

CAYUGA HEIGHTS POLICE DEPARTMENT

NEW YORK STATE POLICE REFORM
AND REINVENTION COLLABORATIVE PLAN

MARCH 2021



“To Protect and Serve.”

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A view from Renwick Road where it meets North Sunset Drive



Village of Cayuga Heights Police Department

Jerry L. Wright
Chief of Police

Dear Cayuga Heights Community,

The process of reviewing the police profession and how it operates throughout our country started shortly after the appalling event that took place on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, MN. It is extremely sad to think that in far too many circumstances, in all areas of society, it takes avoidable events to occur for major change to happen. The New York State Police Reform effort was immediately started.

In early June 2020, New York State legislators met in Albany to pass a package of Police Reform bills. A review of the specific pieces of legislation being discussed were, for the most part, both reasonable and understanding.

On June 12, 2020, the New York State Governor announced Executive Order #203 requiring police agencies throughout New York State to adopt a Police Reform Plan that needed to be submitted to the State no later than April 1, 2021. Part of this plan was to engage in a public and open process, developing a strategy that will promote policing for equal treatment and protection of civil rights for ALL.

I immediately saw Executive Order #203 as both a challenge and an opportunity to fully evaluate every aspect of how the police profession operates. I took the challenge of seeking out information both locally and nationally to see how we could possibly improve in areas that would be better suited towards serving our community. I further reviewed and determined some areas within our department that could be improved upon, to ensure that we did, in fact, serve our community more effectively.

As an employee who has spent almost 20 years working within the VCH Police Department, I did not feel there were major areas that needed to be addressed. A primary reason for this, is that we are a department that is very engaged with the residents in the community we serve. Our department is known for, and is modeled after, a community policing approach that includes service driven initiatives. This model of policing leads to developing relationships that allow familiarity, trust, and a feeling of comfort and safety. My view was also supported by the 2017 Tompkins County study performed by CGR where residents within the county were asked about their satisfaction with their local law enforcement agencies. More than 60% of respondents stated they were satisfied or very satisfied with law enforcement being provided. In the Village of Cayuga Heights, 76% of residents (which was the highest percentage within the county) stated they were very satisfied with the law enforcement being provided. This percentage is something that I was and am proud of however also saw as an opportunity where we could work to increase that number.

As the NYS Governor stated, "The success and safety of our society depends on restoring and strengthening mutual trust." It is sadly too obvious, there are areas in this country where this needs to occur. I will work to build on strengthening the trust that I believe we have within our community. The Governor also stated that, "Police need to rebuild the relationship with the communities they serve". This situation can only be productive if both the police and the communities they serve are willing to work together in their efforts. I do feel that we have a good relationship with our community however will work to sustain it. With this discussion related to trust and relationship within the community, we completed a review of our Policies and Procedures, our training and education needs along with other areas where we can work to improve upon. One of these areas was the implementation of body worn cameras which will help in many areas to include transparency and accountability.

My approach to policing for the last 26 years has been no different from the way I live my life. I have always followed a simple thought process, which is to treat everyone with respect and kindness. I believe the definition of Constitutional Policing addresses the way in which ALL police agencies should be modeled after. (Constitutional Policing is defined as policing that follows the US Constitution and upholds peoples' civil rights. Constitutional Policing ensures that law enforcement officers treat everyone fairly and impartially.)

As I stated prior, I see this as an opportunity to remain connected and engaged with our community. It has also given us an opportunity to review areas where we could improve upon as we continue to strive to provide the absolute best service that our community expects and deserves.

Chief of Police

Jerry L. Wright

Mission Statement

We, the members of the Cayuga Heights Police Department, are dedicated to protecting life and property, to work with our citizens to reduce crime, disorder, and the fear of crime. Through community oriented and problem-oriented policing we will provide personalized police services with respect for human dignity according to the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and accountability.

