasing a police presence so that he can be more informed.

Nick Fleisher stated he likes Lois' suggestion of the subcommittees and also believes the Commission should be looking at what community resources and practices already exist because he doesn't have a good understanding of how the Northampton Police function. Nick would also like to see how the civilian oversight process can fit into policing. Nick pointed out that he joined this Commission to learn and doesn't have a pre-formed idea of where he wants to end up.

Lois Ahrens stated that she works with people who used to be locked up in mental hospitals, that are now locked up in jails, as a result of closing psychological institutions. Lois stated that a category is essential to look at budgets because the Commission needs to know what the money is being spent on.

Lois Ahrens moved to create three subcommittees and make each category as deep as possible. Booker Bush seconded.

Javier Luengo-Garrido pointed out that there is going to be a need for a repository of documents so that everyone has access to them.

Elizabeth Barajas-Roman stated she agrees with Lois' motion but would offer an amendment to the first subcommittee so that it covers, "Police Practice and Services". Elizabeth pointed out that the Commission should determine what services the Northampton Police Department are specifically providing because after looking at the call logs, a majority of the calls rendered are for private property checks and very few calls are for imminent violence.

Larissa Rivera-Gonzalez stated she doesn't know what abolition looks like so she would love to receive emails with examples. Larissa stated that in order to get to abolition, the notion of reform and reimagine will need to be looked at.

Alex Jarrett asked for clarification around the motion. Alex asked Lois to identify the three subcommittees for the record.

Lois Ahrens identified the categories as: 1. Police Practices and Services 2. Alternatives to Policing (which will include examples of what is happening around the country), and 3. Budgets (salary, overtime, details, all contracts, etc.).

Alex Jarrett moved to amend the name for the "Alternatives to Policing" subcommittee to read, "Alternatives to Policing and Alternatives to Reduce the Need for Policing". Nnamdi Pole seconded the amended motion.

Lois Ahrens stated that having the three fold prism of abolition, reform, reimagine, is more of the context for thinking for each of the subcommittees.

Co-Chair Daniel Cannity pointed out that all of the subcommittees are not limited in the scope of their work and once topics and notions are discovered, they can be expanded on.

Nnamdi Pole asked that the motion specifically indicates whether the Commission is looking to abolish, reimagine, or reform.

Co-Chair Daniel Cannity sees the subcommittees as gathering information and presenting back to the Commission. Daniel pointed out that the findings might also include recommendations.

Alex Jarrett clarified the three subcommittee names: 1. Police practices and services, 2. Alternatives to policing including alternatives to reduce the need for policing and 3. Budgets and spending.

Co-Chair Daniel Cannity stated that reducing the need for policing should be one of the tasks under the umbrella of alternatives to policing.

Lois Ahrens wished to amend the budgets and spending subcommittee name to read, Spending and Contracts.

The amended motion to rename the Alternatives to Policing subcommittee was approved 14-0 by a roll call vote.

The motion to form three subcommittee entitled: Police Policies and Services; Alternatives to Policing and Spending and Contracts was approved 14-0 by a roll call vote.

Alex Jarrett asked who will be serving on each of the subcommittees.

David Hoose moved that prior to the next meeting, everyone submit to the co-chairs, the subcommittee of their choice. Michael Quinlan seconded.

Josey Rosales recommended the Commissioners submit preferences in ranked choice.

Alex Jarrett pointed out that if David accepts the recommendation as a friendly amendment then voting twice is not necessary.

The motion for Commissioners to submit their subcommittee preferences to the co-chairs in ranked choice order was approved unanimously 14-0 by a roll call vote.

Alex Jarrett pointed out that all documents for discussion at the next meeting should be sent to the staff person so that individuals can place the documents in a repository.

Co-Chair Daniel Cannity pointed out he spoke with Mayor Narkewicz and City Council President Gina-Louise Sciarra about the possibility of creating a repository for files. Daniel will share more information once he receives it. Daniel will also create a Google form to be distributed to Commissioners so they can submit their preferences for subcommittees.

Carmen Lopez hoped the Commission can meet next week so that the Commissioners can find out who will be in each of the subcommittees.

There was a brief discussion about a meeting schedule.

Alex Jarrett moved to meet next Tuesday, October 6, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. with an hour of public comment. Booker Bush seconded. The motion passed unanimously 14-0 by a roll call vote.

5. Adjourn

Alex Jarrett moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:37 p.m. Michael Quinlan seconded. The motion to adjourn the meeting passed unanimously 14-0 by a roll call vote.

Respectfully submitted by Annie Lesko, October 2, 2020.