

SKANEATELES POLICE DEPARTMENT



POLICE REFORM PLAN

APRIL 1, 2021

INTRODUCTION

On June 12, 2020, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo signed Executive Order #203 requiring every municipality in New York to adopt a policing reform plan. The New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative was intended to help rebuild the police-community relationship. Every police department in New York was directed to work with stakeholders to have a dialogue concerning the public safety needs of their respective community. A guide was distributed to all police departments to assist in developing a reform plan. The guide called for soliciting public comments, re-evaluating policies, improving training, and developing relationships with outside resources.

It is acknowledged that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. There is however, the acknowledgement that the police must always act professionally, impartially and without prejudice. Outside resources in the law enforcement community were consulted for input and best practices methods. Additionally, since there was not a template for a reform, law enforcement executives relied on each other for feedback. Specific law enforcement organizations relied upon included the International Association of Chiefs of Police, New York State Association of Chiefs of Police, Central New York Association of Chiefs of Police, and Onondaga County Association of Chiefs of Police.

The police department also participated in a virtual meeting that was held by the Governor's Office relative to the expectations and to answer any questions from the attendees to assist in the plan preparation. It was stressed that each agency should develop their own plan based on the needs of the community.

Onondaga County created a collaboration with all municipalities to address a comprehensive plan. The Police Reform and Reinventive Collaborative held six public virtual forums to gather public comment. One of the forums was held on January 7, 2021, and hosted by Nodesia Hernandez of New York State Senator Rachel May's Office. This meeting was to seek comments from the Southwest parts of Onondaga County including the towns of Camillus, Elbridge, Fabius, Geddes, LaFayette, Marcellus,

Onondaga, Otisco, Skaneateles, Spafford and Tully. This forum was attended by Police Chief Scott Heggelke and Trustee Mary Sennett. The forum was attended by 55 people. Although no specific comments relative to Skaneateles were made, the feedback was valuable as part of the process in developing a reform plan.

Based on the public comments that were received during all six forums, an independent report was compiled and prepared by InterFaith Works, a Syracuse based non-profit agency. The report analyzed 211 public comments regarding the role of the police in Onondaga County and the City of Syracuse. Seven (7) themes emerged:

- Community Trust
- Police Demeanor, Brutality, and Profiling
- Mental Health / Alternatives to Police
- Police Organization and Structure
- Systemic Racism and Poverty
- Schools and Youth
- Recruitment and Training

These seven themes have been given considerable consideration and will be incorporated in the policies and procedures as we move forward. They will also help guide our patrol operations and how we deploy personnel. The themes will be objectively evaluated without prejudice. It is imperative that an open and honest analysis is done on each theme to ensure that the best possible service to the public is achieved.

An Onondaga County Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative was co-chaired by Ryan McMahon, Onondaga County Executive, and Ben Walsh, Mayor of the City of Syracuse. There were five (5) sub-committees:

- Police Structure
- Police / Community Relations
- Crime Analysis

- Training
- Alternatives to Police Response

As an added benefit to the process, Chief Heggelke served on the Police/Community Relations Sub-Committee and participated in several meetings. The continuing relationship with members of the diverse collaboration will be valuable in the future.

A full copy of the report can be found at [Final Draft Plan - Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative \(ongov.net\)](https://ongov.net).

SKANEATELES POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Skaneateles Police Department is a full-time police department that serves the Village of Skaneateles. The police department is staffed 24-hours a day, 365 days per year. The village is 1.7 square miles and has a population of over 2,400 residents. Skaneateles is a popular tourist destination and attracts a diverse crowd throughout the year due to local events. In February 2020, Skaneateles was named one of the best small towns to visit by Oprah Magazine.

The police department is currently staffed by 10 sworn members and one support staff. Only two of the sworn officers are employed full-time and all the others are part-time. The current staffing is as follows:

- (1) Chief of Police (Full-Time)
- (1) Lieutenant (Part-Time)
- (1) Sergeant (Part-Time)
- (7) Patrol Officers (1- Full-Time / 6 - Part-Time)
- (1) Police Clerk

The department has a wide array of experience. It includes former members of the New York State Police, Onondaga County Sheriff's Department, Syracuse Police Department and a current member from the Auburn Police Department. The specialized skills include homicide and major crime investigations, forensic experts, tactical response and collision reconstruction. Though the skill set of the members of the department are vast, there is an outstanding working relationship with the New York State

Police and Onondaga County Sheriff's Department. Assistance from both agencies will be utilized when appropriate.

