

WORK STUDY GROUP RELATIVE TO THE POLICE COMMISSIONERS

September 30, 2021

A meeting of the Work Study Group Relative to the Police Commissioners was held Thursday, September 30, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber and via Zoom teleconference.

The Zoom meeting link can be found on the agenda and on the city's website.

Alderman Richard A. Dowd, Vice-Chairman, presided.

Members of the Committee present: Alderman Richard A. Dowd – Vice Chairman
Eva Castillo
Sandy Cleary
Nicholas Dahl, Clerk
Mark Brave
Kendra Smith

Members of the Committee absent: Alderwoman-at-Large Shoshanna Kelly, Chairwoman
Deborah Novotny
Kerry Baxter
Marylou Blaisdell

Also in Attendance:

ROLL CALL

DISCUSSION

- Vice-Chair Dowd to recognize Police Chief Michael Carignan to lead the discussion.

Chairman Dowd

This evening the meeting is going to be a discussion. I'm going to recognize hopefully the Chief is here. Deputy are you going to be filling in?

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Yes.

Chairman Dowd

Okay. So it's going to be a discussion that starts with – you're going to be leading the discussion so if you want to come up and take a chair.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Thank you Mr. Chair.

Chairman Dowd

All right so I assume that you have something to...

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Sir, I was under the impression I was here to answer questions but I can get the ball rolling with a brief statement. I'd be more than happy to.

Chairman Dowd

Yup that would be good.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

It's the position of the Nashua Police Department and Nashua Police Commission that the current system in place is the most efficient, and effective, and best practice system for the appointment of Police Commission. We are aware that we remain to be the only agency in the State to our knowledge that still falls under this system, which has been in place for over 100 years. But our position is there's a reason Nashua is continually recognized as being one of the top law enforcement agencies in New England, let alone the State of New Hampshire. Having this autonomy that this system has put in place has allowed us to make decisions based on training, experience, best practice, moral and ethics that were taught without any fear of reprisals from city government.

Having been born and raised for decades in Massachusetts and the majority of our sworn police officers in Nashua are coming from outside the State, most from Massachusetts, we can all tell our war stories of our local cities and towns where we have seen and heard local politicians, local government using influence, whether undue or otherwise, into day-to-day police procedures, operations, practices and we feel that this current system is one of the reasons we're able to recruit so well and pull a high quality and high caliber officer into Nashua. I'd be more than happy to continue with that or answer any questions.

Chairman Dowd

We'll open it up the questions in a second. But I just want to start by saying this Work Study Group is investigating the questions that have come up relative to this particular action, although there may be a change but right now I believe that this is going to appear on the ballot in November. A legal petition was put together and approved and I know there's a number of signatures but outside of that, it will be on the ballot. It will be voted on and however way it goes is this city government here in Nashua will have to abide by the decision IF it goes forward.

So, again, the reason for this Work Study Group is to look at all the questions that came up during the course of when the Aldermen were looking at this question and then voted not to do it immediately to study it and because it was a Charter question, and get all the facts down before a decision on exactly how the procedure should work would go. We're still doing that and we'll see at the conclusion of the Work Study Group where we're at and what we'll do, but if it's on the ballot, we will live with every decision is put forward. Having said that, are there any questions from anyone first here? Anyone on Zoom has questions for the Deputy Chief. Yes, Ms. Timmons.

PUBLIC COMMENTGloria Timmons

Yes thank you. I'd like to point out that I don't think the Police Department is in question of how great they are or not. I'm confused when you say, you know, you have the best police department in the State. I really believe that but it's not about the police I don't think so. So it's about the Commission not about the police itself or their job being police officers. I've been here 31 years and I see the difference between then and now. So I'm not questioning why Nashua is one of the best police department in the State. I have other concerns.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Mr. Chairman, may I respond to that?

Chairman Dowd

Yes, Deputy.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

First of all, I appreciate the compliment to the agency. I greatly appreciate it. My opinion is if you feel that way and we can all acknowledge that the Police Commission gives oversight and oversees especially the major decisions budgetary, hiring, discipline of the Police Department and if your opinion is our Police Department is as strong as you say, and I wholeheartedly agree, why would we want to change anything that could undermine that or change that? Why would we want to make a change for change sake?

Gloria Timmons

Well that's my personal opinion but I hear other opinions from other people in the community. Okay because I do work

with the Police Department. If we want to change, sometimes change is better and what I don't know is the things I don't know and that's why this Committee is put together so I can find out the things that I don't know. And why is it so important to not change because change is always good? It always benefit everyone in the long run and why not? If something we're not seeing and something is missing and when you're so against something, what are you hiding and that's my concern. Maybe I don't know what I don't know.

Chairman Dowd

Okay. Are there any other questions?

Sonia Prince

Hi, thank you. My question is, when you say no fear of reprisal do you think that the other police officers all over the State of New Hampshire have fear of reprisal because they have local control over their Police Commissioner appointments?

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ms. Prince the difficulty - I'll answer the question. I believe one of the difficulties you'll find is a conversation that I can have with a Chief or a Deputy Chief from an agency where they may be very comfortable being frank with me. They're not as comfortable speaking out publicly and the reason is under most systems throughout the State and throughout New England if they share with me, which has been shared before, that they're envious of our current system, if they were to go public with that, they're basically slapping the current system in the face at the detriment to themselves. I have. All I can tell you is I have spoken to officers, to supervisors, and other agencies that have given me horror stories on local elected officials that are interfering in the day-to-day operations such as whether or not to make arrests and things of that nature, which I put at the top of my list of fears.

Sonia Prince

Well the nice thing is if there's five people, they can't take that decision on their own. The five people have to vote on something. Imagine they can't just one person can disturb the whole thing. Correct?

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

I disagree.

Sonia Prince

I have one more question. So what exactly is the step-by-step process if someone, anyone in Nashua would want to become a Police Commissioner? What are the steps precisely to become a Police Commissioner? How do you go about that?

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

My understanding is the Governor of the State makes the nomination to the Executive Council and the Executive Council ratifies or approves that nomination. For instance, we recently had one of our Police Commissioners reappointed and the information I have received is that there were no other names that were submitted. I don't know that factually. I didn't reach out but the information I received was no officials from Nashua, for instance, submitted any other names.

Sonia Prince

So they submit the names to you and you submit it to the Governor or somebody like me who would want to become a Commissioner, I have to call the Governor and say I want to be a Commissioner?

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

No, Ma'am. The Police Chief, the Deputy Chiefs, the command staff of the Nashua Police Department are not involved in this process. We are told this is who the Governor has nominated. This is who the Executive Council has approved and then we will be presented with a new Police Commissioner. But no we do not submit the names.

My understanding is any citizen, politician, or otherwise, can reach out to the Governor's office, to the governor's staff, and make a submission. What happens at that point, you would have to ask the Governor's office but anyone is free to reach out to the Governor's office.

Sonia Prince

So the Police Department doesn't recruit?

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Police Commissioners?

Sonia Prince

Yeah.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Correct.