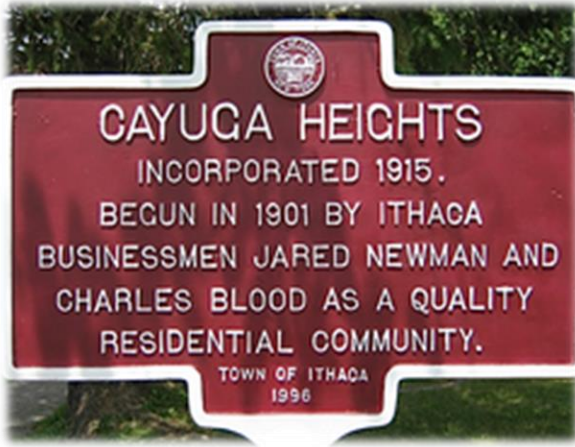


Officers outside of Marcham Hall, built in the late 1920s by Dorothy Cornell. The lower front right side of the building was reconstructed to become the police department in 1969.

Vision Statement

To become a leader in the law enforcement profession through a commitment to quality performance and continuous improvement as we strive for excellence in the delivery of public safety services. To improve the quality of life, and reduce crime and disorder, through a police-community partnership.

Department Profile



The Cayuga Heights Police Department is a 24-hour agency, operating 365 days a year.

The Department is staffed with 6 full time officers including the Sergeant and the Chief and employs an additional 10 part time officers to relieve full time officers, when needed. With generally one officer on duty per shift, the primary focus of CHPD is community policing; combating issues that may inhibit a prominent quality of life for residents.

Officers are assigned use of one of three patrol vehicles, all bearing traditional black and white markings, and the familiar gold lettering, recognizable to the community and other law enforcement agencies in the area.



Pleasant Grove Road, in front of the Cayuga Heights Fire Department

Community Demographics

Understanding our community's demographics helps us to be better prepared for the types of situations that may arise.

