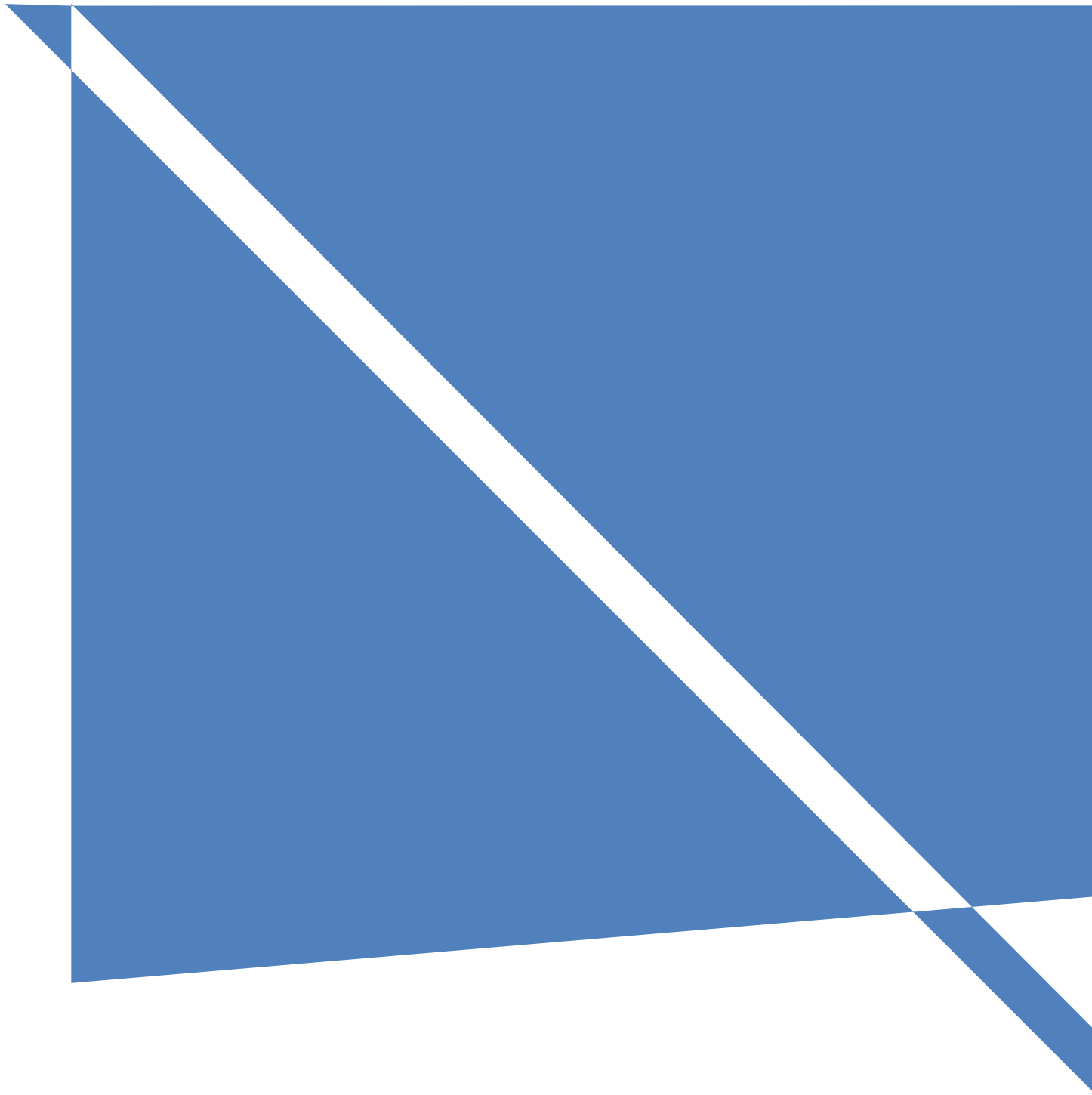




# Village of Afton Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Response

New York State Executive Order # 203



## NYS Executive Order 203 Summary

On June 12<sup>th</sup> 2020 Governor Cuomo signed Executive Order 203 requiring each local government in the State to adopt a policing reform plan by April 1, 2021. The order empowers the Director of the Division of the Budget to restrict State aid to localities on the adoption of such plan. In order to ensure the development and adoption of such plans the Governor's Office has called for the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative.

The Collaborative is meant to rebuild the police-community relationship by organizing stakeholders for a fact based and open dialogue about the safety needs of their community. The goal of the Collaborative is to create a plan of what the appropriate role of the police will be for their community. "Policies must be developed to allow the police to do their jobs to protect the public and adopt policies that meet the communities' acceptance" (Governor Cuomo, 8/17/2020)

The Collaborative process should:

- Review the needs of the community served by its police agency, and evaluate the department's current policies and practices;
- Establish policies that allow police to effectively and safely perform their duties;
- Involve the entire community in the discussion;
- Develop policy recommendations resulting from this review;
- Offer a plan for public comment;
- Present the plan to the local legislative body to ratify or adopt it, and; Certify adoption of the plan to the State Budget Director on or before April 1, 2021.