Sonia Prince

Okay. Well I spoke to a few people who didn't get on the Commission and they said they were recruited and when they put their nomination in, they didn't even get a call back. So I was just curious about that. Thank you. That's all.

Chairman Dowd

I would assume for the people I've talked to that anyone that wanted to be a Police Commissioner could just submit their name to the Governor and yes he probably, you know, looks at whoever has submitted their names and makes a decision. One of the things that this Committee is looking for is okay, how many people have they typically had to choose from, and who were they, and more on the procedure so that we have a better understanding on what's going on. I think we also wanted this Committee to look into commissioners from other cities and towns and get some kind of a candid response from how things are working. So we didn't have that information yet and that's one of the reasons for this Work Study Group.

Alderman Wilshire

I guess I would ask how do you become a commissioner or a trustee for the Ira Harris Legacy Trust? How do you do that? You do your homework, you look into it, you figure out who it is. I mean this isn't rocket science. If someone was interested in the Police Commission, all they have to do is look into it. It's not a hidden secret by any means. That's what some people want you to believe that it's all so secretive and so, you know, nobody can get there because it's ridiculous. It's like any other seat. How do you become an Alderman? How do you become Mayor? I don't know. I don't buy that. Nobody knows how to do it. Well pick up the phone, make a phone call, and figure it out.

Nicholas Dahl, Police Commissioner

I would just briefly add that as a current Police Commissioner when I started on the Police Commission, I did not know Chief Lavoie. I did not know Deputy Chief Carignan. I did not know a Deputy Chief Linehan and I did not know any of them until I became a Police Commissioner. So they most certainly didn't recruit me because they didn't know me. So I just thought I would add that.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Mr. Chair, based on something you just stated as far as reaching out to other Police Commissions and doing the due diligence, I know this Study Committee will do. I do have a suggestion and it might be something you've already taken into account but it's based on a comment I made earlier. I wholeheartedly believe if you want to hear the most valid, accurate information especially when you reach out to other cities and towns, it is important to speak to former Chiefs and former Commissioners. The reason I say that, and I do believe this, if you speak to a current Chief of Police who answers to - I'll give an example, let's say their local Mayor and that Chief says anything other than our current system is wonderful. I don't understand how they would say that without any potential fear by making a negative comment. I know I would feel that way if I stood up with our current system and someone asked me, you know, something that

could be negative towards one of my supervisors, I wouldn't be a little bit of apprehensive. Once I step away from the system, maybe I'd be more comfortable. As an example, you have heard retired Chief Hefferan, retired Chief Andy Lavoie's opinion on this matter. They have no skin in the game anymore. I mean they'll always be very proud of the Nashua Police Department but if they believe this system was detrimental to the city, now's the time for them to speak out on it. So I would just encourage this Committee to try to reach out to former or retired Chiefs of Police hopefully ones that left in good standing and don't have an axe to grind. I would add that also. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman Dowd

Okay, hands up. Alderwoman Gathright.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

All right if I can get this together here. I'm going to try to get on video shortly. But one of the things that I have a problem with when you make a statement like that Deputy Testaverde is that it seems like our Police Department here in Nashua, because that's the only one I can speak to, feels as though no matter who has the oversight, you have to listen to them. For me personally, I have a problem with that because if you know someone is wrong and is doing something wrong, I have a problem when you think you have to obey them. Because for me, you don't belong in that position. You don't belong in that position if you feel just because that's your boss and you know they're wrong, whether their prejudice or anything else, you feel that you have to abide by them. Because that tells another story about all the years that I've been here since '79. Because you're just confirming what I've been told and what I believe for so long.

I have great faith, at least I thought I had great faith, in the Police Department here over the last four years. We've worked hard to make a lot of changes, to bring the community together, particularly people of color in the Police Department. So I'm really, really struggling now as a person here in Nashua 40 some odd years with five children, and 13 grandchildren, and a great grand coming. I'm struggling right now as to what this issue the fact that it's been request that we have local control in terms of the Police Department or Commission. It's not even the Police Department, it's the Commissioners. Do you know that I know that we're one of the best and have supported the Police Department in the last four or five years tremendously across the city and the State. But I'm struggling with how we've gotten so much flak about this. I literally am struggling. And yes, I will have a conversation with the Chief again. Because none of this seems right to me on a personal note. Someone that's worked very hard to bring that relationship with the community and particularly of color with the Police Department. And when you say basically you're telling me that all of us that sit in that chamber are lousy and we cannot make the right decisions for you. And I'm going to say over the last four years that I've been in that chamber, I thought we were making the right decision for you. So I'm expressing myself probably more than I have with this whole situation because it's really beginning to get to me.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Alderwoman Gathright, I'm sorry you feel that way. I specifically have said and I'm almost positive the Chief has said that our comments are not directed at any of the 15 current members of the aldermanic circle. We are going with what I believe our whole system, a democracy in this country was founded on that we need a system that assumes there's a potential for someone negative to be in a political office. So nothing has been directed at this aldermanic group. Furthermore, one of the examples we gave was from the 1993 investigation involving free sitting Alderman at the time and listening to retired Chief Hefferan, the people to include the President of the aldermanic circle reaching out to at the time Chief Landry basically trying to influence that investigation.

Further, I wholeheartedly disagree with you if you feel that someone who is appointed will have absolutely no influence. I've never said that I'm worried that if an officer is at a domestic violence call, and there's a violation of a restraining order, which is a mandatory arrest, if we have probable cause, the officer is not going to do the right thing. But at the same time, because I am familiar from other States on how promotions, and transfers, and things of that nature work and that there has been according to very good friends of mine from other States, undue influence. Yes I do worry that if I bring forth a name for a promotion or a transfer, that if someone in local government feels differently, that there could be an influence. That doesn't mean that that particular politician is even a bad person, especially if the person that they are trying to assist is of, you know, a good officer and a good employee. But we have a system in place. It's very successful. It is complemented by the Commission of Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, CALEA. We're one of very few agencies in the country that have this level of accreditation and once again, I appreciate the compliments you've given the agency and I would say again, why would you want to change the system?

That being said, I also in July when I spoke in front of the entire aldermanic circle, and I'm aware that some of my comments didn't go as I intended, and I apologize maybe for the way it was interpreted or presented, but at the time

more than half - more than half of my life has been with the Nashua Police Department. So to change something that is so near and dear to my heart, I'm very, very hesitant and nervous about as is the Chief of Police.

As far as the local control aspect, the number one thing that keeps our lights on, our cruisers running, our officers on the street is money. The aldermen and alderwomen control our entire budget, as I know you know, but I look at that is we have local control. The ultimate local control. In addition to that, all three of our Police Commissioners must be Nashua residents, good moral standing, Nashua residents for a minimum of five years and we do a background check on them. So the local control is there. If this was a situation where the public was coming forward and saying over and over again, we have a problem with the Police Department. There is corruption in the Police Department....

