

Allentown police: “We are interested in improving our methods”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police March 25, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder* 

“This is not about replacing police officers in any capacity, this is about doing better to serve the residents of Allentown.”
Allentown Police Chief Granitz

Gadfly always keeping an eye on what is going on around us, especially as the one-year anniversary of the GeorgeFloyd event approaches.

You know that Gadfly is a bit frustrated at what seems to him our soft response to that event.

Here is the response Chief Kott gave to Councilman Callahan’s attempt at the Public Safety meeting March 2 to get some information on the kind and extent of training our officers receive.

Audio Player not available in this archive

The Chief gives no specifics. Her answer should be the topic sentence (damn English teacher in me!) to a meeting in which we drill down in great detail.

Unfortunately, the Chief’s answer to Councilman Callahan sounds to this Gadfly like don’t worry, we’ve got it covered, no need to say any more, that’s all you need to know, training is in good hands, we’ve got it, let’s move on to the next question.

(Listen to Councilman Callahan’s tone of voice. We know the Councilman can be tough. We’ve heard that voice. But not here. Would you agree? His tone, to Gadfly, is deferential. Why? I think we need his tougher tone on this subject.)

There was just an enormous settlement in the GeorgeFloyd case — even before the trial.

That’s what’s going on these days.

We are open to great liability.

We should know more.

selections from Anthony Salamone, “Allentown, Cedar Crest College form partnership looking at city’s policing future.” March 24, 2021.

Chief Glenn E. Granitz Jr. also said the department has made strides at bettering community outreach, and the new force has become more reflective of the city’s diverse community.

But since becoming chief in 2019, Granitz said he’s also asked why the department doesn’t do more, given the community outcry over police practices locally and nationwide that have spawned protests in support of Blacks, Hispanics and other minorities.

“We are interested in improving our methods,” Granitz said. “What we decided is, we needed data to show us what we were doing well, and just as importantly, where we needed to improve.”

In addition to the nationwide outrage last summer sparked by the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis and the shooting death of Breonna Taylor in a no-knock police raid in Louisville, Kentucky, there were local protests following the arrest of an intoxicated man in July in which an Allentown officer put his knee on the prone man’s head. Days before the incident, Allentown police released their use-of-force policy.

Then in September, an Allentown man who was beaten during his arrest in 2018, and acquitted of resisting arrest last year, sued the city and eight police officers, alleging excessive force and an official cover-up.

Granitz appeared Wednesday with Mayor Ray O’Connell, other city officials and leaders from Cedar Crest College to announce the Center for Police Innovation and Community Engagement partnership.

O’Connell said the aim of the data-driven research is to evaluate Allentown police practices in four areas: strategy and practice, community outreach, organization and the transferability of nationally

recognized police interventions, including an “active bystandership training” program by the Georgetown University Law Center. Allentown was one of the first 30 police departments in the nation selected for the program, which provides officers with tactics to intervene and prevent misconduct by their peers.

The city and Cedar Crest, which offers a criminal justice major, will work on a three-year process of establishing a community police program with the city. Part of the process will be researching community policing programs in other cities.

“We believe strongly that policing is a process and not an event,” said Scott Hoke, who chairs the department. “And as a social process, anything can be measured and accessed for its effectiveness.”

Hoke said Cedar Crest has begun surveying officers about handling calls among residents with behavioral issues with a goal down the road of developing guidelines such as how often officers need to respond in cases of crisis residents. He said results of the survey will take “months, not days or weeks” to measure.

Granitz said that once survey results are received, police leaders will meet with city and Lehigh County officials to discuss whether any crisis intervention programs or training would require changes.

City Council in November allocated \$40,000 per year over three years for the program, part of \$40.8 million Granitz sought last fall during the city’s budget review. The college, meanwhile, has committed two student interns per semester to assist in developing crime analysis data, as well offer its campus for several annual police training events.

“This is not about replacing police officers in any capacity,” Granitz said. “This is about doing better to serve the residents of Allentown.

“At the base of this program and relationship is looking at policing in a different way in terms of how are we policing in our community, what are we needing to do to serve residents better.”