



Town of Eden
Police Reform and Reinvention Committee
Recommendations (Draft)

February 4, 2021

Members of the Committee:

Brian Burgstahler – SRO/ Eden Police

Emma Buckthal – Eden Reserve Police/ Community member

Deborah Felschow – Community member

Marlene Grunder – Administrative Assistant for Supervisor/ Community member

Nelcilia Harling – Community member

Chief Gregory Savage – Eden Police Chief

Jeff Sortisio – Eden Central Schools Superintendent

Richard Ventry – Deputy Supervisor/ Business owner

Schedule

November 5, 2020 – Set Goals and timeline

December 3, 2020 – Review

December 9, 2020 - Public comment period during Town Board meetings; no public comments were presented

January 7, 2021 – Developed plan

February 4, 2021 – Finalized plan

February 22, 2021 – March 10, 2021 – Time period for public comments on plan

March 10, 2021 – Town Board Adopt plan if there are not further changes needed

Town of Eden Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Committee Report and Recommendations

It is the overall sense of the committee that the Eden Police have a generally good relationship with the town's community and local institutions. In the committee's review of the best practices encouraged by the New York Police Reform Workbook, it is the sense of the committee that the Eden Police are already following many of these best practices either formally or informally, and that the Eden Police generally do not follow practices described in the workbook as potentially problematic.

As outlined below in further detail, the committee encourages the Eden Police to continue best practices already in place and to explore opportunities to expand upon these existing positive practices. Where appropriate, the committee encourages the Eden Police to consider memorializing current informal positive practices into formal policy. The committee also encourages the Eden Police to continue avoiding potentially problematic practices not currently employed.

Last, the committee suggests that the Eden Police consider updating existing policy and procedure manuals as well as adopting new policies and practices, such as a language access plan, which may be beneficial in building community relationships.

Current Positive Practices to be Continued

It is the sense of the committee that the Eden Police's current School Resource Officer (SRO) program contributes to building positive relationships between the Eden Police and the school community. The SRO program helps educate students about law enforcement topics to help them avoid future problems, such as through a DWI program targeting high school students. It is the understanding of the committee that the SRO and the school staff collaborate to address problem situations non-judicially where possible, such as by referring students facing challenges to the school counselors instead of addressing problems with an immediate referral to family court. The committee encourages the Eden Police to continue the SRO program and associated positive practices.

Eden Police officers generally serve on duty alone. As a result, Eden officers tend to excel at de-escalation strategies because they cannot rely on strength in numbers. It is the understanding of the committee that ability to de-escalate has been a past consideration for officer hiring in Eden, which we believe has contributed to the Eden Police's strength in this area. The committee encourages the Eden Police to continue their focus on de-escalation skills. The committee suggests that the Eden Police consider formally incorporating the present emphasis on de-escalation ability as a consideration in hiring. The committee also suggests that the Eden Police consider encouraging or requiring current officers to attend crisis intervention team (CIT) training to build upon existing de-escalation skills.

It is the understanding of the committee that the Eden Police department currently counts community contacts towards daily job performance goals, which encourages officers to engage with the community in a positive manner. The committee encourages the Eden Police Department to continue this practice and consider formalizing it through policy. The committee also encourages the Eden Police to continue positive community participation, such as providing support to needy families at Christmas and other occasions, through the Eden Police Club.

Potentially Problematic Practices to Be Avoided

As of this report, the Eden Police does not utilize surplus military equipment, drones, or facial recognition technology in its operations. The Eden Police also do not operate a SWAT team or other high risk response group. The committee believes that the use of such technologies or teams would be inappropriate in our community and encourages the Eden Police to continue avoiding such practices.

The Eden Police also does not utilize “stop and frisk” practices of temporarily detaining individuals on the street for pat-downs based on reasonable suspicion, nor does the department utilize informal quotas which may encourage officers to make arrests to meet a mandated numeric threshold. The committee believes that the use of such practices would be inappropriate for our community, could damage the existing positive relationship between the police and the community, and encourages the Eden Police to continue avoiding such practices.

Suggested New Policies / Practices to Be Adopted

It is the understanding of the committee that the Chief of Police is in the process of revising and modernizing the Eden Police’s policies and procedures manual. The committee understands that the Chief of Police has re-written several key policies and is finalizing them for implementation. These policies include a use of force policy which prohibits the use of choke holds unless deadly force is justified, requires the documentation and investigation of any use of force incidents, and outlines the rules for carrying and deploying lethal and non-lethal weapons. A policy on the operation of Eden Police Department vehicles, including policy on police pursuits, is also ready for implementation.

Last, the committee understands that the Chief of Police is working to develop additional policies including policies on training and deployment for tasers and OC spray, an annual evaluation policy for officers, which may include incentives for continuing education and fitness, an updated policy regarding investigation and disposition of personnel complaints received from the public, as well as an overall disciplinary policy.

The committee supports the Chief of Police in undertaking the above policy and procedure revisions to bring the Eden Police’s policies up to date. In the course of this update, the committee encourages the Eden Police to develop a formal language access policy regarding the

use of interpreters and language line resources by the Eden Police in providing services to limited English proficiency members of our community.

It is the understanding of the committee that in the past, the Eden Police operated an informal internship program offering opportunities to older high school students, but that this program is not currently active. The committee suggests that the Eden Police consider re-activating its student internship program as a technique to grow its positive community relations. The committee also suggests that the Eden Police may want to invite service providers, such as the operators of the 211 WNY hotline, to provide training to the Eden Police about available supportive services which may be useful to community members who contact the police for matters which may be best handled through non-police assistance.

It is the understanding of the committee that the Eden Police do not currently participate in an Employee Assistance Program. Although members should have access to mental health care through their health care provider, the committee recommends that the Town of Eden explore available options to provide the Eden Police an Employee Assistance Program which is geared towards meeting the unique needs and challenges of law enforcement officers.

It will be the responsibility of the Eden Town Board to review this plan yearly and confirm the recommendations are being accomplished.