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

There is. I'm sorry.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Officers are abusive officers are not conducting themselves as professionals, then I could at least sit back, whether I agree or not and say I understand why there is a such a press to change the system so quickly. I don't believe the system needs to be changed. Yet. I said in July and I say again, I'm not so arrogant to say I'm not willing to discuss it with any member of Nashua which is why I applaud this particular study group. I'm just a little disappointed that it may still be on the ballot before this group gets a chance to really roll up their sleeves and find out what we believe the best practice would be. Thank you.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

Mr. Chair. I have a follow up follow up.

Chairman Dowd

Follow up. Go ahead. And just before you do, I have Mr. Scales and Ms. Shaheen in the queue and anybody else that has their hand up if they haven't taken it down, take it down til after Ms. Shaheen speaks.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

All right. I will pass this time because I have many more meetings to come to. Alright.

Chairman Dowd

Okay. So Mr. Scales.

Mr. Scales

You'll have to give me a minute because I haven't figured out how to – I only just figured out how to put my hand up so I have to figure out how to take it down.

Chairman Dowd

Yeah, so Miss Prince and Ms. Timmons, you still have your hand up. If you would put it down until after Ms. Sheehan speaks. Thanks. Good ahead Mr. Scales.

Mr. Scales

With the understanding that this is a committee to look at the Commission - a situation here in Nashua and understanding that currently, the Nashua Police Department - I'm going to go by Deputy Chief's position that the Nashua Police Department is not very open to the change. However, they would like to discuss the pros and cons. I just would like just a little bit more background on the feeling other than I've heard, or I've talked to, or whatever. Give me something more substantial than that for your argument against forming the Committee. I mean or having a self-deposed Police Commission?

Chairman Dowd

Okay. I'm not sure they're against the Committee, but Chief.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

I believe I understand...

Mr. Scales

That's what I changed my statement.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Yes, Sir. I believe I understand what you're saying, Mr. Scales and, again, I'm going to explain why you hear me being vague. And I'm not trying to be elusive, but because many conversations - I've been a Nashua Police Officer for going on 24 years, I have friends in law enforcement throughout New England and I've been fortunate enough to travel throughout the country training. When I get together and we have these conversations, these are private conversations and I wouldn't expect any supervisor from another agency to be comfortable standing up and bashing their own agency or their current system. That's why I give some of those examples. But to answer your question, I sit back and say I am familiar with how our current Police Commissioners in the time I've been Deputy Chief for going on three years now give us oversight, oversight with our budget, oversight with our hiring, oversight with our discipline, and I can assure you as much as I would love a rubber stamp system because I think we do things very well, they're not a rubber stamp and they scrutinize every penny, every dollar, and they question decisions that are made.

So my position is because I'm familiar with the current system and I see how successful the Nashua Police Department is, I am leery to make any change. Here's an analogy for you Sir. If you take a basketball team and you take the perfect lineup and then someone comes up and says well why don't you change the point guard? Why would we? We're undefeated. We have the perfect system in place. And forgive me for the metaphor because that's how I think. That's how I talk. But that's how I look at it. I will never say the Nashua Police Department is perfect and we can never ever get better but we strive every day to get better. That's why I'm open to the study. I'm open to conversations like this, because someone might make a suggestion that we sit back and say actually that that would work. But our number one major pause with us, our number one major apprehension is to switch the autonomy that we currently have under the Governor appointed system. We feel it works.

Chairman Dowd

All set Mr. Scales or do you have another question?

Mr. Scales

Well I have a kind of a response. Okay, well I see you guys as a team and I see the oversight committee or I should say not the Oversight Committee but the Police Commissioners as the coach to put it in a better perspective. Now, even though you might have a good going team. Sometimes the coaches leave. You get a new coach and the coach directs that team. There's absolutely nothing wrong with getting a new coach. Okay and there's always changes with a new coach. But the goal is still the same - to win, right?

With that being said, I really can't see what the argument is. I understand there's always some difficulty. I understand there is some mistrust issues because that's the bottom line. You know and nervousness and any kind of change but I don't really see a real good reason why this can't happen. But that's why we have this committee so we can discuss it.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Mr. Scales I appreciate the analogy you use. So I'm going to use it and I'm going to use the same one. So my fear is that if you have a coach who has an owner that says, "I'm going to tell you who you're going to play. I'm going to tell you what plays you're going to make. I'm going to tell you who you're going to trade. I'm going to tell you who you're not." Maybe that works for some places, but I look at that coach as that coach is not living up to their full potential. They're not doing their due diligence. They're almost like a puppet for the owner. As opposed to a situation where the owner says, "I have the money. I trust you coach. You go out and you run the team." I believe our current system is that. The Governor appoints who he or she feels has the best qualifications to give oversight on the day-to-day operations of the Nashua Police Department. Then as soon as that's done and approved by the Executive Council, the

Governor goes back to dealing with matters of State and doesn't usually to my knowledge - I've never seen where the Governor got involved with local municipal issues dealing with the Police Commission. But I do agree with you wholeheartedly about the benefit of this study group.

Chairman Dowd

Thank you, Mr. Scales. If you have another question, you can answer it later. I'd like to go to Ms. Shaheen.

Stefany Shaheen

Thank you so much and it's Stefany Shaheen. I'm the Chair of the Portsmouth Police Commission and I was invited (lost audio) to city council and did a lot of work to evaluate our city charter and really evaluate and wrestle with a citizen oversight Police Commission. I think for both of our communities, although they're different and they're appointed in different ways and elected, in the case of Portsmouth, I think we're ahead of the game in the sense that we do have built in civilian oversight in the forms of these Commissions which is a fantastic start that not a lot of communities can point to.

So I'm happy to answer any questions you might have about how our commission functions. We are duly elected. We are a Commission of three. We have terms that cycles, so not everyone is up at the same time but we are at large elected by the entire city. So you know one Commissioner cycles off and then two years later the other two spots are open. We have two open seats right now in this upcoming municipal election. Terms are four years and we provide oversight of much like you heard the Deputy Chief say we provide oversight of the budget and policy work. We just achieved CALEA accreditation a couple of years ago as well. We oversee the hiring and firing of the senior leadership within the department and it sounds like function (lost audio) temporary appointment (lost audio) about how it works in Portsmouth.

Chairman Dowd

Yes, we have some questions.

Unidentified Male Speaker

Thank you for joining us. Do you know how long the Commissioners have been elected by the City in Portsmouth?

Stefany Shaheen

I believe from the very beginning.

Unidentified Male Speaker

That Commission has been in place for quite a while?

Stefany Shaheen

Yes for a very long time and enacted by the City Charter and have historically been three members. We've actually - part of what I was looking at when I was on the Council is evaluating is that the right number? I don't think it's the right number. I think it would be better to have five because we have we always have issues of whether we have a quorum because you have to have all three commissioners present in order to have a quorum. So we've actually looked in our community at evaluating the size of the Commission but at this point, we haven't yet gone forward with proposed changes to the Charter to expand the size.

Unidentified Male Speaker

Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

I just have one question for you. What would it take in Portsmouth to remove a Police Commissioner?

Stefany Shaheen

You can get voted off.

Chairman Dowd

So you would be there until the next election?

