

SUMMARY OF HOSTED COMMUNITY MEETING

July 25, 2022

A group of community members hosted the Bakersfield Monitoring Team for a community discussion on July 25, 2022, at 6:00 pm. There was a small but lively crowd with 17 community members in attendance. The session began with introductions of the Bakersfield Police Monitor Team members, an overview of the stipulated agreement and a summary of progress to date. This was followed by a facilitated discussion.

Much of the discussion focused on the Bakersfield Police Department's policies, training, accountability, transparency, bias and communication. Discussions covered a range of areas and the following is a summary of comments received during the session.

Communication and Respect

- Participants felt that there were geographical divisions in town and felt that the east side of Bakersfield was over policed. Conversely, those in attendance perceived less police response or support when community members placed calls for assistance.
- The attendees reported that the BPD was disrespectful and dispassionate with persons in their community (the east side of Bakersfield) who seek police assistance.
- Several discussed experiences by youth in their community who have been branded as gang members without basis and other negative police encounters with youth.
- The community expressed that they have not seen evidence that the BPD wants a positive relationship with the residents of the east side, noting the BPD does not host engagement events in their community. Some expressed the opinion that this divide was rooted in racism.
- The attendees felt that the BPD needs to start now to build a relationship of trust with the community.
- There was discussion regarding beliefs that the only time BPD responds to a community concern is when an issue is brought to their attention from a member of the community they deem reputable, which does not include the east side of Bakersfield.
- Some participants indicated that they think the community's relationship with BPD may be beyond repair. Others indicated that the community has a role, along with BPD, to improve this relationship.

Transparency

- Participants discussed accountability of the BPD and noted that they want more information from the BPD after a community member files a complaint. They said they do not believe the BPD holds its officers accountable and that there is currently no follow through with the community after complaints have been made. Reference was made that people saw officers back on the street after a complaint, without knowing what consequences, if any, occurred as a result of their complaint.



- The group raised issues regarding the BPD's policies or practices regarding the identification of gang members. Attendees noted that the BPD will label a teenager as a gang member because they happen to be in the company of a member of a gang that they are related to or simply because they live in a certain area of town. This was noted as a continuing practice for those living on the east side of Bakersfield.
- There was discussion regarding the prevalence of cameras in their community without clarity as to the standards or reasons for their placement in specific areas. The presence of cameras in their communities created a sense of pervasive surveillance, with one community member stating it was like being back in prison.
- Some people in attendance indicated that the lack of trust is in part related to the lack of transparency of the BPD. They expressed that they wanted to be part of the solution but noted that only a small group of residents continues to be engaged with the BPD.

Reform

- While the group understood that the BPD monitor is currently overseeing implementation of the stipulated judgement, they said that something has to be done to maintain oversight and independent monitoring beyond the 5-year term of the Stipulated Judgement.
- Community members raised concern that the BPD has only provided lip service to reform, but not really taking action.
- Participants indicated that BPD pays attention to an issue when funding is available, but is quick to leave when funding for a project or initiative evaporates and subsequently no follow-on by BPD.
- Need for the BPD to conduct more thorough background checks of recruits and officers to root out members of racist groups.
- Continued concern regarding harassment and racial profiling. Participants noted that during traffic stops, community members are still being asked if they are on probation or parole.

Additional Topics

- Participants suggested that funds be redistributed to support programs for community-based programs, including Bakersfield Stop the Violence, Wendell Davis Foundation, Stay Focused Ministries, Safe Streets, Compassion Christian Center and Community TRUSTT.
- Participants felt there was need for programs that specifically target areas impacted by biased policing. This was reinforced by a belief that the department does not care to provide equitable or necessary services, rather the community is providing support needed.
- The Citizen Police Academy is seen as a positive step and a method of keeping community members engaged.
- The overall group stated they would be interested in participating in community events to provide input.
- The group identified that the BPD Monitor should provide better and more timely communication regarding upcoming meetings. The community members agreed to reach out to their network and invite people to the next sessions held with the Monitor.