What Kind of Policing does Columbia Want?

A Proposal for a Comprehensive Collaborative Planning Process Involving the Columbia Police Department and Community Residents

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Introduction

The Columbia Police Department (CPD) faces multiple inter-dependent major challenges. Several of these challenges are listed here:

- CPD is understaffed/overworked, officer morale is low, and recruitment is difficult.

- Officers describe an internal culture of blame and punishment, with mentorship and nurturing of less experienced officers discouraged.

- There is a dysfunctional relationship between CPD/City of Columbia management and the Columbia Police Officers' Association (CPOA).

- The Attorney General's annual "Vehicle Stops Report" shows racial disparities in CPD's traffic stops and searches, which may indicate implicit bias or profiling.

- Some senior CPD leaders and City administrators appear to be uncomfortable discussing America's history of racial discrimination and how it impacts modern social issues.

- Many community residents want CPD to adopt a community policing philosophy, which requires higher levels of staffing and training, and yields multiple societal benefits including enhanced crime prevention.

- Residents have low confidence in CPD leadership as demonstrated by the rejection of a proposed property tax increase in 2014.

Against a national backdrop of tension and violence between police officers and community residents, these challenges represent an extremely serious threat to Columbia. Therefore, it is essential that the City Council address the challenges of CPD understaffing, low morale, racial disparities in stops and searches, and low confidence in leadership with urgency.

What is required is a comprehensive collaborative planning process involving CPD and the community, which could be named, *What Kind of Policing does Columbia Want?*

Proposal Overview

This proposal envisions a two-step process that will be fully transparent, have community credibility and broad engagement, involve Columbia police officers of all ranks, address the challenges individually and through the lens of their inter-relationships, and generate implementable recommendations that dramatically improve specified metrics.

Step 1 - Define the Process:
- City Council appoints a steering committee of 12-15 key community stakeholders.
- Steering committee meets for 2-3 months to define an open, transparent and engaging community process that addresses each of the challenges listed above.
- City Council adopts the committee's recommendations for the planning process and moves to Step 2.

Step 2 - Implement the Process (since the process will be defined by the steering committee, the following are simply suggestions):
- Name the process, "What Kind of a Policing does Columbia Want?"
- Schedule multiple community gatherings in different neighborhoods over a 6-12 month period.
- Attract 50-100 people to each meeting and tackle one topic at a time - racial disparities, community policing, officer morale, etc.
- Engage skilled facilitator(s) to manage programs that could include brief informational presentations from experts followed by "World Cafe" style table discussions with all ideas captured and analyzed.
- Steering committee continues to oversee process, review police officer reaction to community ideas, and develop long-term recommendations.

This proposal raises a number of critical questions which need to be discussed openly and decided upon at different stages of the process. The following notes are intended to stimulate further thinking.

1. Who should be on the steering committee?

The steering committee should represent a broad cross-section of key stakeholders, by including:
- Community/faith leader(s) from 1 or 2 high-crime neighborhoods
- Residents from 1 or 2 neighborhoods that do not have high levels of crime
- Persons with expertise in race relations, implicit bias, and community policing
- Representatives of Columbia Public Schools, University of Missouri, and social service providers
- 2-3 Columbia police officers of different ranks

The steering committee should not include the Police Chief, the City Manager, or members of the City Council, although Council members might chair the committee.

2. Who should facilitate the community gatherings?

Having defined the collaborative planning process, the steering committee will need to identify an individual or consulting firm to facilitate the community gatherings.

This should be a professional facilitator from outside Columbia with previous experience in similar projects and a proven track record. The facilitator will need to work closely with the steering committee to plan, advertise, conduct, and analyze the community gatherings. The overarching purpose of the community gatherings will be to elicit multiple ideas and opinions from diverse participants on relevant topics.

As part of the process, the steering committee might choose to send "fact-finding teams" to other communities with model programs to help inform the community gatherings.

3. What topics should the community gatherings address?

The design of the community gatherings should be defined by the steering committee, but the following issues should be addressed in some form:
- History of race and poverty
- How to understand racial disparities in traffic stops and searches
- The daily workload and working conditions for Columbia police officers
- Experience of the Community Outreach Unit's "3 neighborhoods" pilot program
- Research from other cities on benefits and costs of community policing
- Funding options for public safety

In addition to tackling these issues separately, it will be important to discuss how they interact with each other.

4. What outcome can we hope for?

The people of Columbia want CPD to be stable, successful, and fully funded for the difficult and dangerous job we expect its officers to perform. I believe we can achieve that outcome by following a process like this - in fact, I think it's the only way!

What would that outcome look like? Police officers would have manageable workloads, receive appreciation from the community, and take pride in their roles. The Department would effectively prevent crime, solve crimes when they occur, and actively support the City's strategic vision of social equity - opportunity for all people to live safe and successful lives. The damaging legacy of racial discrimination would fade.

Specifically, I believe this process will build community support for the increased funding CPD needs to provide the kind of policing Columbia wants.

References

The following articles by Chip Cooper were published in the Columbia Daily Tribune in 2013. They provide excellent background to CPD's challenges and well-researched ideas for solving them:

Police in need of community's support now (March 9, 2013):
http://www.columbiatribune.com/business/saturday_business/police-in-need-of-community-s-support-now/article_b4f42916-885a-11e2-91ff-10604b9f6eda.html

Police need the resources to do their job correctly (July 27, 2013):
http://www.columbiatribune.com/business/saturday_business/police-need-the-resources-to-do-their-job-correctly/article_3fb3861c-f649-11e2-a9ea-10604b9ffe60.html

Give our police the support they need for the job (September 14, 2013):
http://www.columbiatribune.com/business/saturday_business/give-our-police-the-support-they-need-for-the-job/article_1b3f3f9e-1cdf-11e3-8f9e-10604b9f6eda.html

Cop's tale shows department's good, bad sides (October 5, 2013):
http://www.columbiatribune.com/business/saturday_business/cop-s-tale-shows-department-s-good-bad-sides/article_c5171526-2d4e-11e3-83d3-10604b9f6eda.html

No one can win in Sanders case (November 9, 2013):
http://www.columbiatribune.com/business/saturday_business/no-one-can-win-in-sanders-case/article_beea0146-48e6-11e3-9eed-10604b9f6eda.html