## Response Summary

In response to Governor's Executive Order #203, the Board of Trustees of the Village of Afton assembled a board of representatives (Civilian Police Review Board) of the community to review Village of Afton Police Department Procedures and Practices, and other related policing practices to study their applicability to the Village of Afton "to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color" (NYS Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative, 2020). This report contains a plan for implementing 6 policing recommendations for the Village of Afton Police Department.

## The Village of Afton History and Demographics

The Village of Afton was first settled in 1786. It is seated in southern Chenango County with an approximate total area of 1.6 square miles. The Susquehanna River flows through the village and separates Main Street, to the north and East Main Street to the south. There is one major highway, Interstate 88 that passes just east of the city limits. There are several businesses in the village ranging from restaurants, gas stations, a hardware store, privately owned fair grounds utilized for public events, and several other small businesses.

According to the 2019 United States Census the estimated population of the village is 933. Since 2015 data from the Census suggests the total approximate village population has been on a steady decline.

Please reference table 1 below depicting the approximate total population of the village from 2015-2019. The demographics in table 1 and table 2 are based on persons that identify as one race (not more than one).

Table 2 refers to the percent of population by race. The majority of the population is white maintaining between 97% and 98% from 2015-2019. From 2015 to 2019 the black population has increased in percentage from 0.2% to 0.7%. American Indian population

and Asian population have been on a steady decline of percentage per population from roughly 1% to 0.5% of the population.

**Table 1: 2015-2019 Village of Afton Population and Demographics based on persons that identify as one race**

Year	Total Population	Identify as One Race	White	Black	American Indian	Asian
2019	933	922	903	6	7	6
2018	986	971	940	7	17	7
2017	991	970	946	2	14	8
2016	1079	1062	1038	2	12	10
2015	1086	1066	1037	2	11	14

**Table 2: 2015-2019 Village of Afton Population and Demographics % based on persons that identify as one race**

Year	Identify as One Race	% White	% Black	% American Indian	% Asian
2019	922	98%	0.7%	0.75%	0.65%
2018	971	97%	0.7%	1.75%	0.72%
2017	970	97.50%	0.2	1.44%	0.82%
2016	1062	98%	0.2%	1.12%	0.94%
2015	1066	97%	0.2	1.03%	1.31%

## Village of Afton Police Department Mission Statement

Personnel joining this agency must remember that you take on a responsibility to make this agency one of the best as if it is your own. Members are expected to carry out their responsibilities and to take pride in the profession they provide to the public we serve.

The principle law enforcement mission of the Village of Afton Police Department is to preserve the rights of the citizens and reduce fear in the community through the prevention of crime, protection of persons, property, and the maintenance of order in

public areas. To anticipate and respond to events that threatens public order and the protection of life and property.

It is essential that all members remember that in the execution of their duties they act not for themselves but for the good of the public. They shall respect and protect the rights of the individuals and perform their services with honesty, zeal, courage, discretion, fidelity, and sound judgement.

Police officers must seek, and preserve, public confidence by demonstrating impartial service to law, and by offering service and trust to all members of the public.

In joining this agency, members make the agency's responsibilities their own. They are expected to carry out these responsibilities and to take pride in the services they provide.

## **Role of the Police in the Village of Afton**

The Village of Afton Police Department (APD) operates as a part time police force. The department currently consists of an Officer in Charge and five sworn officers. All department members are certified with the Basic Course for Police Officers (BCPO) and certified through DCJS. The training consists of a minimum standard of over 700 hours established by the Municipal Police Training Council (MPCT). The course covers a wide range of topics ranging from Ethics & Professionalism, Cultural Diversity, Bias Related Incidents, Professional Communication, Persons with Disabilities, Crisis Intervention, Use of Force and Deadly Force, Active Shooter Response and Decision Making.

The goal of the department is provide safety and security to the residents of the village as well as the local community that comes to enjoy the splendors that the village has to offer including several small businesses and community events. The police department attempts to achieve this goal by actively patrolling the village and engaging with the public. Department members perform vehicle and traffic stops by enforcing NYS V&T law as well as educating the public in motor vehicle safety. APD responds to calls for service as well as provides mutual aid to surrounding agencies including the Chenango

County Sheriff's Office, NYS Police, Village of Bainbridge Police and Village of Greene Police Departments. APD responds to calls for service that range from incidents involving domestic violence, mental health, larceny, burglary, motor vehicle accidents, etc. The department provides traffic details for events such as the Christmas Parade, and events held at the Village fair grounds located inside the village limits. Property and business checks are a priority for the department to help in deterring property crime. More recently with the incline in drug related incidents, drug interdiction has also become a priority.