Stefany Shaheen

Presumably, although we have had an instance where there was public pressure over a particular situation and we had two Commissioners choose to step off. They resigned and you can have a Mayor or the Council call for a resignation. Usually that kind of public pressure would force the decision of a resignation. That happened as recently as about six or seven years ago. I was on the Council and we had two Commissioners actually step off as a result of an outcry over a particular issue. In that instance, we had interim people appointed until the next election cycle.

Chairman Dowd

Thank you. Miss Timmons did you have a question?

Gloria Timmons

Yes, I do. Ms. Shaheen, thank you for coming. Just for clarification, so the citizens of Portsmouth elect your Commissioners and if they do something egregious, then the Mayor or whoever can remove that Commissioner but the key I'm trying to say is that the people of Portsmouth, they're the ones that elect their own commissioners. So if anything happened, those people are the ones that's responsible for selecting the ones that they did and not the State. Is that correct?

Stefany Shaheen

That is correct. So every two years, we have at least one Commissioner's name on the municipal ballot. This year we have to because of the way the cycles work and we're duly elected by the citizens of Portsmouth in the same way the School Board is and the same way the City Council is in this. We also have a Fire Commission and our Fire Commission is elected the same way.

Gloria Timmons

Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Any other questions? I have one other question. What type of vetting process do you go through before your name can get on the ballot?

Stefany Shaheen

It's the same way you all go through the process to put your name on the ballot to run for Alderman. It's the same way you would if you were going to run for City Council, or School Board, or Police Commission. In the case of Portsmouth, you make the case to the voters. We have, you know, community forums. We have meetings you can attend and ask questions. We have information sessions and it really is up to the citizens to decide if they can put their confidence in you to serve in that capacity. Like I said, they are four year terms. Our Council members and our School Board members serve two year terms but they do cycle so we're not all up at the same time. All nine of our seats on the City Council are at large and (lost audio) why you think you're qualified and the voters decide.

Chairman Dowd

So if I understand you correctly, that the Mayor or the Selectmen in Portsmouth had some cause to remove a Commissioner, they could ask that Commissioner to resign but that Commissioner is not obligated to resign?

Stefany Shaheen

Why haven't ever seen it in the 17 years I've lived in Portsmouth and grew up in Madbury but 17 years I've lived in Portsmouth, I've seen calls for the resignation of Police Commissioners on three occasions and in every case, they resigned. So I've never seen it play out where someone was asked to resign or they were called on to resign and they didn't. Frankly, it wouldn't be any different for an Alderman, or a City Council member, or School Board member if there was a concern over someone's integrity or some action they took. There'd be the same kind of public pressure to get them to step down if they couldn't do the job.

Alderman Wilshire

Thank you for being on the call tonight. Citizens elect their Police Commissioners so there's not really any like background check or anything like that. So I guess what would concern me about that is what if the citizens elect someone who has a criminal history? I mean you don't vet that, right? On the ballot you don't give them a background check.

Stefany Shaheen

Yeah I guess the same could be said for the City Council and the City Council approves and authorizes the budget for the Police Department.

Alderman Wilshire

Well, I agree but I think the Police Department is a little different than - I think you don't want to criminal on the Police Commission.

Stefany Shaheen

Yeah, I don't think you want a criminal anywhere in city government, right?

Alderman Wilshire

No, you don't but I think the Police Department even more so you don't. That's my take.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ma'am thank you for being here tonight. I have a very brief statement. I'm wondering if you agree or disagree. Would you agree or disagree that elected officials in order to successfully be voted continually be voted into office - so you know subsequent times – would need to curry favor with voters in order to win elections?

Stefany Shaheen

No. I think elected officials are elected to do a job and they need to do it with integrity and if they do it with integrity, then they have a better shot at getting re-elected.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Follow up Mr. Chair.

Chairman Dowd

Yes follow up, Chief.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Thank you. Alderwoman Wilshire did ask the part about the vetting process. So along those lines, it is possible for someone that has a disdain - I'll take the criminal record out of it - but someone that has a dislike, a hatred, a defund the police mentality as long as the citizens elected them to become a Police Commissioner, correct?

Stefany Shaheen

Again, I mean I think that's part of what the electoral process would flush out. And I'll give you a very candid and direct example of how this played out in our own community. We had a situation not long ago while I was on the City Council where a police officer was accused of manipulating an elderly woman out of, you know, and becoming part of her will. Right. So there was a criminal case. There was an investigation. He was put on administrative leave. This is all played out in public. You can read articles about it. It created huge backlash among the elected members of the Police Commission. The citizen who brought forward this concerning complaint was very disheartened by the way the Police Commission had overseen and provided leadership in this situation. He then ran for Police Commission and you could have argued that maybe he wouldn't be very sympathetic to the Police Department or maybe he had an axe to grind because he had brought forward this legitimate concern about how a police officer was not upholding their end of the bargain to keep the community safe. But instead, he ultimately became Chair and has become a proponent for transparency, oversight, support, and has been a strong advocate for the police budget, the department, leadership within the department. So I think the goal of the Commission is to be a conduit to the community to provide advocacy and oversight for the needs of the Police Department and to be that connection to understand what's happening on the ground in the community where there are concerns, to bring those concerns forward, to hear when the department is saying, look we need some additional resources. We need some reinforcement here. We need you to help us advocate for these resources. That's the role of the Commission.

We're fortunate both in Nashua and in Portsmouth. We have this built-in mechanism to provide that kind of transparency and to me, I mean, there's lots of different ways to do it. It has worked well in Portsmouth to have our Commissioners be elected members and when it isn't working well, like in the instance I just described, we had two Commissioners choose to resign and we had the person who brought forward this complaint and the complaint was about a Police Department and he ran for Police Commission. He was the Police Commission Chair until a year ago. I do think the electoral process does have a way of flushing out those concerns and if you had somebody who was actively advocating against the Police Department, it's hard to see why the community would elect them to serve on the Police Commission and if they did and it didn't work well, that person wouldn't get re-elected.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Mr. Chair one last brief follow up if you allow. Thank you very much. Final question for me, Ma'am. Do you have any idea how the current command staff feels about the way Police Commissioners are chosen in Portsmouth?

Stefany Shaheen

I think so. I don't want to speak for them but we just appointed our new Chief Mark Newport who has been in the department for 20 plus years. He's a UNH grad and has worked his way through the department and up to becoming our new Chief. He was put in that position not long ago, about a year ago, and I think the command staff would say the Commission has played an important role in advocating for things like budget, contracts, and including up until - we're actively in the process of evaluating a new location for police department headquarters. We've been advocating for changes to the current space that the department is operating in because we've had some issues with the building that they're in. So you know, again, I wouldn't even try to represent or speak for them but I think if you were to ask our Chief or if you were to ask the Chief who left a year and a half ago, I would I think that they would say to you that the way we are appointed and the fact that they have us as a resource has more often than not been helpful.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Thank you, Ma'am. I was there months ago doing research and I asked that question.

Chairman Dowd

Okay. I do have Sonia and Kendra, but Alderman Wilshire.

