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## **Yarmouth police launch community relations team**

**By Christine Legere**

[clegere@capecodonline.com](mailto:clegere@capecodonline.com)

YARMOUTH - Yarmouth police take great pride in the department's active involvement in the community, but Chief Frank Frederickson believes there is room to be better.

"We want to make a concerted effort to reach out to all the diverse groups in town, and to bridge the gaps if there are any," he said.

To that end, the department has established a community relations team to take a closer look at the makeup of the town's population, which is in constant flux, and to

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determine their respective needs and how best to address them.

The goal is to develop a strong relationship between the department and the public? one that is built on a foundation of understanding and trust.

"The whole concept is to get out there and take a bigger look at the issues and perceptions," Frederickson said. "Getting on the ground level and getting a real flavor for the people in town. We want to share information on what we do. We want to be more open and transparent."

The death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police in late May sparked protests across the country as well as on the Cape, and heightened tension between the police and the public.

The calls for change from Black Lives Matter, with its push for police and criminal justice reform, have grown louder over the summer and broadened to include a call for economic and social justice.

Frederickson said his department wants to address those nationwide issues locally.

"We'll focus on different groups, whether they're religious groups, gender groups, cultural groups, or ethnic groups," Frederickson said.

A two-page draft has been drawn up, outlining the mission, makeup and focus of the community relations team. Outreach will be done via in-person forums, one-on-one meetings, church gatherings, ride-alongs, citizens academies and zoom meetings.

"What we have right now is the framework," Frederickson said. "There are a lot of moving parts." The ultimate goal is that "people in diverse groups will come to us and feel safe talking to us," the chief said.

In addition to connecting with the public, the team's mandate will include constant review of department policies, including those related to bias and use of force.

The team will be led by Yarmouth police Lt. Kal Boghdan, who will work with all levels of department employees, from police sergeants to patrol officers.

"For this to work, it will involve not just police, but stakeholders across the town," Boghdan said. "Our job will be to identify all the groups out there, determine how they feel and how we can build better relationships."

One aim is to underline that local police are there to help and support the community. "If there are any biases, the No. 1 way to address biases is by having positive interaction with us," Boghdan said.

Initial steps will include identifying minority groups within the community, using information from the census, school administration, and social service agencies.

The draft policy states that the team leader will recommend "training of police to improve the ability to professionally respond to and communicate with specific populations and to address their specific concerns."

The Barnstable County Human Rights Advisory Commission is among the groups to be tapped for the initiative.

Human Rights Coordinator Susan Quinones said Frederickson, who is president of the Cape and Islands Police Chiefs Association, has taken a leadership role in improving the relationship between the Cape's police officers and the public.

Following Floyd's death, Frederickson organized two forums for the region's police chiefs to discuss department policies with the public, she said.

"I'm excited he is going to launch this program for two reasons: that he is trying to get as many people as possible

to comment on the draft, and that part of the mandate is to look into the sorts of police training that will be necessary," Quinones said.

A police officer's job is increasingly challenging. "We've noticed that very often actual police matters are secondary to some interpersonal matters," she said. Police can be called upon to take on the role of mental health workers when responding to calls, she said.

The Barnstable County Human Rights Advisory Commission, which fields complaints on all kinds of issues, can forward such information to the police.

"If there is a problem with hate speech against a religious group or an issue with the homeless, we can alert them," Quinones said.

The community relations team is going to start gathering information with a public survey, which may be done in conjunction with other town departments.

Quinones praised the department for taking on an important initiative.

"I like the recognition that whatever is going on in the community, the police want to be there helping to make the community better," she said. *Follow Christine Legere on Twitter: @ChrisLegereCCT.*

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