



**St. Johnsville Police Department
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VILLAGE OF ST JOHNSVILLE POLICE REFORM PLAN

Approved by Village Board of Trustees

Date : March 16, 2021

Subject to Annual Review

By Executive Order 203, issued June 12, 2020 by New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo, "Each local government entity which has a police agency must convene the head the police department and stakeholders in the community to (1) perform a comprehensive review of current police force deployments, strategies, procedures and practices and (2) develop a plan to improve such deployments, strategies, procedures and practices, for the purposes of addressing the particular needs of the communities served 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. Such plan must be adopted by the governing board by April 1, 2021."

By collaborating with local governments, local stake holders, community partners, and community members, the Village of St Johnsville has reviewed the present operations, policies, practices and procedures of the St Johnsville Police Department in response to and fulfillment of Executive Order 203. It is the goal of this Reform and Reinvention Collaborative "to foster trust, fairness and legitimacy" between the citizens of the Village of St Johnsville and their peace officers.

Recognizing the interdependence of the various police agencies that serve the communities of predominantly rural Montgomery County, the initial step of the process was a meeting with representatives of the New York State Police, the Montgomery County Sheriff Department, and the Police Chiefs of the City of Amsterdam, the Village of Canajoharie, the Village of Fort Plain and the Village of St. Johnsville. This meeting was conducted on September 10, 2020 at the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office and included the above-mentioned members of Law Enforcement.

During this initial meeting, a list of objectives was developed as part of the **Planning** component outlined in the Executive Order to address and facilitate the **Listening and Learning** requirements needed to **Draft an Initial Proposal**. The cooperating agencies believe this selected process allowed our interdependent communities to share in the positive aspects of this learning initiative and still allow our individual agencies to return to our specific communities to hear and address the unique needs and concerns of

our individual citizenry. We agreed to share ideas and policies encountered that would benefit the overall efforts of all involved. We also agreed to hold an open forum with Community Stake Holders, Educators, members of the Clergy, representatives of Social Services and the County Health Department, Community Organizers and Advocates, and members of the public, to hear particular concerns on a county wide level.

The **Listening and Learning** process was initiated when a forum was held at Fulton Montgomery Community College (FMCC) on September 28, 2020 at 9 am. The above mentioned members of the broader community, and representatives of Law Enforcement including the Montgomery County District Attorney and the Fulton County Undersheriff and FMCC Director of Public Safety, took questions and listened to the concerns expressed by those in attendance. Participants included educators, politicians, social service workers, clergy members, community activists and organizers, as well as members of the general public. The meeting was productive and free flowing allowing for a good, open and frank exchange between all those in attendance. After this open dialogue concluded, contact information was exchanged to provide those uncomfortable with public speaking to engage in the process further and share their ideas and concerns. The Chief of the St Johnsville Police Department offered all in attendance contact information to facilitate the further discussion of any concerns or topics mentioned that day, or a further opportunity to share new concerns they wished to address in future conversation. The St Johnsville Police Department will continue to welcome input by phone, email, or a personal visit, even after the conclusion of this process.

Predicated upon the input and conversation which occurred at the September 28, 2020 Public Forum, a county wide survey approach was agreed upon to collect public feedback for all County Residents in general, with provision for Village of St Johnsville Residents to share their input relative to their local police department. Additionally, law enforcement executives from all police agencies in the county were asked to submit potential questions to address individual areas of concern relative to the unique policing requirements of their respective communities. These combined questions were collated and reviewed by all members and were then ranked for inclusion into the survey. Redundant and overlapping

questions were then edited down to 7 questions that all thought were best to get an accurate read on public perception of each law enforcement agency while insuring the initial survey was not over burdensome. It was agreed that the Montgomery County Sheriff's Department would put the survey out and receive the initial results. Those results would then be distributed to each individual law enforcement agency. Once the survey was released, various forms of social media were used to alert the public to the survey and request their participation in the same. The survey was put out to all Montgomery County Residents on October 6, 2020 and was completed on October 15, 2020. The following are the results received that pertain specifically to the Village of St. Johnsville Police Department.

Village of St Johnsville Resident Survey Responses:

The Village of St Johnsville is a rural community located in Montgomery County in upstate New York. The Village population is approximately 1,900 people with 702 individual households occupying 84% of a total of 834 housing units of which 57% are owner occupied. The Village demographics are predominantly white (94%), with the remaining ethnicities represented as follows: Asian (1%), Black (1%), Hispanic (3%), and Other (1%). Source: [St. Johnsville, NY - Profile data - Census Reporter](#)

The Village is situated on the north shore of the Mohawk River / New York State Barge Canal with predominantly one and two family homes in neighborhoods surrounding a four block commercial district located astride Main Street, (New York State Route 5). The Village land area is only .77 square miles and is densely developed.