Alderman Wilshire

Thank you. I know that in Manchester I think their Police Commission is more advisory and I know we have Eva Castillo who is a Manchester Police Commission on Zoom. Is Portsmouth advisory or do you do the promotions, hiring, firing?

Stefany Shaheen

We do the promotions, hiring, and firing?

Alderman Wilshire

Okay.

Sonia Prince

Yup so if I understand correctly, I guess the difference between how you have it and how I'd like to see it is that instead of being elected like you would an alderman, we're asking our elected 15 officials who are also elected by the people to vote, vet, and publicly interview the candidates and have public input for the first time in public meetings. So very transparent process. The only differences you didn't get interviewed by the people but you got elected, and you had to prove yourself, and put your resume out there, and have discussions, and be vetted in a public forum instead of more like debate probably question answer type forum versus how (lost audio) just the problems that happened with Aldermen but there have been issues that I could list. There's three or four of them actually - whether it's police cruiser contracts with special deals, and Aldermen being threatened if they brought it up, and intimidated, and things like that, or whether it was duck gate, or if it was a sitting Commissioner who maybe had the city pay settlements in the past. There could be good or bad people everywhere but like you said, it would flush itself out eventually.

We had a person on the School Board who was elected, and we wanted her out, and we asked her to resign a whole bunch of people asked to resign. She refused to resign but she didn't get re-elected. So that happens and hopefully the Board of Aldermen can appoint somebody else and elect somebody else. So thank you for coming tonight. I appreciate the information.

Kendra Smith

I think I was just gonna kind of echo what Sonia just said. I feel like public officials are elected by the people and the police are here to work for the community. So why do you feel like you shouldn't have to answer back to the community I guess is my biggest question.

Chairman Dowd

Is that a question for who?

Unidentified Female Speaker

For the Deputy.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

I'd like to answer that Mr. Chair. Ma'am are you familiar with Tom Alciere?

Unidentified Female Speaker

No.

Jim Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Okay. Tom Alciere was a Nashua resident that has publicly called for the legalization of the murder of police officers. So under the Portsmouth system, Tom Alciere could be elected to become a Police Commissioner and if anyone says that would never happen, Tom Alciere was elected by the citizens of Nashua to the State House. I remember vividly being in a union meeting when this information came to light and the comment was made, and I was there so this is first-hand information, the comment was made we need to go public so this man is never elected. The comment was made by the union executive board, the citizens of Nashua will never elect this man. They all know he is a pro cop killer and then they elected him. Shortly thereafter, the State House asked for his resignation and he resigned.

So we are answerable to the citizens of Nashua. If we don't do a good job, we don't get a budget. If we do anything illegal, immoral, unethical, we're investigated, we're removed, we lose all our police power. We can suffer criminal penalties. We believe every day and fortunately, several members tonight have complimented the Nashville Police

Department to include Alderwoman Gathright and I know Alderwoman Gathright knows how hard we work with the community. So we believe we are constantly subject to the citizens of Nashua. We are working for the citizens of Nashua but sometimes people don't like the hard decisions that police officers have to make and I worry about a system where if a local official wants to get re-elected, I don't understand how they're not going to listen to their constituents. I mean, seventh grade civics has taught me that elected officials need to curry favor with their constituents to get elected. That's not a bad thing. I have the utmost respect for the Aldermen and Alderwomen in the city and the fact that they keep getting elected tells me they're doing a good job for their constituents. I just think the police department is one of the few things that should be a little bit autonomous. It's my opinion. Thank you.

Alderwoman Lu

Thank you very much Alderman Dowd. I just wanted to offer my experience - or I'm sorry. My husband is a current Police Commissioner in Nashua and I can just share that I know how, you know, he went about getting elected or rather appointed. He attended Police Commission meetings for a couple of years because he was interested in how the Police Department is run. He had been for a couple of years in his 20s a police officer. Never made the pension - wasn't with the department long enough. But he has always been a supporter and concerned with police enforcement. So he found out what the process was for being appointed and he followed the process which was to send a letter to the Governor's office, and then to speak with the people who approve it, and they spoke with him, and they vetted him.

Now to be honest, this will seem funny but before I got into the government, you know, into aldermanic chambers, I didn't understand how to get appointed to any of the voluntary Commission's committees that are in Nashua. I did not have a clue. Didn't even know how to go about finding out. I feel really crazy now but it does require just looking into it and asking questions. I want to really thank Stefany Shaheen, because this is what I really hoped that this group would do is, you know, get some voices of people who come from other ways of doing things. I think this is great to have this discussion. I wish that I heard a comment, I think from attorney Gathright that there is corruption in the department. I'm sorry are you talking? The risk corruption and I would just like to I haven't heard anything. I'd like to know what is being referred to.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

May I speak for a second?

Chairman Dowd

Yes, go ahead.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

First of all, I'm not going to go into that with you and secondly, I'm not an attorney. I am an Alderman, as well as a State Rep., and a mom, and a grandma, and soon a great grandma. All right. So I'm done with that.

Chairman Dowd

Alright, thanks. Any follow up Alderman Lu or are you all set? You're on mute.

Alderwoman Lu

No, I'm all set. I just heard that allegation and I thought I'd - I mean it could be discussed but um thank you.

Chairman Dowd

We probably don't want to get into allegations because that's really not the purview of this Committee.

Sonia Prince

Yeah, I just wanted to have a response to the Lieutenant. Earlier he said that, you know, people might have fear to speak up. But I knew a few policemen that had fear to speak up because they agreed with me because the Chief is the boss and you know, he's telling everybody vote no. That puts fear into them.

Now when he said that there's a fear of change, or if the system, or what if somebody wants to defund the police? Obviously if there's a system change and that person is put into that place and elected by the 15 people on the Board

of Aldermen, obviously the change is wanted by the people. Whether the Lieutenant agrees with a change or not doesn't really matter. It's the will of the people. So he's saying we don't want change. I don't like change. You know, sometimes there's change. For instance, the Chief and I didn't agree on body cams. For three years, I was pushing for body cams. No, no, no don't want body cams. This year, he's open to body cams. Great - three years. But I mean, things change. He was against body cams for three long years and this year he's not. So things change. The system changes sometimes and that's a good thing. So having the will of the people heard, I think is super important. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Are there any other questions for Ms. Shaheen or the Deputy?

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

I don't have a question but can I just say, Stef thank you so much. It's been a while. I appreciate you.

Stefany Shaheen

Well it's my pleasure and these issues that you all are wrestling through, we're doing something similar in Portsmouth. It's not easy and it's really important. No more important obligation than to ensure that public safety is the highest priority in our communities. That means we have to trust the people that we are relying on to do that work and I think this is important work you all are doing. If I can help you, you know how to find me. Just please feel free to reach out.

Chairman Dowd

Also before we...

Unidentified Female Speaker

I have a question for the Deputy.

Chairman Dowd

Just one second just before you sign off Ms. Shaheen. I just want to thank you for all of – it looks like you put in a lot of service to the City of Portsmouth and Portsmouth is one of our nicest cities. It's is progressive, it's energetic, and it's also one of the big tourist attractions in the State, and also home to one of our most important Navy Yards. So thank you for all your service. Does anyone else want to speak? Oh, go ahead.