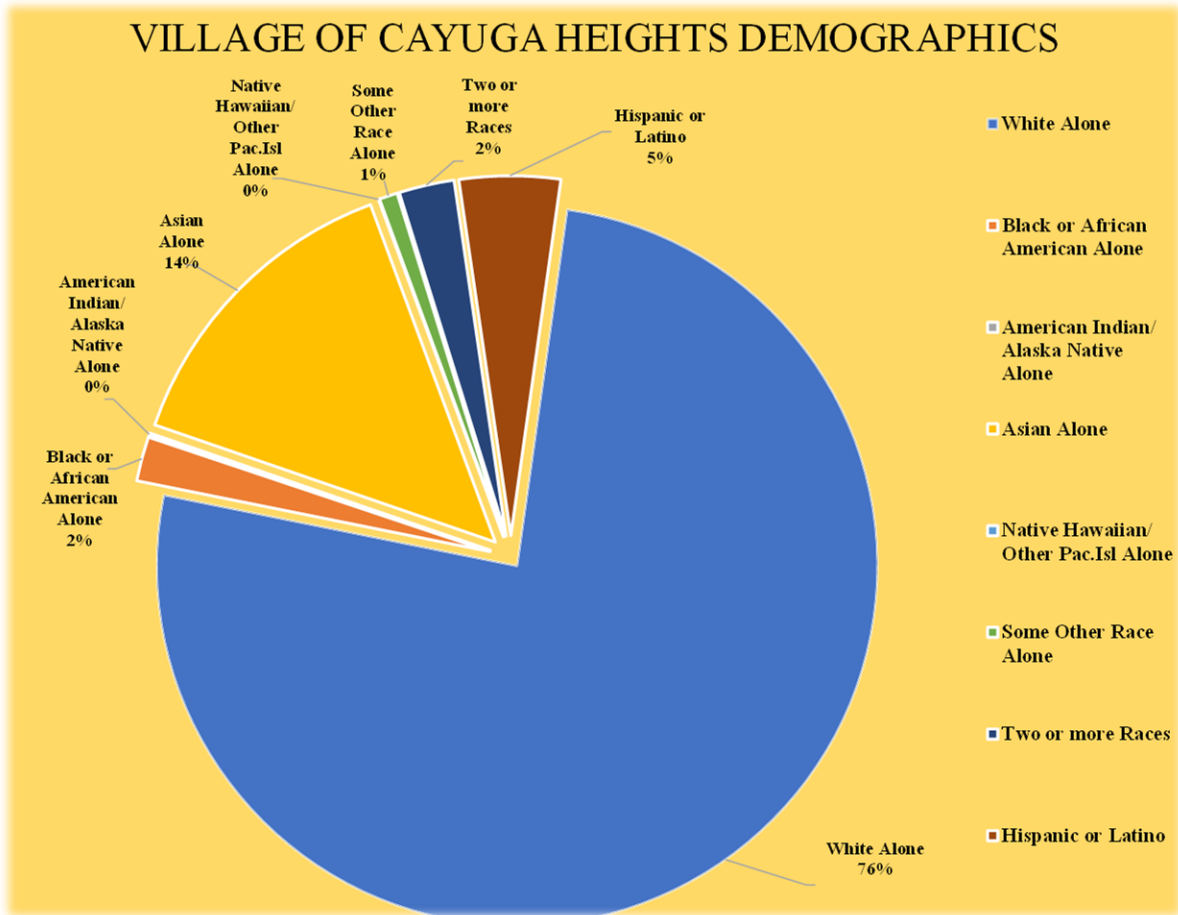


Figure 1, Community Demographics

As of the 2010 United States census, the Village of Cayuga Heights has approximately 3,730 residents, including professors and students from two prominent educational institutions.



Cayuga Heights Road overpass, looking out over State Route 13

The Village lies just east of the city of Ithaca, in central NY, spanning across 1.8 square miles. Cayuga Heights is accessed by 10 heavily traveled entrances of commuting traffic to include State Route 13. The center of the Village of Cayuga Heights is accessible by way of 7 immediate roadway routes, accommodating traffic from the greater Ithaca area to Cornell University.

Department Transparency Report

Cayuga Heights Police Department filed approximately 175 arrest charges in 2020 and responded to nearly 4,600 calls for service. Department arrest and offense data is compiled monthly and reported to the Department of Criminal Justice as part of the New York State Incident Based Reporting System or NIBRS.