The Governor's Office created and distributed a guide to be utilized for developing reform plans. This guide was separated into four subsections, which will be addressed in this plan.

I. WHAT FUNCTIONS SHOULD THE POLICE PERFORM?

The police officer is the most recognizable and accessible member of government. When citizens have a question, concern or crisis, they often call the police. Officers are expected to serve in a variety of roles, often with little formal training. Critics argue that the police should not respond to non-criminal conducts and others feel that the role of the police should be diminished.

Officers of the Skaneateles Police Department, like many village police departments, are often dispatched to non-criminal matters such as ambulance calls, fire alarms, loud music complaints, and mental health related issues. Our response to these types of call should be consistently evaluated.

The following protocols will be instituted to meet our objectives:

1. The police chief will mandate the use of a patrol log sheet and review the daily activity.
2. The police chief will work collectively with other department heads and delegate responsibility for complaints that are non-criminal.
3. Members of the Skaneateles Police Department will maintain a relationship with the school security officers of the Skaneateles School District to assist them as appropriate and to share matters of mutual concern.

In order to effectively fulfill the mission of the police department, we must have sufficient staffing who are properly equipped. The Village of

Skaneateles needs to allocate the appropriate amount of funds in the budget for this to be accomplished.

The following protocols will be instituted to meet our objectives:

1. The police chief must carefully review staffing needs based on the needs of the community. Emphasis will be placed on recruiting full-time officers to create relationships with residents and become more engaged with their concerns. Part-time officers should be utilized to supplement staffing and not be the main source for coverage.
2. An objective evaluation should be made on all purchases of equipment. Equipment should be needed, not wanted, and be reflective of the day-to-day duties. The Village of Skaneateles is an excellent location for a bike patrol and the feasibility will be studied.
3. Fiscal responsibility is incumbent on the police chief. Careful consideration will be given to all expenses and purchases. The police chief will work with the Village Board and Village Administration to guarantee accountability.

II. EMPLOYING SMART AND EFFECTIVE POLICING STANDARDS AND STRATEGIES

Police departments must be engaged with the community to be effective. This engagement process will help build trust and result in a positive foundation.

The following protocols will be instituted to meet our objectives:

1. The Skaneateles Police Department will follow the four pillars of Procedural Justice:
 - a. Voice (Listen)
 - b. Neutrality (Be fair)
 - c. Respectful treatment (Be respectful)
 - d. Trustworthiness (Trying to do what's best for the people)
2. The Skaneateles Police Department will mandate training in de-escalation techniques and hate crimes investigations. Additionally, the

New York State Police Bias-Crime Investigators will be notified and consulted when a hate crime is reported.

3. The police chief will assemble a Police Advisory Panel to include segments of the Skaneateles Community, including the school district, business community, faith-based organizations, senior citizens and youth groups. The panel will assist in being the eyes and ears of the community and provide guidance as appropriate. The creation of a village-wide Neighborhood Watch will be one of the first agenda items.

III. FOSTERING COMMUNITY-ORIENTED LEADERSHIP, CULTURE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is being responsible for something and answerable to someone. For a police department, that “someone” is not only our community, but all communities. As we have seen over the last year, irresponsible actions of a few from across the country have had an impact on everyone. It therefore is incumbent upon every law enforcement employee to act with integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness. It is imperative that police leaders set an example and all members strive to be a consummate professional.

The following protocols will be instituted to meet our objectives:

1. The police chief will be engaged in community policing and set an example for the members of the department. The department will recruit and hire members who are committed to the community policing model and provide training on the topic.
2. All use of force instances will be immediately reported to the police chief, who in turn will be responsible for mandated reporting. The use of force policy of the Skaneateles Police Department will be posted on the village website.
3. All members of the Skaneateles Police Department will receive annual training in the use of force. The training will include a segment on the duty of the member to intercede when an inappropriate application of force is used.

4. The Skaneateles Police Department will implement a citizen complaint form on the website. Additionally, a form to commend a member of the department will also be on the website.
5. Transparency will be stressed to all members of the department. Officers will be issued business cards that can be given to citizens that they interact with. The purchase and use of body worn cameras will be researched during 2021.
6. The members of the Skaneateles Police Department will maintain an active relationship with all segments of the community. It is imperative that an established relationship exists with faith-based organizations, civic organizations, youth groups, Skaneateles School District staff at all levels, business owners, non-governmental organizations, and senior citizen groups. The aforementioned list is not all-inclusive, but a sampling of the groups that will be engaged.