Stefany Shaheen

I just want to say to all of you, I've grown up in a family committed to public service and I've watched my parents serve at different levels. I think local governments and municipal leadership, there's nothing more important and there's nothing harder. So thank you to all of you for the work you're doing every day to make Nashua a safer, better place to live, and work, and raise a family.

Chairman Dowd

Thank you. Does anyone else have anything? Miss Timmons.

Gloria Timmons

Not for Ms. Shaheen, I just have one question to ask the Deputy If he's still around.

Chairman Dowd

He's still here.

Gloria Timmons

Oh, okay. My question is you mentioned the word "perfect" and I have a problem with the word "perfect" because nothing is perfect. We can always do better. We can do better in every aspect of our life or try to be there. I tried to be

perfect and we I can never get there but I'm as perfect is I can get. I know you guys know always tell me how to how I can do better. I think we can do that with our police department because I don't believe they're perfect. I think if we have more eyes, I think it can be more perfecter than just saying we're perfect the way we are and that mean you have no reason to change anything and I have a slight problem with that. I was wondering how you feel that we can improve on what we already have?

James Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Ma'am, I'm sorry for the confusion. I thought I specifically said I would never say that we are perfect because we always strive to get better. So if I didn't say that, that is how I feel and I agree with the statement you just made. I thought I did but regardless, I do agree we're not perfect. I wholeheartedly agree with you. No one is and we strive every day to make things better and more efficient. Could you just, if you don't mind, the very last part of your question could you repeat it for me, please?

Gloria Timmons

Oh, one of the things is that to make a more perfect unit, or unity, that we have more people watching what we're doing and not just the three that's there. I really don't know a lot about the ones. I had to go and research and when Alderwoman Wilshire said well, you know, we know all these things and we can easily look at it but the average citizen don't. They just don't and they don't know when did the Commission positions are up? I don't even know. I don't know when they're selected and I don't know when they're up. But I can tell everyone you guys have been elected, I can tell you when your positions is up, because I actually know because it's out there. It's not as transparent as you might think it is. It's like if I'm just dumb or whatever the case is, because I can ask anybody walking down the street do you know how many years the Commissioner is in place and when is their term is up? I really don't know that. So it's not as transparent as if I was in Portsmouth because that would be real transparent because we will be electing that particular person. So that's what I'm saying. I think we don't have the transparency that we need in Nashua. Not that the Police Department is corrupt, or wrong, or anything. It's just more eyes. It's better for everybody. More people of color, more women, more everything. So the three Commissioners is there, fine. Let them be there but then we also should have somebody else other than them. Sometimes you have one accountant. You might need two accountants because the other one watches the other one If you have a lot of money. That's the point I'm trying to make.

James Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

May I answer here question?

Chairman Dowd

Chief.

James Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ms. Timmons you asked, I believe, what - you said several things I followed right along what you said but as far as what we're doing, basically to strive to be better. I'll list off some quick bullet points. As Ms. Prince said a moment ago, we're in the process of getting body cameras. By the end of October, we start our training department wide. I just spoke here two nights ago to and the Aldermen and Alderwomen were good enough to ratify a contract with a language line which will give us access to be able to do interpretation services for over 240 languages, including American Sign Language. This is one of the cornerstones of the Chief's administration to become a culturally effective organization. That is something else we're always we're also working towards.

We're constantly recruiting. We're down seven officers. We're at full complement months ago and with it's kind of a tough time to be in law enforcement. I don't think there's any ideal time. We've had some retirement and we've had some basically say it's not for me but I can tell you, and I don't have my paperwork in front of me so I'm going by memory, I believe this is accurate but if I'm off, I'm off by number two. Out of the last 29 hires, 9 out of the 29 have minority status. We're very proud of that. They are outstanding officers and we're going to continue to recruit the best officers we can that also represent the demographics of the city.

So those are just some quick bullet points when you say, I agree, we're not perfect. These are just some of the things we're doing to get a little bit closer there. I understand what you're saying about the transparency of the police commission system. I know when there's an election because when I drive around, I see lawn signs and because our Police Commissioners aren't elected, there's not that level of transparency though I have made some comments tonight on why I like the appointed system better than the elected system and Tom Alciere will keep jumping out of my

mouth every time I hear voting for them. But I do also know that with the click of a mouse, it's very easy to find when our Police Commissioners are up and what the process is. So it is there and the number one thing I can say and Ma'am I know you've worked very closely with the Chief and previous Chiefs over the years, we are a phone call away and we'll answer any questions you were any other citizen has. Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

Okay any other questions? Linda.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

I was just saying that I saw two other hands up before me that were already there. I don't know if they're done – that's Sonia and Elizabeth. But I actually have a question. Can I move to another person because I talked to Stefany? Can I go to Ava for a question?

Chairman Dowd

Oh, yeah, sure.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

Hi, how are you?

Ava Castillo

Good and you?

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

Oh, good. I'd like to know a little more about Manchester. You know I've come to a couple of your...

Chairman Dowd

You went back on mute.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

I don't know why. I didn't touch it and went on mute. So maybe somebody else is muting me. However, I got into a couple that, you know, when you guys were I guess appointed as Commissioners and what have you. I'm just curious is to how do you find that relationship since you guys are appointed as well but yet you have no voting power? And so I'm just curious how that works.

Ava Castillo

Okay. Well, you know, prior to my being a Police Commissioner, I really never had any relationship with the police. I'm an activist for a living and my heart. So both. I get paid to protest and I'm an immigrant rights advocate. So I started going to visit Chief Marta (?) because we were concerned about profiling immigrants in the City of Manchester. You know for a couple years, they didn't give me the time or the day but they were very polite. But little by little, I started building a relationship with him and he is the one that actively lobbied then Mayor Gatsas and asked him to put me in the Commission. I would have never - I had no idea what a Commission was or why didn't one. He took a leap of faith and when he told me, you need to go talk to Gatsas right now because he wants to hear from you. I went and I talked to him and I said yes I want to be a Police Commissioner because I want to act as a bridge between the immigrant community and the police and I want to understand why you do what you do and and see how we can all work together. I believe that regardless of what color we are or where we come from, we all want to live in a safe city and we want to be able to count on the police to defend all of us.

You know we're five Commissioners. We have no power with just pretty much advisory. So we really don't hire, fire. We just meet with them every month, and we get reports, and we advise, and you know sometimes we have private meetings when they discuss stuff that they don't want the public to know about, or they're not ready for the public to go about, and we just advise them. We serve three-year terms. So we can serve two consecutive terms. Then we have to break and after my six years, I told Chief I want to go back with the Commission. He said yes and I waited my turn

and I came back, so I'm right back. So I'm in my third term as a police and I really believe in what I do regardless of whether we have power or not. We do have a lot of influence and I have used that to first to understand myself why they do what they do and secondly, to educate them about cultural differences and how, you know. I have been in the in the Nashua, you know, I go through the conversations of race and justice meeting in Nashua. Nashua is one of my favorite Police Departments.