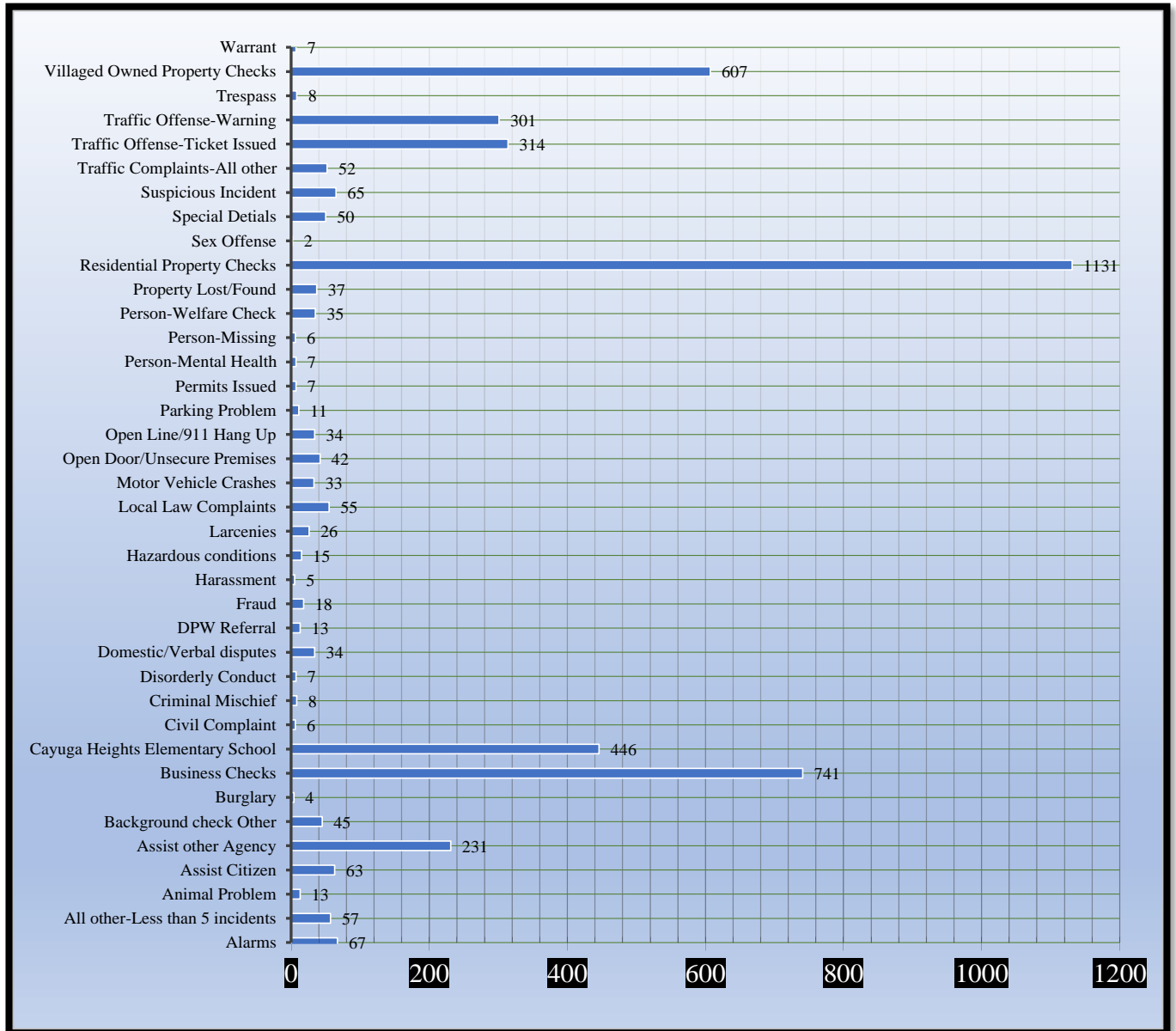


Figure 2, Number of Calls for Service by Call Type

Figure 3 reflects the number of offenses that CHPD submitted to the Department of Criminal Justice Incident Based Reporting System in 2020. Crimes against property may include Burglary, Larceny, Fraud, or Drug/Possession of Controlled Substances, which are often times at the Misdemeanor or Felony level. Crimes against society are often less severe in nature and account for many of the Violations shown, yet some Misdemeanors as well. Although NIBRS does not require that most vehicle and traffic arrests be reported, Driving While Intoxicated and associated charges are crimes of society and reportable as Misdemeanor or Felony level offenses only.

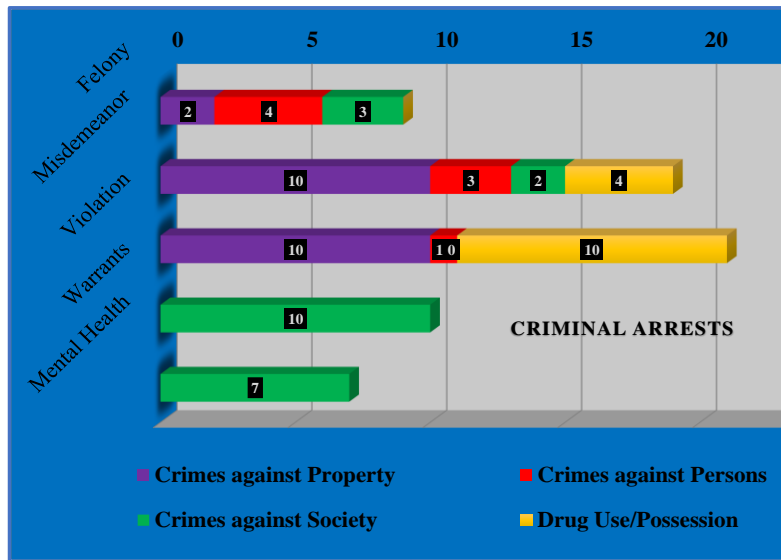


Figure 3, 2020 CRIMINAL ARRESTS

Cayuga Heights officers issued 714 Uniform Traffic Tickets in 2020, 101 of these being for unclassified misdemeanor charges of Aggravated Unlicensed Operation of a Vehicle, and Suspended Registration.