## Proposed Plan

After reviewing the guide book and resources set forth by the Governor's office, to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color the Village of Afton has created the following plan to restore the relationship between the community and the police.

### 1. **Ensure law enforcement accountability and increase transparency of the police department by implementing Body Worn Cameras (BWCs)**

- In order to restore relationships between the community and police it can be difficult for the public to understand what police do and how they react to an incident. Body worn cameras have become a tool, over the past two decades, to assist in providing transparency and accountability of how police conduct themselves. Body worn cameras (BWCs) have been a topic of discussion in the village community; the village board has secured funding to purchase two BWCs to be worn. Research will be conducted on what BWCs the village will purchase as well as policies to be adopted and technology required to store video footage. The Village of Afton Police Department OIC will be in charge of reviewing footage and maintaining records. BWCs have a measurable outcome. They also have the potential to result in future policy changes that benefit both the public and police alike.

## **2. Increase Community Policing Efforts**

- “Community-oriented policing seeks to address the causes of crime and to reduce fear and social disorder through problem-solving strategies and police-community partnerships” (NYS Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative, 2020).
- The Village of Afton has a number of community groups, events, and activities that attract not only village residents but members of local communities. The police department has historically been involved in community activities such as the Christmas Parade, Afton fair grounds events, and village board meetings. The extent of involvement has not been a primary task of the police department due to lack of engagement with community leaders. It is a goal of the police department to develop closer ties with the community leaders to be a part of the planning process to help assist with safety concerns, provide traffic control for events, and to refocus efforts on more face-to-face interactions with the public.
- The village setting allows for a more personal interaction with the public to establish and maintain a safe and orderly social environment.
- Acting OIC of the police department will attend monthly village meetings to increase awareness of public concerns and community events.
- Suggestions for discussion with the community and village board
  - i Introduce a bike patrol
  - ii Youth engagement events
  - iii Create an internship program

## **3. Community Outreach Plans**

The three programs listed below will be offered to the community upon request. In some instances they may be offered on a specific date and time with a sign up.

- Risk Assessment Program



- Law enforcement has a unique perspective due to their job duties therefore risk assessment is a typical function of their day to day activities. The Village of Afton Police Department will offer risk assessments to local businesses, religious organizations, and schools to help identify and mitigate risk. This type of community outreach encourages face-to-face interaction with the community as well as helps to deter crime and civilian liability.
- Women's Self Defense Program
  - Acting OIC has training in Rape Aggression Defense (R.A.D) a nationally recognized women's self-defense program. The techniques used provide a basic skill level and building blocks for women to better protect themselves in situations of violent encounters. The program also promotes confidence and overall general safety.
- Active Shooter Program
  - Active shooter incidents have become more prevalent in recent years. The reality is that active shooter training has become a common training in the workplace among larger organizations and businesses. Law enforcement, again, has a unique perspective and skills to educate people on how to react in the event of an active shooter event and understand a police response.

#### **4. Annual De-Escalation Training**

- De-escalation involves verbal and non-verbal tactics meant to diffuse a situation to reduce the risk of an incident becoming violent. Law enforcement is taught de-escalation in several forms throughout the Basic Course for Police Officers however DCJS does not have a specific course on de-escalation.
- The main principle of de-escalation is that an officer should exhaust all available methods of resolving a situation before using force.

- De-escalation training will be incorporated into the annual training program

**5. Annual Procedural Justice Training**

- a. Procedural justice focuses on the way police interact with the public and how that interaction shapes the public's views of the police. There are four principles of procedural justice: fairness, transparency, voice and respect. Fairness means no one will be treated differently because of their race, class, or social standing. Transparency ensures accountability and honesty. Procedural justice gives everyone involved a voice so that they may have the opportunity to tell their side of the story. All parties are treated with respect ensuring that the officer is impartial in the decision making process.
- b. Procedural Justice training will be incorporated into the annual training program

**6. Establish a Civilian Police Review Board (CPRB) that promotes Transparency on Policy Reform:**

A Civilian Police Review Board has been established and consists of local community members including Chris Kehoe (business owner), Charles Torres (community member), Deanna Lawrence (village board member), and (formerly) Ronald Swislosky (APD). The CPRB was tasked with reviewing the current Village of Afton Police Department policies and procedures. They reviewed the policies and made suggestions and changes to previous policy. CPRB met on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

The meetings were open to the public and meant to gain public input and recommendations on current policy. The review board was available for suggestions and recommendations to update current policy. Acting OIC at the time, Ronald Swislosky then formed the new policies and procedures and presented them to the members of the board.

The Village of Afton Police Department adopted new policy effective December 14<sup>th</sup> 2020. The updated policy is reflective of recent criminal justice reform ("Say Their Name" Reform Package).