

A message from Police Chief George Robinson

As your Police Chief, I would like our citizens to know their safety and well-being is our top priority.

In light of the national headlines made by the senseless killing of Minnesota resident George Floyd, as well as other encounters that have resulted in the death of unarmed citizens, the Rocky Mount Police Department has continued the re-evaluation of our approach to best serve our community.

I know you may have several questions, and I'd like to update you on where we are in making the Rocky Mount Police Department the best it can be. Our officers continue to be trained on ways to empower the community through community policing initiatives, to investigate and solve crime to build legitimacy and community trust, de-escalate situations and utilize problem solving techniques. We also realize the importance of technology in our efforts and our officers wear body cameras and have in-car cameras so we can constantly assess, critique, and improve our customer service.

Your voice matters to us, and we embrace any initiative that gets our officers involved in community activities and interacting with citizens. We want to show everyone that police officers are just like everyone else. We want to break down walls and communication barriers and we have several programs that we use to accomplish this, such as; Coffee with a Cop, Chat with the Chief, Police Explorers Program, Police Athletic League, Junior Police Academy, and Citizen's Police Academy, just to name a few.

We have a robust community outreach program. We will talk with anyone who is willing to talk with us. We frequently meet with protest organizers to offer suggestions designed to make their events successful.

We are active in food distribution efforts, working to protect and facilitate our citizens exercising their constitutional rights.

Right now, many of our programs are on hold due to the pandemic restrictions. However, we have been fortunate that we have not experienced the destruction that many of our surrounding jurisdictions have suffered. I would like to believe that the respect we have shown to protestors in conjunction with contingency planning have had a positive impact on preserving that peace.

We are having discussions with our officers about how our actions and conduct affect our agency, city and profession. We discuss training, procedures, citizen rights, policies, and constitutional rights. We discuss what we must do as law enforcement officers and where we can exercise discretion to build better relationships with our community partners.

As an agency we will continue to be transparent and professional to build community trust and in turn police legitimacy. Our continued efforts toward becoming an accredited law enforcement agency will also help toward these efforts.

Certainly, the events driving the current push for social change force me and my staff to ask if our policies and training procedures are consistent with providing professional policing services to our community. And as previously stated, we constantly look to improve our operations.

Our process requires constant evaluation of both our policies and our practices. We are in the midst of a policy review and update as we modernize our policy tracking and management system to meet accreditation standards when compared to other law enforcement agencies across the country.

Several years ago, we studied the recommendations from President Obama's President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing to ensure our practices were consistent with industry best practices. We are working to get our Officers the training they need to enhance their service to the community.

We stress the use of de-escalation, while working to improve decision making in stressful situations. We work to enhance officer confidence and skills with less than lethal interventions when conflict is unavoidable.

Currently our officers receive a minimum of 24 hours of state mandated in-service training each year. And as the Chief of Police, I also mandate additional training each year as well.



In years past we have mandated additional training in the areas of implicit bias, de-escalation and use of force, and critical incident training certification. This year, our additional mandated training is in the area of Mental Health First Aid to help our officers recognize and de-escalate issues and symptoms of people under stress and in crisis; as well as recognizing and addressing these issues in themselves.

Professional development is a top priority, and promotions are made from within the organization. We make every effort to ensure the best equipment and technology is made available to our officers to better assist them in doing their jobs. Not only do we provide them with the most up to date technologies, we give them the autonomy to seek training that they are interested in, which in turn gives them a path to achieve their own career objectives.

So, what does the future look like? Training will encompass more exploration of our community oriented policing philosophy and methods. We want to cultivate partnerships with our citizens and empower the community to assist in their own problem solving and addressing their own quality of life issues. Additionally, we will continue to innovate and seek out any training that helps our officer's deal with protests, marches, and potential civil unrest with a focus on constitutionality and crowd management, while maintaining community and officer safety.

We inspire to recruit from within our community, however recently that has been a challenge due to interest declining in the law-enforcement profession and COVID-19 pandemic.

We strive to maintain a diverse work force, one that reflects the community that we serve; and we have a full-time recruiter who attends various job fairs locally as well as statewide. We

recently sent officers to the CIAA basketball tournament to recruit minority candidates. We visit four-year and community colleges, as well as military bases. And we are always actively looking for people in this community that have an interest in Law Enforcement.

In February of 2016, our city council approved the purchase and use of body cameras. They were implemented throughout the agency in 2017, and we have implemented policies that address how they should be used.

Officers are required to have their cameras operational when investigating or answering calls for service where police enforcement may be necessary. To ensure that this policy is being followed, supervisors are required to randomly review their employees body camera footage.

The Rocky Mount Police Department is proud to announce that it is joining several police departments in the 8 Can't Wait campaign, which identifies eight policies that could reduce police violence and killings. Those include:

- Banning chokeholds and strangleholds
- Requiring de-escalation
- Requiring a warning before shooting
- Exhausting all alternatives before shooting
- Giving officers a duty to intervene
- Banning shooting at moving vehicles
- Requiring a use of force continuum
- Requiring comprehensive reporting

Our department has had action in place for 7 of these 8 policies, and on June 15, 2020, I issued a memorandum that addresses giving our officers a duty to intervene. The policy is now listed in our Police Rules of Conduct and Duty Manual, and today we are operating under all 8 policies.

As you've heard from me during the past few minutes, there is a considerable amount of work that has been put in place to ensure our department is performing to the highest standards. And the City Council voted to allocate an additional \$50,000 in the Fiscal Year 2021 budget for Police Training and mental health assessments for officers, as policing is constantly evolving. There are new things that we must acclimate our responses to. Everyone has the right under the constitution to be policed fairly and just. There's always room for improvement, and we must hold our leaders accountable.

During the next three months we will focus on growing community and police collaboration and our internal review practices, as we fully support a person's right to protest which is protected by the First Amendment.

Our department would also like to see more community involvement and empowerment as we work to improve the quality of life for our residents. We must change cultures and mindsets and continue to operate under complete transparency.

I hope this has given you some insight into not just our policies and procedures, but also some of our goals for the future.



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