NAACP Berkshire County Branch
General Chapter Meeting
January 2, 2019 6pm - Berkshire Athenaeum

Attendees (See addendum)

Guests
Doug Mishkin of Heisler Feldman & McCormick, P.C
Pittsfield Police Department Chief Mike Wynn

Business

1. Dennis Powell called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.
2. Dennis wished the membership Happy New Year.
3. Dennis thanked Doug and the Social Justice Action Committee for their work on helping to create the Pittsfield Police Oversight Commission.
4. Dennis introduced attorney Doug Mishkin of Heisler Feldman & McCormick, P.C.
   a. Wants to practice law in a way to join with the community and spend the last chapter of his career in the Berkshires.
   b. Firm does not charge the client - the other side pays the fee.
   c. Legal services organization that happens to be a law firm form
   d. Cases are taken when firm is confident they can win.
      i. Housing discrimination
         1. Eviction
         2. Bad conditions with affirmative claims against landlord
         3. Foreclosure work
         4. Mobile home parks
      ii. Consumer protection - debt collection
      iii. Civil cases against police departments
      iv. Discrimination
         1. Housing
         2. Police department
         3. Banks/Redlining
         4. Employment (Racial and other)
   e. Firm does not take cases
      i. Where person simply cannot afford rent/mortgage/ect
      ii. Owner occupied premises in rental cases
5. Doug spent the remainder of his time fielding questions from membership
6. Chief Wynn
   a. Discussion of the potential Pittsfield Police Department Oversight Commission
   b. Chief Wynn chronology of the ordinance
      i. End of summer 2017 letters and complaints about the PPD.
Discussed with the Mayor and PPD HR on letter of complaint and request
Prompted administration to look at what has been done on the books
Draft ordinance from Mayor’s office
Met with derision from the council
Ordnance stalled
Beginning of 2018 City revisited it
Mayor asked Chief to review what Cambridge and Springfield PD has done.
  1. Consulted
     a. National president of the national review board
     b. What passed in Cambridge was not executed the way the law
     c. Springfield Commissioner created a new system.
Drafted new ordinance
NAACP requested a meeting with Chief Wynn to look at versions of the ordinance
Subcommittee rewrote and presented to solicitor.
Another version was written
Passed the subcommittee
Jan 26 for full council to pass
Drew Herzig spoke - has the current version of the ordinance
  i. Can send to Secretary to send to membership at large
  ii. Chapter added
     1. NAACP put in training as desired
     2. Quarterly ride along training program
Reached out to Cambridge advisory board
Discussion of Sec12
  1. Police can take you into custody if your health care provider says so
  2. Brien Center began ride along program resulting in 70% decrease of sec12.
Councilor Peter White - ordinance is available on the website.
Chief Wynn
  i. Bad law doesn’t make good policy
  ii. Cambridge had a hard to working on policy that was in conflict of other laws
     1. Civil service laws and rights of officers
        a. Ie. police officers cannot be forced to appear at hearings
        b. Commissioner has given up responsibility to discipline police officers.
  iii. Believe ordinance is a fair and legal compromise as possible.
  iv. When police advisory uncovers a crime from the actual report and it gets caught up in the system. Gets sent to the DA’s office.
f. Rebecca Thomson - Commission can
   i. Develop information tools on how to make a complaint
   ii. Assist individuals navigate the complaint process
   iii. Will get reports out on individual police officers
   iv. Make recommendations on process
   v. Work with neighborhood groups
   vi. Provide summary reports
   vii. Advocate/mechanism to address state level
   viii. Does not have to be about discipling police officers
   ix. Help educate population on how the complaint process works and what to expect

7. Commission (in current draft)
   a. 11 members
   b. Mayoral appointees
   c. Current proposal diversity based on organizations and ethnic/social groups
   d. Complaint form currently only in English
   e. No statute of limitations of the compliant

8. Discussion of section 12 and the procedure of removing people from their home.

9. Will Singleton asked a question about the Columbus community outreach office.
   a. Looking for volunteers
   b. No policing is done out of the office.
   c. Toehold in durant park
   d. Work in progress
   e. Space for community engagement
   f. Technology will let them work where they want
   g. Opened as response from people in the community
   h. Volunteers would
      i. Take complaints
      ii. Fill out accident reports
      iii. Make references to right divisions in police office

10. Time frame for passage of the PPD Oversight Commision
    a. Passes in January
    b. Populated by spring
    c. Council approval of members after that.

11. Joel Priest asked what the rank and file police officers think of the oversight commision.
    a. Most officers below level of attention.
    b. They understand they have legal protections.
    c. They don’t expect this to change the discipline procedure.
    d. PPD is held up as a mode for other police officers

12. Leah Reid
    a. Need to work on customer service skills of the department.
    b. Fielded idea for social worker for the police department.

13. Drew Herzig
a. Officer Grady said officers were in support of the effort and the spirit of the effort.
b. Positive sign the PPD Chief is at the NAACP talking.
c. Encouraged membership to sign up for ride along with the PPD.

14. Alisa Costa
   a. Suggested NAACP facilitate ride along requests.

15. Chief Wynn
   a. 16 year old can do it with parents okay
   b. Have 20 active explorers now

16. Shirley Edgerton
   a. Asked how the PPD are trained to engage people outside of the complaints.

17. Chief Wynn
   a. Work with Barrington Stage

18. Problem with lack of national standards for police departments. They only get best practices recommendations.

19. Joel Priest questioned monitoring of informal activities of officers such as spousal abuse, homophobia, white supremacy

20. Chief Wynn response
   a. There is a specification on off duty conduct. Fought hard with the union to keep that.
   b. Can’t touch first amendment rights. Social media posts, ect.
   c. Special standard of behavior with police with domestic violence. Not acceptable.

21. Alisa Costa asked for what the best case scenario is:
   a. Chief has been asking for this for a long time.
   b. His hope is that is additional communications organization.
   c. Doesn’t really change what info the public and get now.

22. Tommie Hutto-Blake
   a. Asks City Councilors Peter White, Helen Moon and Earl Persip about their opinion on the oversight commission.
   b. Peter White asks people to educate themselves on the ordinance.
   c. Ask questions of councilors.
   d. Earl Persip recommended taking police citizens academy.

23. Dennis closes meeting thanking Chief for his time.

24. Motion to adjourn by (need to get name).

25. Seconded by Dennis Powell.

26. Meeting Adjourned 7:30pm