A total of Forty-Eight residents of the Village of St Johnsville responded to the County Wide survey stating that the St Johnsville Police Department was their primary law enforcement agency.

Forty-One of the total responded they have been directly involved with, or directly observed a police interaction with the St. Johnsville Police Department within the preceding twelve month period.

Thirty-Two of the Forty-One respondents who observed or interacted with the St Johnsville Police Department rated the Village Police Department

“fair and professional”. They felt the interactions they had with or observed of the St. Johnsville Police Department scored in the top category, a total of 78.1 % of village residents responding to this survey question. Only two respondents, or 4.9%, rated the Police Department as “unfair and unprofessional”. The remaining Seven respondents (17.0%) gave a score of average or above average.

Asked “what change would you like to see from their local law enforcement”, Thirty-Eight persons responded to this question broken down as follows:

Twenty-Three respondents, 61 % of total, “greater enforcement, ticketing and patrols”

Nine respondents, 24% of total, “no change in enforcement practices”

Five respondents, 13% of total, “increased public engagement”

One respondent, 2% of total, “defy Governor’s anti-constitutional policy”

Village Residents were asked “what is your level of trust for local law enforcement officers with 1 being dissatisfied and 5 being satisfied”. A total of Forty-Eight persons responded to this question. Thirty-four of the total, (70.8%), gave a rating of 5 (Satisfied). Thirteen persons, (27.08%), gave the St Johnsville Police Department a score of 3 or 4. One responded with a score of 2. No respondents answered this question with a score of 1, (Dissatisfied).

When asked “Are you in favor of a visible police presence in your community to deter crime?” And “If so, do you feel that your local law enforcement agencies currently provide that to you at a sufficient level?” Forty-Seven Village Residents responded to this question. Overwhelmingly respondents answered this affirmatively (94%), with only Three of Forty-Seven respondents (6%) answering “no” to this query.

Residents were asked to provide any ideas they may have that would increase the trust and confidence in their local law enforcement agency. A total of Thirty-Four persons responded to this question as follows:

Fourteen respondents, 41% of total, “increased Community engagement”

Ten respondents, 29 % of total, “greater enforcement, foot patrols”
Eight respondents, 24% of total, “no change in enforcement practices”
Two respondents, 6% of total, “no ideas” & “stay out of civil matters”

The specific written answers shared by St Johnsville Village Residents have been reviewed and passed onto members of the Village Police Department and Village Governance for review, discussion, input and action.

Key Findings from Survey:

In summary the St. Johnsville Police Department received an overwhelmingly positive response to this survey from those it serves. However, within the Police Department we recognize there is always room for improvement. We need to strive to keep improving professionally and in our interactions with the public we serve.

The areas of desired improvement identified by the Residents of St Johnsville in the survey are as follows:

Greater Community Engagement
Increased Visibility / Patrols
Greater Enforcement

Initial Draft Proposal:

Utilizing the concerns, insights and information gathered in the **Listening and Learning** steps outlined above, the following details the Initial Draft Reform and Reinvention Plan proposed for the Village of St Johnsville Police Department. Foundational to the accomplishment of these Community goals is the establishment of a culture in the St Johnsville Police Department that constantly strives to improve professionally, and stay current with the ever changing best practices of maintaining public safety. Toward that end, a new progressive annual training schedule / education program has been initiated geared towards increasing and improving the

knowledge and preparedness of the officers of the St Johnsville Police Department. The desired impact of this training schedule is to foster confidence and trust in the Police Department as a partner in the creation of a safe and sustainable Community. By adhering to an annual topic based schedule, changes and initiatives, like those recently instituted in the Governor's Police Reform Directive, will have a structure that insures the sharing and adherence to new policies and practices.

In recognition of the overwhelming desire on the part of those we serve and protect, the St Johnsville Police Department has instituted an annual training schedule. The training topics and schedule is as follows.

January:	De-escalation and Conflict Resolution Training
February:	Cultural Diversity and Implicit Bias Training
March:	Officer Wellness and Resiliency
April:	Evidence Based, Community & Problem Oriented Policing
May:	Procedural Justice
June:	Narcan Training and Refresher
July:	Mandatory Annual Sexual Harassment Training
August:	Use of Force Training
September:	Firearms Training
October:	Taser Refresher & Updates, Defensive Tactics Training
November:	Situational Awareness Training
December:	Past Year Training Review and survey for Upcoming Year

The schedule outlined above will be an annual training curriculum for all officers of the St Johnsville Police Department, and will be updated annually to meet changing community needs and best practices in policing.