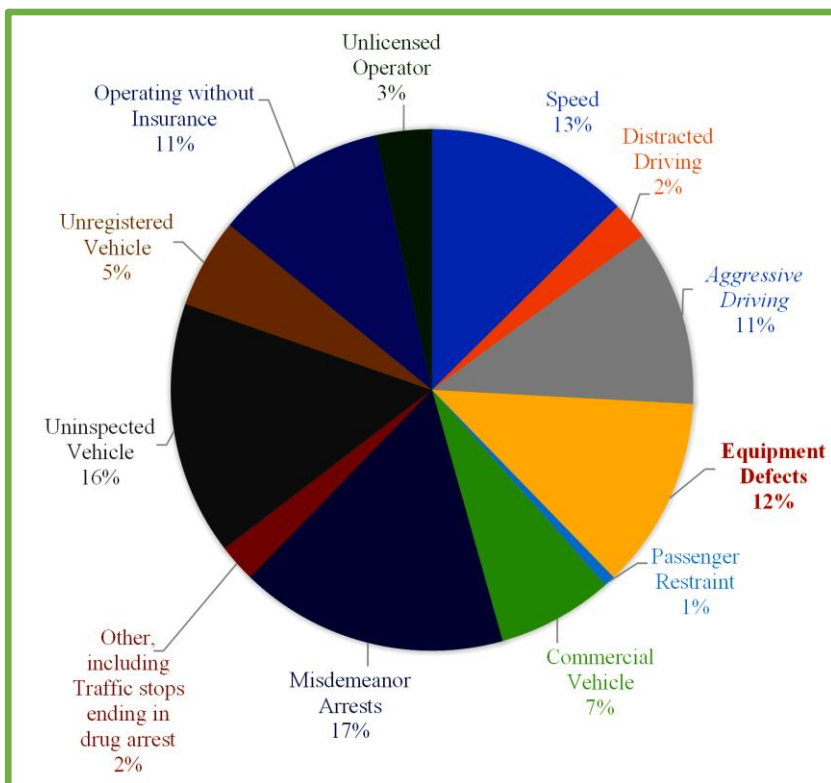


Figure 4 TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS

Figure 4 shows the percentage of ticket types issued by officers throughout the year.

Part 1






WHAT DOES EXECUTIVE ORDER (EO) #203 ASK?

The EO asked that each government entity, which has a police agency operating with police officers (as defined under Section 1.20 of the New York State Criminal Procedure Law), perform a comprehensive review of current police force deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices for the purposes of addressing the particular needs of the communities served by such police agencies and promote community engagement to foster *trust, fairness, and legitimacy* and to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color.

Each chief executive of such local government shall convene the head of the local police agency and stakeholders in the community to develop such plan. This plan shall be presented to the local legislative body which shall then be ratified or adopted with a local resolution no later than April 1, 2021.

The process of developing this plan should include engaging in conversations with stakeholders, including those listed below, among others. Opportunities to take part in on-line surveys and public forums could be offered where feedback would be gathered, and specific reform needs could be identified.

Further specifics within the EO ask that those consulted within the community, among others, should include the following:

-  Heads of other police departments
-  Faith-based organizations
-  District Attorney's offices
-  Local elected officials
-  Residents within the community

The Village of Cayuga Heights took the NYS Governor's challenge regarding Police Reform to review our current practices that include a review of our policies and training. We also acted in a manner to gather community feedback and to search nationally to find areas of expertise that may be helpful in developing our plan. These actions were taken so we can ensure that we are providing the best possible service to our community!

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

July 2020:

Initial Tompkins County Police Reform survey.

New York State Conference of Mayors (NYCOM) survey on Police Reform was completed by Chief Wright and Mayor Linda Woodard.



November 2020:

Took part in statewide NYCOM survey results discussion. New York State representatives were pleased to see the results showing that most of what was being asked in EO #203 was already being done within each police agency.

January 2021:

NYCOM survey with specifics related to the village were posted on the Village of Cayuga Heights website for public review. A total of 2 contacts regarding this information, were received from residents, via email.

