

**Joint Police Advisory Council**  
**Wednesday, June 3, 2020, 10:00-11:00 am**  
**Via Zoom**

**Minutes**

**JPAC Members in attendance via Zoom:** Chief Powers, Chief Pyle, Chad Barnhardt, Jackie Wolf, Toby Stock, Jordyn Zimmerman, Maria Modayil, Ralph Harvey, Josh Thomas, Liesl Gyurko, Molly Burchfield, MaryKathyrine Tran, Kim Castor, Amanda Graham

**Guest** Mayor Steve Patterson

**In the wake of the killing of George Floyd by four police officers in Minneapolis and the resulting protests, this meeting of JPAC was a special meeting to discuss race and racism in the United States, particularly as racism pertains to police departments, police officers, and policing.**

**Jackie**, as the only U.S. historian on JPAC, spent a few minutes providing for the group a brief history of the origins of institutional and systemic racism in the United States.

**Mayor Patterson** thanked JPAC members, acknowledged the meaning of this time in U.S. history, and said white people need to do the work educating themselves and other white people about white racism.

**Chief Powers** described this moment as a pivotal point in policing. He called for police to be engaged in supporting anti-racism work. He noted that most police officers are outraged by racist behavior, but that objectivity is engrained in well-trained officers. In this instance however, he said, police have an obligation to engage and speak out.

**Chief Pyle** described what Americans witnessed in Minneapolis as “beyond heinous.”

**MaryKathyrine** asked about a discussion of police accountability in Athens as well as talking with other police departments statewide and nationwide about best practices.

**Chief Powers** outlined a few OUPD and APD regulations. Both departments require their officers to intercede if another officer’s behavior violates departmental policy. Currently OUPD and APD officers are talking about what they would have done if they had been present in Minneapolis. Both OUPD and APD are currently working with OU’s Voinevich Center to design de-escalation training for both police departments.

**Chief Pyle** noted that the APD can set an example for other police agencies. The APD hires community-minded people, not people who just want to carry guns. The culture of a police department begins with the people hired. Chief Pyle also noted that small agencies are more easily monitored than large ones and that police can develop a disdain for the public they serve because they interact daily with criminals.

**Chief Powers** pointed out that, since Athens is a University town, both the OUPD and the APD have lengthy histories of managing public unrest and peaceful protests. Other agencies have actually reached out to the APD and OUPD for help with forming operation plans during protests to eliminate or minimize violence.

**Josh** asked if police officers were discouraged from going public if they wanted to denounce unacceptable police behavior.

**Chief Pyle** explained that his main reservation was that use-of-force incidents are rarely so clearly right-and-wrong as the murder of George Floyd. Normally, agencies do not condemn other agencies and he does not want to create the expectation that the APD will always say something when there is a protest about a police action.

**Chief Powers** said the police have to remain objective. They cannot be seen as activists but rather have to find ways to be allies without making the police the center of attention. Both Chief Powers and Chief Pyle, however, have allowed their officers to support peaceful protestors.

**Chief Pyle** explained that as clear-cut as the George Floyd killing is, there are many non-clear-cut examples in law enforcement that need time for the facts to come out.

**Jordyn** observed that this issue is in some ways greater than the police. It is about how whiteness has contributed to systemic racism and that black lives do matter.

**Chief Pyle** asked Jackie if she would develop a course for the Athens Police Department on the history of racism in the United States. He would like the training to happen quickly. Education has a huge impact on culture.

**Jackie** said she would be very interested and since the meeting has invited three other US historians on the OU faculty to work with her to develop and deliver the course quickly.

**Mayor Patterson** noted that if any moment cries for change, it is this moment and that a course on the history of racism designed for police officers could be a game-changer nationally.

**Chief Pyle** asked that JPAC meet again next week.

**Liesl** reminded everyone that the Athens County Fair still sells confederate flags at the fair each year. While Athens City may be amenable to anti-racism work, in Athens County attitudes can be different. She suggested extending the history of racism training to police departments outside Athens City, in Athens country.

**Mayor Patterson** sent a letter to the Board of the Athens County Fair after the Board voted to continue to sell confederate flags at the fair. The letter informed the Athens Country Fair Board that the City of Athens will not do business with them any longer unless they cease the sale of confederate flags. Board members asked to meet with him and he responded the issue was not negotiable.

***Next JPAC meeting, via Zoom, Thursday, June 11 from 1 to 2:30***