A further step will be the complete review and update of all departmental policies and procedures. To date the following Policy updates have been completed or commenced:

1. New Anti-Bias Policing Policy for the St Johnsville Police Department which previously did not exist.
2. An updated Use of Force Policy which includes all current state and federal guidance, mandates and restrictions.
3. We are in the process of updating our officer discipline policy.

All other Departmental Policies are subject to in order to fulfill the Communities stated desire for Greater Engagement, Visibility and Enforcement.

A new Compliment / Complaint Form for the St. Johnsville Police Department has been developed and can be obtained at the Village Clerks Office. This form will allow members of the public to address concerns or compliments in a neutral environment. The form will be submitted to the Village Clerk who will forward it to the Mayor for review. The Mayor will then follow up on any documented complaints with the Police Chief or, if required, an outside investigating agency.

Initial Draft Proposal Public Presentation:

On Wednesday February 17, 2021 at 6:30 PM, Chief of Police Donald VanDeusen, and Mayor Charles Straney along with Trustee Arthur Dockerty from the Village Board of Trustees, hosted a web-based Village meeting to present the initial draft proposal.

This web-based meeting was a further chance for the community to provide feedback and input on various topics related to the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative and the Initial Draft Proposal prepared by the Village Board and Police Department.

In attendance for this meeting were Montgomery County Sheriff Jeffrey T. Smith, Montgomery County District Attorney Lorraine Diamond, Pastor Thomas Jones from the Bethesda Fellowship Christian Church, Dawn Lamphere the Librarian of the Margaret Reaney Memorial Library, Josh Diaz from the St. Johnsville Neighborhood Watch, Sgt. Ray Renzi and Officer Steve Ferraro from the St. Johnsville Police Department, and Joshua Thomas of the Courier Standard Enterprise.

The goal of this meeting was to have an open and honest conversation about the perception of the Village Police Department and the proposed action plan. It was stressed that through open and honest dialogue the Police Department can and will strive to serve our community better.

Chief VanDeusen presented the following statement regarding The Village of St. Johnsville police reform initiative to date.

“Welcome all to this important meeting on New York States mandatory Police reform initiative.

My name is Donald VanDeusen and I am the Chief of Police for the Village of St. Johnsville. I have been serving in this capacity since August of 2020. Prior to taking the position of Chief I have been a member of your Village Police Department and served as a school resource officer for the past two school years. Prior to joining your department, I was a 25 year member of the Gloversville Police Department, having served the last four years as the Chief of Police. I retired from the Gloversville Police Department in 2016.

Based on my experiences there are at least a few differences in Police services in larger departments compared to the smaller villages. Smaller villages normally do not possess the same resources as larger departments. Staffing, equipment, and training are the things that jump out to me.

However we are still tasked with providing a quality level of service to all that we encounter. Regardless of whether the person is a victim, witness, suspect, or none of the above; small municipalities tend to lean on their police departments for more of an officer friendly presence and a service oriented response to their needs. We in law enforcement need to recognize the value of community interaction and community assistance and participation to enhance the overall perception of the police department. However there are times when crimes occur and those crimes need to be investigated thoroughly regardless of who they involve. Investigations that lead to arrest need to be consistent regardless of who they involve.

Along those lines we have instituted a new training module that I hope will enhance the perception of the St. Johnsville Police Department as a

trusted partner in your community. Aspects of this enhanced training schedule include De-escalation and Conflict Resolution, Cultural Diversity and Anti-bias Policing, Officer Wellness and Resiliency, Evidence Based Policing, Procedural Justice, and changes in use of force per the state and federal mandates of the past few years.

Policies are being reviewed and updated. We have initiated a new Anti-Bias Policing Policy which previously did not exist. We have updated our Use of Force Policy to include all current state and federal mandates and restrictions. We are in the process of updating our Officer Discipline Policy. I will not go into detail about these policies or any others at this time, as to do so would monopolize all the time we have allotted for this meeting. I would however invite anyone that has questions about these or any other policies of the St. Johnsville Police Department to contact me for a personal review of policies.

In September we sent out a county wide survey looking for input. The responses were overwhelmingly positive about the level of service, courtesy and professionalism provided by the members of the St. Johnsville Police Department. I will gladly make the results of that survey available for anyone to review.

A new St. Johnsville Police Department Complaint or Compliment Form has been developed and can be obtained at the Village Clerks office.

I have solicited input from local social workers and mental health professionals about their opinion of Social Service and or mental health response to certain incidents rather than a police response. I invited them to attend and speak on this issue.

I have also solicited input from our local school district for their opinion on the thought of some that School Resource Officers and police in general do not belong in our schools. Some have labeled this as a pipeline to prison program. I would welcome input tonight from any of those from education who are present.