I have met Chiefs all over the place just trying to build a relationship with them. I think it's very important for us people of color, regardless of how the method to build a relationship with the police because many times we all see the world through our own lenses. We all see the world through our own experience and it takes to look back and see things from a different perspective to see how many times this all misunderstandings because we don't come together trying to see somebody else's perspective you know. When I go around sometimes talking to - I go to CIT training – the crisis intervention training and I talked to the police officers about cultural differences and I use this little cartoon where two people are facing each other and there's a six in the middle and my six is somebody else. The person across the myself is a mine. And I said, you know, that's what perception is all about. That doesn't mean that one's right and one's wrong. Until we come together to talk, we cannot really get the whole truth or why is it that you think that way?

So to me, that's the value of being a Police Commissioner. I'm not here to advise you because I really don't have, you know, I don't even live in Nashua. I have the utmost respect for the Nashua Police Department and I can testify how the Chief Carignan has been so open and so out there to build relationships and to educate himself. I know. He's helped me a lot to build relationships with police departments that I had no contact whatsoever. I really treasure my being a Commissioner because of that. But you know, I've seen some Commissioners in Manchester that is just like, like they say, everybody wants to be a Commissioner. Supposedly that's something that's really what is it not cool, but prestigious. But you know, I've seen as some of those Commissioners go sit there for an hour a month and then they don't do anything. So that's a total waste of a position that we could use to building, you know, to do something to build support, to build relationships, to get all sides to understand one another. I really don't know, I think, you know, it's just the Mayor, and the Aldermen, and sometimes the Police Chiefs that decide who is going to present and we just pretty much present ourselves to the Board, or Mayor, and Aldermen and bring our resumes and they vote us. But I really don't see it as a contested thing and at the same time, I see that your average person has no clue how to become a Police Commissioner or even that there's a position such as a Police Commissioner or anything.

Chairman Dowd

Thank you.

Sonia Prince

Hi. So earlier I just heard a few comments about, you know what could be wrong, if there's anything wrong with our Police Department. I'm privileged. I'm white. I've never been stopped for a speeding ticket. Nothing. I took a wrong turn one time, I got a warning but I have friends of color, Latinos, African Americans, Indians, they have been pulled over and it was not the same experience whatsoever. It's not because they were bad drivers or anything like that. So I think there are problems. We're just not clued in because some of us are privileged and I'm the first to admit that. I'm not saying everyone in the Police Department is bad but that was one of the reasons I was pushing for the cameras and for some reason, the Chief was pushing against me. But then some wave came my way and now he agrees. But anyway had we have had maybe a Commission of three to five people have civilians, maybe this would have been pushed three years ago? Maybe not. I don't know.

But the other thing I wanted to say is why wasn't there any diversity or gender, you know, in the last - they make an effort to put people of color and minorities on the police force but they don't make an effort to do that, you know, in the Commission, which they could recruit if they wanted to, right, but they don't. So they're okay with the status quo of having three white people there all the time who happened to be new. So I don't know. I just I think there's efforts made everywhere, why weren't there any efforts made there because they, too, are representing us and the police works for the people. So I think there's changes that need to be made and I just want to say that. Thank you.

James Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Thank you, Sir. Just to respond to that very last part. We do not want that. I believe you do not want your local police department involved in politics. We strive to not be involved in politics. This current situation is crushing us because we do not want to be involved in politics and I have not recruited a Police Commissioner and I hope there's never a time in my career where I do recruited a Police Commissioner because I don't believe in cronyism. If I told people we're striving hard to recruit not only the best officers but those that represent the city as much as possible and I look at that as such a positive attribute. Anyone – Ms. Prince can call the Governor's office and make a recommendation.

She can recommend herself. She can recommend a friend. She could recommend anyone she wants. What the Governor decides to do with it is the Governor's choice. We've said this numerous times. Governor Sununu did not initially appoint the current three Police Commissioners. Governor Hassan did. Governor Sununu reappointed them. So you have a female Governor, Democrat, male Governor, Republican, I'm looking at it like you really have both sides of the aisle here, and then you have another vetting process with the Executive Council, and then the background. But yes, she made a point. We could go out and recruit. We don't want to go out and recruit. I would like to thank the citizens don't want us recruiting our own bosses.

Sonia Prince

Can I respond?

Alderman Dowd

Follow up?

Sonia Prince

Yes. Thank you. So you're saying that the fact that often the former police officers on the Police Commission, that's just pure luck and that or maybe somebody from PAL it's just pure luck because they're interested in that. My issue with that is when I say the fox watching the henhouse and I hear of internal investigations, red flags go up for me. For instance, one time I posted online hey, whatever happened to that lady with her son who she thought was depressed, and she asked the police to do a wellness call and unfortunately, he ended up dying. They shot him in the stairway. I asked questions like, hey, whatever happened to that investigation? This was like four months after I said, did anybody hear anything? What happened? I asked what happened. You know what I got? I got a call from the Police Chief at my workplace in Manchester. He didn't like that and like, why are you calling me? He's like, oh, you know why are asking questions? I'm like, excuse me. Like I'm a citizen of this town. I'm asking questions because I remember that happened and I never heard what happened. I never heard anything about the – investigations take time. We're doing our own internal investigation to him. Like he was really offended that I asked a question. So that was another red flag for me. That was Chief Lavoie and not Carignan. So no fault to him.

But I'm just saying there are red flags sometimes and I do think that citizens' oversight is better. If you look at Vermont, they're looking into putting citizens' oversight throughout the State right now because they're having so many issues. Not that we have issues all the time in Nashua. That was maybe one but there are issues that maybe I'm not afraid to speak up about but I have friends and people of color who are afraid to speak up. So I have that privilege, again. So I speak for everyone. I try to speak for the people who can't speak for themselves. But I do think Nashua does a great job. I'm not gonna lie, I was on those committees with the Chief. I helped him organize the meetings at the schools, facilitate the conversation. What we came out of there was amazing. Some kids said, they didn't know that if you punch someone else they could press charges because they were used to like being in rough environments and they didn't think that was a thing and he explained to them it was. So they were amazed, you know. So what people know and don't know about the laws and they didn't know about, hey, do you have to show your ID? Do you not? Are you allowed to pull over? When I lived in Louisiana, I was told, you know, don't pull over until there's lights or somewhere where you're not alone here. If you do that, they think you're grabbing a gun, you know. So it's just different everywhere. So anyway, it's good to have citizens and put in my opinion.

Commissioner Nicholas Dahl

I would just like to make a couple of points and I'm not going to get into a long discussion about this. The Police Athletic League is a charity and I'm not going to apologize for being involved in a charity that is trying to help inner city kids in Nashua. I don't believe my service for power, which long predated my becoming a Police Commissioner had anything to do with me becoming Commissioner. Like I said, the Nashua police officers did not recruit me and the only police officers I really interacted with PAL were rank and file officers. And again, I'm not going to apologize for helping run athletic programs for inner city children.

