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City of Akron - Police Chief Town Hall

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Summary

- Akron Mayor Shamas Malik is asking residents for feedback to inform the mayor's office on community priorities as they hire the next Akron Police Department (APD) police chief.
- The current priorities of the mayor's office include:
 - Experience with management in a large police organization
 - Strong sense of integrity and honesty
 - Emphasis on community policing and violence intervention
 - Commitment to building trust with residents through relationship-building, transparency and accountability
- At this first of three town hall meetings, a few items came up several times:
 - Community members were concerned about the cost of hiring an external police candidate and the possible lack of commitment to the community of someone not from Akron.
 - Community policing was a priority.
 - A shift in current culture and trust issues with the public. Accountability needed for bad police policies and officers.
 - Prioritization and education of basic needs being met, racism and social needs, mental health, and immigrant issues that require more education and creative solutions within policing and beyond policing.

Follow-Up Questions

- How long will the [survey](#) be open and available for residents to complete?
- How much weight in the decision making do the survey results have?

- The mayor's office has already listed their priorities. Will those priorities change if the survey results differ?
- How will the mayor's office let the immigrant community know that the survey exists? Are the surveys in other languages only available at the North Hill Community Centers? Are they also available online?
- Will the mayor's office hold a town hall in the North Hill neighborhood with interpretation services available so members of the immigrant population can share their voice and priorities in person?
- Will the mayor's office give weight to the [Police Oversight board](#) through this process? Have they been included in informing the mayor's office on their current priorities?

Notes

The meeting started at 6:02 p.m. There were around 100 people in the auditorium when the meeting began. Several more trickled in throughout the meeting. There was a truck outside and a police dog mascot inside with the sign, "Save our tax dollars, hire from within the department."

The meeting was live streamed and can be found [here](#). On stage were Chief of Staff [Brittany Zaehring](#), Ohio Sen. [Vernon Sykes](#), Chief of Strategy [Nanette Pitt](#), Senior Pastor at St. Ashworth Temple [Robert DeJournett](#), retired APD Captain [Sylvia Trundle](#), Assistant to the Mayor for Labor Relations Randy Briggs, and [Mayor Malik](#).

Pitt started the meeting asking the audience to take 10 to 15 minutes to fill out the police survey. The survey can be found online [here](#) and is for all Akron residents. Officials also had paper copies, QR codes, and links to the survey from the Akron City [website](#).

At 6:15 p.m. Malik gave a brief introduction about the importance of getting community feedback for this process to search for the next police chief. He then introduced those on stage. About 19 minutes into the [online video](#), Pitt gave a brief overview of the process and priorities so far::

- Working with Ralph Anderson & Associates on the search
- Issuing the community survey in multiple languages: English, Nepali, Spanish and Arabic.
- Hard copies available at every community center
- Issuing internal survey to Akron Police Department employees
- Opening the process to both internal and external candidates
- Plan for two more town halls as they narrow down the candidate list

- Should take three to five months to select the next chief

Current priorities:

- Experience with management in a large police organization
- Strong sense of integrity and honesty
- Emphasis on community policing and violence intervention
- Commitment to building trust with residents through relationship-building, transparency and accountability

DeJournett came forward at 22 minutes in to help facilitate the question-and-answer session. The mayor's office had both microphones and paper notes available for people to write down their questions. The Q&A time took the rest of the meeting, just over an hour.

At the end, DeJournett rushed through questions to keep to the time limit. Around 35 questions were asked. It was unclear if DeJournett was able to get through all of the questions he received.

When asked about his personal philosophy on policing, Malik referred to his [website](http://togetherforakron.com), togetherforakron.com. Malik said he was looking for changes and shifts in the APD moving forward, with an emphasis on community policing.

When he was asked what he meant by community policing (about 1 hour 22 minutes into the video), Malik defined it as "Patrol officers being able to spend more of [their] time doing proactive stuff as opposed to reactive stuff."

He said he hopes this approach resolves issues before they become more serious and creates relationships rather than just putting out fires.

Malik was asked several times about people wanting someone that would stay or someone who wasn't racist, among other questions. He agreed they would try their best but said that hiring someone is not an exact science and is very difficult. When residents suggested specific candidates, Malik said each person is welcome to apply for the position.

Some priorities that multiple members of the public commented on:

- Cost concerns with the hiring process and hiring from within the department: Save money by hiring from within the department. Don't transplant someone from outside the area who might leave when things

get hard. [Editor's note: Former Police Chief Steve Mylett was hired in 2021 after a national search. Mylett had previously worked in Washington and Texas.]

- Community policing is needed—proactive policing vs. reactive
- Community outreach is needed. There are trust issues between the public and the police. There is a need for culture change and transparency. Regular community meetings would be beneficial by offering public access to the new chief. Jayland Walker was mentioned several times by the audience, and several people shared other personal stories that they said have led to major trust issues between the public and the police.
- More training and accountability: Does the oversight board have any power? Will the new chief be able to stand up to the police union or the city? Training is needed for de-escalation, social issues, racism, basic community needs, mental health and using data to inform policies. There is a need to hold individual officers accountable for their actions, residents said.
- Immigration: Creative solutions would help to meet the needs of the immigrant community.
- Socio-economic issues that need to be addressed outside of policing: Racism, mental health, education, poverty, basic needs of certain neighborhoods, kids with access to guns without parental supervision, etc.

Only Malik answered the public's questions and concerns. At one point he was corrected by his team. Malik had said that there would be a requirement for the new candidate to live in Akron. Once he was corrected, he told the audience that was not a requirement after all.

There will be two more town hall meetings over the next few months. This meeting ended at 7:32 p.m.

Notes to reader: Unless quotation marks are used, all text is paraphrased. If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email us at documenters@signalakron.org with "Correction Request" in the subject line.