I for one welcome a transparent environment in the police department. However, this cannot be a blanket approach to all issues being dealt with by

a police department. Sensitive and confidential investigations will be necessary to ensure that investigations are conducted thoroughly, and victims and perpetrator rights are protected. All individuals are to be considered innocent until proven guilty. This at times will include police officers who are accused of misconduct and or criminal conduct. I can assure you that any allegations of misconduct or criminal activity by a St. Johnsville Police Department will be thoroughly investigated. The results of that investigation will then be released in accordance with state and federal law.

I have not touched on everything that you may have come here to learn about. So now it is time for you to ask any questions or voice your opinion on any matters relating to the St Johnsville Police department or policing in general that are concerning to you. "

Public Comments and Conversation:

The following conversation and interchange was generated in the meeting.

There is a positive view of St Johnsville Police Department by all members of public in attendance. Indicative of this sentiment "a good established rapport" and " a good police presence" were noted by several parties in attendance.

The current School Resource Officer program for the Oppenheim Ephrata St Johnsville Central School District staffed by officers of the Village Police Department is perceived as positive by the Broader Community. The point was made that there is a significant number of students at risk in our School District and the importance of addressing "their needs" was brought forward. The value of positive interactions with a supportive and caring SRO in the education community was noted. The value of knowing individuals and families personally prior to the advent of a crisis situation will produce a better outcome for all involved.

The value of inter-agency and two way free flowing communications between the Community and Police Department was stressed as vital. The value of the newly formed Neighborhood Watch (initial meeting August 8,

2020) in the gathering and dissemination of information to address Community needs and concerns is paramount. The importance of the public bringing forward to the Village Police Department their concerns and observations was emphasized; however minor or inconsequential they may seem to the reporting party.

The need for revisiting training previously supplied by the Montgomery County Sheriff's Department relative to policing for those with Special Needs was raised as a community concern. The commitment to complete this training for the officers of Village Police Department was made. The training was last offered two years ago by David Whalen of Niagara University hosted by the Montgomery County Sheriff. Montgomery County Sheriff Jeff Smith offered to co- sponsor this training with the Village of St Johnsville Police Department again in the near future. This is something the St. Johnsville Police Department will certainly take advantage of and make available to other police agencies in our area.

A suggestion to revisit a past program and provide a formal process for checking in on those home bound and elderly community members was raised. Cooperation between the Village Police Department, Community Religious Institutions and the Neighborhood Watch is essential for the success of this program. The desired net result would be to have a Police "welfare check" should Community orchestrated contact attempts be unsuccessful. Chief VanDeusen met with Dawn Lamphere on February 23, 2021 for initial discussion on this goal and will follow through on determining the best method to accomplish this desired Community objective. It was discussed about trying to keep the process from being misinterpreted as a police overreach by anyone that might oppose police participation in this endeavor.

Clergy expressed a desire for an "informal and appropriate" social discussion of ongoing issues impacting the broader community with members of Police Department. He extended an open invitation for members of the Police Department to "stop and have a cup of coffee" at anytime and to talk about current community issues and trends. This offer was accepted by Chief VanDeusen on the part of the Police Department.

The conversation, issues and concerns raised in the presentation of the Initial Draft Proposal are hereby added to the outline of work tasks for the upcoming calendar year.

In conclusion, the process and planning undertaken addresses the relevant issues as they pertain to the Village of St. Johnsville Police Department and the Citizens and Visitors of the Village which we serve. Implementation of the program detailed above, along with continuation of our efforts to reinforce channels of communication within the Community, will address the expressed desire of those in the Community to work closely with their Local Police Department.

We must be mindful and recognize that there is always room for improvement, and that current and future trends need to be recognized, assessed, and acted upon in the most professional, fair, and transparent manner possible. We must continue to strive to get better each and every day, to maintain a good relationship between the St Johnsville Police Department and the Citizens of the Village of St. Johnsville they serve.

We recommend we complete and continue the above stated training schedule and continually assess this program for its effectiveness and relevance each year going forward. We would also recommend at least yearly a "town hall style" meeting with the public to assess their thoughts on policing and progress of the above implemented program to date. The Chief of Police should continue to review and assess all policies and procedures of the police department as they relate to changing legislation, best policing practices and Community Fulfillment. He should address any deficiencies and or omissions in the current policies, and identify new policies and practices that need to be added. The Village Police Department must operate in as transparent a manner possible in all situations, and strive toward maintaining and increasing the current level of trust that exists between itself and the Community it serves.

I recommend that the Village Board of Trustees review and adopt this report to be submitted to the State of New York no later than April 1, 2021.