Second, just because I'm a white male does not mean that I don't support diversity. I will tell you that this current Police Commission has been encouraging and supportive to both Chief Lavoie and Chief Carignan to try to help the Department become more culturally diverse. We speak about it often at Police Commission meetings, which are open to the public. We don't hide it and that's all I'm gonna say on the matter.

Chairman Dowd

Okay. I'm gonna open up the public comment. So take a break from Zoom. Is there anyone here in the chamber that would like to make any comments? Nope. All right. Alderwoman Gathright.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

I'm using a different computer and it's really weird. I can only see a part of what I need to click on. I don't know why. But anyway, I have questions now. Mr. Brave - Mark Brave. I just don't remember now. Are you a Commissioner or are you a police officer?

Mark Brave

I'm the Strafford County High Sheriff.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

Okay. So is your group or is the Sheriff on that side have Commissioners?

Mark Brave

No. So a Sheriff is elected by the county residents. We do have a Police Commission in Rochester, which is one of the towns in my county. I did reach out to them so I'm waiting to hear back just so we have another, you know, different perspective like you heard from Commissioner Shaheen in Portsmouth, which is Rock County but that's about 15 minutes across the bridge from Dover so.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

Okay. So I guess it's one of these meetings we'll probably hear from that person?

Mark Brave

Yes. I'm hoping the next meeting.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

All right. So the fact that you were brought into the Study Committee, I believe it was done because they felt that you had some insight into either Commissioners, I'm assuming, because that's what this is all about. So I would like to hear your insight as well.

Mark Brave

So, you know, I was brought here because, again, it's a different set of eyes on an issue that's, you know, the residents of Nashua is dealing with – the Aldermen, Police Department. I'm just here to bring in resources from not only my county, but counties, you know, next to Stratford County that do have successful Police Commission's that are voted in by the citizens. I know that's on the table as an option for the residents of Nashua, or for the people to vote on, or whatnot, or for this committee to study.

You know, in my opinion, when I ran for Sheriff, you know, I was elected by the people. It's a tough position because I'm a Chief law enforcement officer, but, you know, it's a political position. So, you know, it's been something where I've had to lean on a lot of the County Chiefs to help me navigate that because, you know, public safety is first but also, I am due to run again next term. So you know you're having to go out and campaign for a position - a law enforcement role. So I do know that there is a way to keep that position, like as a Sheriff, you know, there's no favors done. I have constituents but, you know, they have a voice and I hear it every day, you know. Different concerns, you know, firearms, you know, COVID, everything else, and all I do is listen, give input, you know, look into stuff, but I try to do it with transparency, openness and, you know, like I said, it is a law enforcement role and you are elected in that role. So

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

Thank you.

Chairman Dowd

All set Alderman Gathright?

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

Yes, I am.

Chairman Dowd

Just one other thing before we wrap up. Deputy - Monday at the Police Commissioner's meeting it was brought up about a young woman from California that did research.

James Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Yes, sir.

Chairman Dowd

And could you just give an overview of that story kind of quickly because I think it speaks very highly of the - it's not having to do with this Commissioners thing, but it's speaks very highly of the Nashua Police Department.

James Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Yes, Sir. Young girl in California was given a high school assignment. I believe she's in 11th grade to write about, do research on a police department. She doing research found that Nashua has continually been rated one of the safest cities in America and she wrote a letter. She did research on the Nashua Police Department and wrote a letter just complimenting us, you know, from basically 3,000 miles away on our professionalism, and all the things that we strive for, working with the community in order to keep being one of the safest cities. So it was something the Chief was very prideful of.

Chairman Dowd

I thought it was very important that the reputation of the Nashua Police Department is spread across the country. So thank you.

James Testaverde, Deputy Police Chief

Thank you, Sir.

Chairman Dowd

So if there are no other questions, I'm going to move on. Next item is remarks by my committee members.

REMARKS BY THE COMMITTEE

Alderman Wilshire

I have a question. I know that the Chair had set up some meetings to involve the wards - two separate meetings I guess, with Wards specific.

Chairman Dowd

Yes.

Alderman Wilshire

How are we advertising? How are we letting people know that these meetings are gonna happen? And how do we get them involved? I mean, I think that's what the whole purpose of this group was is to, you know, study what's going on and get input from the citizens. We get a select few people that show up but my concern is that we're not getting this word out to everybody. Not everybody watches Channel 16. So I guess what my concern is, how do we get the word out to people that we want their input? That we want them to come to these meetings and participate with us?

Chairman Dowd

Yeah. I'll be talking with Alderwoman Kelly tomorrow and see what she's got in mind for advertising.

Alderman Wilshire

Okay cuz, I mean, if I could?

Chairman Dowd

Yes.

Alderman Wilshire

I mean we should be, you know, maybe calling Dean Shalhoup over at the Telegraph, and maybe putting something out on social media, maybe scrolling somewhere. I mean, I think it's an important issue and I think the more input we have the better. So I understand that there are meeting set up, but I don't know how we're going to get those people here.

Chairman Dowd

It also should be on the city's website, as well. So I know, for instance, that I've talked to people in my Ward who are more than willing to put up signs for me and the next thing I know, they don't even know there's an election in November. I'm going whoa. So the city needs to get word out a lot better than we do. So it's a larger issue. All right. Any other remarks by committee members?

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

I just have a comment.

Chairman Dowd

Yes.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

I just want to say that, you know, over the last what four or five years, that not as Alderman but I've worked with the police department as a community representing African Americans here in Nashua but not just myself, but there's been so many like Eva said, you know. We all work together as Nashua community conversation on race and justice and actually, I've done a great thing here in Nashua not just for our constituents, but we've also done it for our children. So I want to say that at no point was there a dig? Well I actually take it back, I did make one, but we do have the best. When I look at New Hampshire and when you talk to others that live in Nashua, they will say I'm okay. I'm in Nashua but if I leave Nashua, and particularly if I go north, then that's where this difference come in. So we can say all day long that Nashua is the best and I'm going to agree with you. We're not talking about Nashua PD and have a problem when you keep trying to put it on the PD because that's not what this is about. And people really need to understand that and look at that.

This is about who chooses those for the oversight of the Police Department, which yes, we do have some. I'm just gonna say we just need to make that clear that it's not about Nashua PD because we do have number one and I will be the first to say that.

Chairman Dowd

My reason for bringing it up because I thought it was an interesting piece of information that the public should know.

Alderman Harriott-Gathright

But everybody knows that. Most people of color knows that in Nashua. So we keep saying things that you keep saying things that we've said why are they saying that again? Why they're repeating that again? We already know that. So I'm like, I'm really serious about this. If we want to do this right, then you really need to look at the issue the real issue and not keep saying it's about Nashua PD. That's all I have to say as a community person and I am an advocate. Eva,

I've known for many years as advocates working in Manchester and all over. Okay. That's my spill.

Chairman Dowd

All right, I'll entertain a motion.

Commissioner Nicholas Dahl

I'll make a motion to adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION BY NICHOLAS DAHL TO ADJOURN
MOTION CARRIED**

The meeting was declared adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Nicholas Dahl, Committee Clerk