

TOWN OF WILLIAMSTOWN

JOINT STATEMENT

Interim Town Manager, Charles Blanchard

and

Chairman of the Select Board, Andrew Hogeland

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 8, 2021

For further information contact:
Charles Blanchard, Interim Town
Manager

cblanchard@williamstownma.gov

Scott McGowan, a former police sergeant has resigned as a member of the Williamstown Police Department, effective as of October 31, 2021.

The Town and Mr. McGowan have resolved the issues between them, including the Town canceling the Civil Service hearing regarding Mr. McGowan and his agreement to withdraw his MCAD claims against the Town.

With this resolution, the Town can move forward to address the challenging issues confronting the Town. It avoids the expense and distraction of protracted legal proceedings and helps the Town and the Williamstown Police Department to concentrate its resources on a number of projects for the improvement of the entire community. These ongoing projects include the following:

- The Williamstown Police Department (WPD), on the initiative of Interim Chief Mike Ziemba, has entered the Strengthening Police and Community Partnerships (SPCP) community program developed by the US Department of Justice. The DOJ SPCP program is a structured dialogue to bring together people from law enforcement and the community to address issues and historical barriers that hinder police-community partnerships. The Police Chief formed the community council in July 2021, whose membership includes several residents who had been critical of police practices.

- Chief Ziemba and the staff of the WPD have started the process towards achieving certification and accreditation under the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Program. This involves adoption of programs and practices to meet professional policing standards and the best practices for the profession. There is a rigorous application process and it may require a couple of years to achieve certification. As one of the initial steps in this process, the WPD already has updated and rewritten its policies and sent them out to a reviewing agency for comment.
- Training at the WPD continues, with this year's courses including Legal Updates, Mass Gatherings, Cultural Competency, De-Escalation and Use of Force, Human Trafficking, CPR & First Responder, Responding to Emergencies of Persons with Mental Health Issues, Officer Wellness, Critical Incident Stress Management, and Suicide Prevention.
- The Williamstown Community Assessment and Research (CARES) program is being conducted by the Town under the supervision of a team of volunteer social workers. It will explore how the Town addresses public safety needs, how the residents feel about their own safety and how we can create a better sense of safety and well-being and improved policing practices. We expect that study to be completed in August 2022 and will include additional recommendations the Town should undertake.
- The Town retained a Human Resources specialist in the Fall of 2020 to conduct an audit of the Town's HR programs and practices, and that audit has been completed.
- The Town also retained the HR specialist at the same time to rewrite and update the Town's HR policies and procedures, and that work has been submitted to the Town for review.

We hope that all residents and the Police will cooperate with each other and move the Town forward.

- END -