

Commenting on Gadfly's questions for the police department

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police July 7, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

Peter Crownfield is officially retired but spends most of his time working with students in his role as internship coordinator for the Alliance for Sustainable Communities–Lehigh Valley.

Gadfly:

These are good questions!

Community policing — I was told by a police officer that a few years ago they disbanded the separate group of “community policing” officers and made the policy department-wide; the officer also said that the result was “the end of community policing here.”

Racial composition — Ideally, the police (and all departments) should reflect the population, but that isn't always realistic in the short term, because the pool of applicants doesn't reflect the community. Better recruiting could help, but I think it would have to start with minorities wanting to become police officers.

Handcuffing — Good points. Up to that point, a person may be willing to converse & answer questions — but now the officer is taking them into custody. For POC, that has an unavoidable connotation of your life being at risk.

Citizen Rights — You should be able to ask the police about your rights, but it might not be the smartest move (depending on the officer & situation). It is clear that you do not have to consent to a search of your vehicle or home; in general, a search without a warrant is unconstitutional. [Fourth Amendment] You clearly have the right to say anything you want to a police officer or any other government official [Fifth Amendment] — but you can expect that some officers will retaliate.

In Greensboro NC, some police officers volunteered to teach immigrants — both documented and undocumented — about their rights.

Police response — There's a problem with crime statistics, because they are sometimes self-fulfilling prophecies. If a neighborhood is deemed to have more crime, it generally will be patrolled more frequently and aggressively — so more crime is detected.

Also, consider crimes such as drug / alcohol use and domestic violence. In crowded neighborhoods, things occur in public areas that would be hidden in suburban houses and backyards — so even if more crime occurs in the suburban neighborhood, it may not be detected.

Training — I think it's obvious that Police Academy curriculum has not kept up with the times. According to several officers, it also focuses heavily on dangers to police and the need for the officer to dominate and control.

Community engagement — See my previous comments on other posts. No committee, task force, or meeting can come anywhere near real community engagement. What we need is an approach that is deeper and more open, like the one developed in Detroit. This would be comparable, in many ways, to the "truth and reconciliation" processes we've seen elsewhere.

As I've said before, I want to see the recent history of changes to the use-of-force policy. (Or do we have to do a RTK request to find out about the history of changes before the updated version was released?)

Peter