IV. RECRUITING AND SUPPORTING EXCELLENT PERSONNEL

People are the most valuable asset in every organization and police departments are no different. Recruiting the right people and retaining them is the cornerstone for success. Long-term members take ownership and create relationships that bring trust to the agency. The reputation of a police department can attract qualified candidates and the opposite will sway them away. Leaders in every agency need to be proactive in treating everyone with respect and conducting themselves professionally as an example to follow.

The following protocols will be instituted to meet our objectives:

1. The Skaneateles Police Department is an equal opportunity employer and will remain as such.
2. Though there are currently no in-service training standards for police agencies that are not accredited, the Skaneateles Police Department will mandate a minimum of 21-hours of in-service training annually. Emphasis will be placed on bias awareness training, de-escalation, hate crimes and communication skills.

3. The Skaneateles Police Department will provide officer wellness training. In the event of a critical incident, the police chief will contact the New York State Police Employee Assistance Plan for consultation.

Police reform and achieving excellence is an on-going process. The Skaneateles Police Department is committed to working collaboratively with members of the community, outside police agencies, civic groups, advocates and non-governmental organizations to serve the Skaneateles community in the best way possible. Through this commitment we are confident that our relationship will grow stronger and will be one built on mutual respect and trust.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

One item that needs to be addressed separately is the topic of community outreach. The Skaneateles Police Department cherishes an excellent working relationship with the community and knows that it is the cornerstone of success. We believe in maintaining a “community bank account” and that good deeds, professional interaction and impartiality build a reputation that fosters trust.

Besides participating in the Onondaga County forums, the Skaneateles Police Department sent a survey out to the residents and business owners. The notification of the survey was made through the utility bills and could be completed on-line or through a mailed paper copy. Our goal was to gauge how the community felt about their police department and to address what the community’s concerns were. The survey consisted of 13 statements which were answered by selecting *Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree*. The survey was designed so that selections marked *Strongly Agree* were favorable and that *Strongly Disagree* showed a strong indication that improvement is needed.

The statements in the survey were as follows:

1. I feel safe in my home
2. I feel safe walking in the village during the day
3. I feel safe walking alone in the village at night

4. The police presence in the village is sufficient
5. The police department acts professionally
6. The members of the police department look professional
7. Members of the police department listen to community concerns
8. The police department enforces the laws fairly
9. Members of the police department are respectful
10. I trust the members of the police department
11. Traffic enforcement measures are adequate
12. Crime is not a problem in our community
13. The police department is actively engaged with our community

In addition to the statements, the following questions were also asked by those who responded:

What is your age group?	Number of responses
25-44	20
45-64	78
65 and Older	84

What is your gender?	
Male	83
Female	91
Prefer not to answer	7

Are you a resident?

Yes	162
No	15

Are you a business owner?

Yes	33
No	144

Would you like to provide your contact information for us to reach out regarding your concerns?

Yes	53
No	121

The survey was designed so that all the statement questions had to be answered, but the personal questions could be skipped. A total of 183 people participated in the survey. The results of the survey are as follows:

Strongly Agree	48.6%
Agree	31.1%
Neutral	15.3%
Disagree	4%
Strongly Disagree	<1%

Though the results can be interpreted that the community is satisfied with public safety measures, we cannot overlook the fact that nearly 5% are not. The majority of those unfavorable responses pertained to traffic enforcement measures. It is evident that the community views traffic safety issues as a major priority and they feel that the police department could address those matters more effectively.

Another important result is that 53, or 29%, left contact information to discuss police-community relations further.

Community outreach is of extreme importance and is the path to success. Our outreach has been a priority and will continue. In the near future, the following steps will be taken to keep an open dialogue with the community:

- The police chief will personally contact the 53 respondents from the survey
- A Police Advisory Council will meet quarterly for input and to address community concerns
- A Coffee with a Cop event will be held depending on the state of the COVID-19 pandemic
- A public meeting will be held with members of the Police Advisory Council to introduce the members, discuss our goals and obtain input on what the community feels the role should be

SUMMARY

This reform plan is not the end, it is not the beginning. It is a continuation to serve the public and to address the needs of the community. It is a necessary reminder that we need to continuously evaluate how we act and how we enforce the law. The plan is a roadmap to ensure that we are impartial and not engaged in bias behavior. It is extremely important that we do not give the impression to the contrary. All citizens, regardless of race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religion or gender must be treated equally. Equally with respect, compassion and kindness.

The Skaneateles Police Department is committed to making the Village of Skaneateles and place where all residents, business owners and visitors feel safe, included and welcome.