

Manchester Message column, August 2020

Mike Clement

Policing in Manchester

The perspective from Police Chief Scott Will and Mayor Mike Clement

Friends and neighbors,

The last eight weeks have been difficult weeks as we have watched and seen graphic examples of unacceptable police response to situations that did not warrant such reaction. We strongly condemn excessive use of force, including what was used against George Floyd by the Minneapolis police officers. The public response across the country has been loud and forceful. We've heard those concerns here. Police Departments, large and small, are being asked serious questions about bias, intent, accountability and funding.

The City has received inquiries from groups and individuals asking about our policies, procedures, training and hiring practices. We think those are fair questions deserving answers. We both believe that openness and transparency in local government are key ingredients to building trust and accountability. In support of that assertion, one needs to look no further than the Manchester Police Department Organizational Values to understand the importance we place on this concept:

- We value both personal and organizational integrity.
- We value suggestions emanating from all citizens, officials, and employees.
- We value the concept of openly addressing any ethical or operational issues that may arise.

The Police Department's value statement makes clear that we embrace questions and comments from the public, even on topics that may not be easy to discuss. Recent events have focused a spotlight on police departments and their policies. Local questions from the public mainly center on the Manchester Police Department's Use of Force policy and whether it permits the sort of "choke or vascular" technique that resulted in the death of George Floyd.

The Manchester Police policy strictly forbids the restraint methods used against Mr. Floyd. Policy 410.06, Section A states:

"Unless the use of lethal force is justified, officers are strictly prohibited from applying any sort of neck restraint to a suspect - whether standing or on the ground, whether handcuffed or not - that restricts a subject's ability to breathe or restricts the flow of blood to the brain (any sort of vascular hold is prohibited). This includes the use of holds designed to "put the suspect to

sleep.” Officers dealing with suspects on the ground should, if possible and safe, place them on their side to avoid pressure to the chest, neck, or head.”

The department’s Use of Force policy already meets or exceeds the often cited “8-transformative change” demands being made by Campaign Zero:

1. The Department has a ban on chokeholds of any kind.
2. De-escalation is the primary goal of officers dealing with a confrontational subject.
3. Officers may only use that force which is reasonable under the circumstances. (This means officers must exhaust all alternatives possible before using deadly force, and only then as a last resort.)
4. The policy has a Use of Force Continuum that begins with the officer’s mere presence and/or verbal commands.
5. Officers have an absolute duty to intervene when ANYONE is committing a crime.
6. Our policy bans shooting at moving vehicles unless it is being used as a lethal weapon.
7. Our policy requires that all Use of Force incidents be reported to the Office of Professional Standards. This not only includes traditional use of force scenarios, but also instances such as pulling a firearm even though no shots are fired, euthanizing deer, etc. These reports are analyzed annually to determine trends, identify training needs (if any), etc.
8. If the situation warrants, and if it is feasible under the circumstances, officers are to identify themselves as a police officer and warn that lethal force may be used if the subject does not immediately stop their threatening action (i.e. holding a deadly weapon, etc.)

All of the Manchester department policies are based on best-practice standards established by the Missouri Police Chief’s Charitable Foundation (MPCCF) accreditation program. Once policies are certified as meeting these standards, the MPCCF requires proof that these policies are routinely followed.

The City police department has completed the “Police Policy” phase of this program. The policies are written and have been reviewed by multiple reviewers. The policies now enter the “proof” phase where the department collects tangible evidence of policy compliance. It is anticipated Manchester will complete the proof phase in early 2022 and seek full accreditation immediately afterwards.

Although policies provide a firm guideline for officers to follow, it is important that this is supplemented by training. Police officer training begins at the police academy for basic training, a 1,000-hour regimen and curriculum. That rigorous training marks only the beginning of an officer's policing career.

Immediately after graduating from the academy, new officers begin an intense 12-week field-training program in which specialized officers teach, mentor, and assess new officers. If the new officer successfully completes field training, they may begin to serve as a "stand alone" police officer. And, their training continues.

To keep abreast of changing tactics, laws, societal issues and change, every police officer, whether new or experienced, is required to complete annual training programs for a minimum of 24-hours (this is in addition to firearms training, self-defense techniques, etc.). Most importantly, the core topics covered include bias/racial awareness, cultural sensitivity, de-escalation and interpersonal communication skills.

All Manchester officers are required to attend a 40-hour Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) class. This training helps officers develop skills to deal with individuals suffering from a mental crisis. On the job, officers carry a laptop and when facing someone in crisis, they quickly connect the distressed resident with a professional counselor. Some officers have advanced skills designed to address specific kinds of crisis situations.

Community policing is the department's core value. Officers regularly interact with citizens in a variety of venues and settings. Officers seek a relaxed dialogue with the community members they serve. Developing trust is a driving principle for all officers. From National Night Out, to birthday parades, to assisting with community food and blood drives, our police officers are always in the community.

We intend to prevent what happened to George Floyd from ever occurring in Manchester. We are committed to listening, and being open to ways to improve our police department. We are committed to improving the engagement between the Manchester Police Department and the community. From this perspective, we welcome any suggestions from residents and from community groups that better help achieving those goals.

Recently, the Chief, in a moment of reflection, queried me, "Mayor, why do folks think police officers want to fight, or for that matter, beat up others? We all have families and kids at home. We don't want to get in a fight. At the end of the day, we want to be able to go home to our loved ones, just like everyone else."

That question still resonates with me. The topics of police reform, defunding or complete elimination could have much impact on this City. Our goal is to have the best police department in the region. When you and I go home, we all want to feel safe and protected by a well-trained,

intuitive, and sensitive police department. The Chief, the City Administrator, the Board of Aldermen and I seek those same goals. We welcome your views on policing matters. We welcome your perspective. Tell us what you think. We are listening.

Sincerely,

Mike Clement
Mayor, City of Manchester
314-680-9278

Chief Scott Will
Chief, Manchester Police Dept.
636-227-1410, ext 119

Post letter: As Mayor, I am proud of the City's transparency and openness in all aspects of its governance. We work at it. I host "Conversation with the Mayor" where residents and I discuss current City issues. All topics are "fair game". The next "Conversation" is scheduled for Wednesday, September 9 at 6:30 pm, at the Manchester Justice Center. The Board of Aldermen meetings are open with two opportunities in the agenda for questions from the public. The Chief is initiating his own, "Chat with the Chief" where he will discuss police department operations and answer questions. His next "Chat" is August 5 at 6:30 pm. Pick up the phone and call the Chief or me. We'll meet individually or with groups.

Final statistic: In 2019, the Manchester PD handled a combined total of 15,756 calls for service and traffic stops. During that period, we had a total of twenty "use of force" incidents. Eleven of those incidents were the result of officers euthanizing injured deer. None of the remaining nine cases resulted in significant suspect injury. In the final analysis, officers had to use force against suspects in only a fraction (.0006) of a percent of the combined calls for service.