February 2021: Survey Monkey specific to police reform sent to village residents for completion. A total of 31 responses were received.



February 2021: VCH Public Forum specific to Police Reform was completed. A total of 18 people attended the public forum via zoom. The one area of major concern throughout Tompkins County, New York State, and the country, has been the discussion involving law enforcements response to mental health related incidents.

Discussions locally included members from the Police Department, Fire/EMS, the Tompkins County 911 Center, Tompkins County Mental Health, and Ithaca's affiliate of the (NAMI) National Alliance on Mental Illness.



Concerns surrounding this organized response caused local leaders to look nationally at other tactics. One method being explored collaboratively, is a crisis intervention program out of Eugene, Oregon that began in 1989. This program, Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets, also known as "CAHOOTS", has reportedly proven to be very successful, however, CAHOOTS, based on the resources needed for restructuring at several levels, would not be feasible for the Village of Cayuga Heights to do single handedly. This type of program would need to be implemented at the county level with ALL the involved stakeholders (Tompkins County Mental Health, Emergency Medical Services, fire, and police) in agreement in order for a new initiative to be sustainable long term.

The conversation related to mental health response was the primary concern heard across the different areas of community feedback. This department would be in support of any program that would lead to an improved way of responding to individuals struggling with mental health related crises.



Part 2

CAYUGA HEIGHTS POLICE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE:

We reviewed the (EO) and immediately started discussions within our own department. We also started conversations with our local legislative body. I further reached out to local stakeholders to include (Cayuga Heights Elementary School, The First Congregational Church, Community Corners Business District, Tompkins County District Attorney's Office, Village of Cayuga Heights residents, other law enforcement agencies, local fire/EMS, and Tompkins County Mental Health.) This conversation also included dialogue with Tompkins County representatives heading up the Tompkins County Police Reform plan.

The participating stakeholders did provide feedback via one platform or another. The responses being very positive overall, with no major suggestions for change to CHPD's service driven policing. Community members expressed feelings of both comfort and safety while under the watchfulness of the Cayuga Heights Police.



Cayuga Heights Elementary School, Hanshaw Road view

Although most responses were received through the on-line survey, several were received via email. Here are a few of the comments received from residents:

"I was extremely impressed with your excellent presentation. You and the entire Cayuga heights Police Department are doing a superb job. After reviewing the NYCOM survey, CHP gets high marks from me. I also think that body cameras are a good idea and that all officers should carry weapons."

"I give the department the highest accolades based on my one experience with...My only wish is to see more enforcement of speed limits in the village."

"As a former member of the Public Safety Committee I know that there is a lot more to running a police dept than the visible everyday patrolling. We applaud your educational outreach to the community, and we think that Dept is doing just fine."

"We are very supportive of the village police department and their fine officers. The contacts we have had with the village police during our 25 years in Cayuga Heights have always been very positive. We oppose any proposals that would weaken our fine police department."

"I just wanted to let you know that I have lived in the village since 1973. Over the course of these many years I have interacted professionally with members of the department perhaps a dozen times, twice involving rather serious situations. In each event, I have found your personnel to be extremely courteous and professional. I consider your department one of the blessing of my residing in the village."

Internally, we completed a self-evaluation of our operating practices. We reviewed our department's policies and procedures, attempting to identify areas for improvement, addressing individual officer's needs and training desires. Training and education are discussed further in Part 3.

Part 3

MOVING FORWARD

A large part of the development of any plan is to consider where improvements are needed. It takes the understanding that as the world evolves, we need to be prepared to evolve with it! This way of thinking takes leadership which is willing to take responsibility for making sure that the plan continues to reassess, identify, and adapt to the changing needs of the department.

We were asked to develop a plan regarding Police Reform and how it relates directly towards the community we serve. This plan needs to be a living document, meaning it needs to be reviewed and changed when necessary for many years to come.

The plan moving forward for us consists of, but is not limited to, the following areas:

1) Community oriented leadership, fostering accountability.

It is in my opinion that leaders truly lead and are not just individuals filling a role. As the Chief of Police, I take responsibility for the culture of the Department. I believe in leading by example. This approach identifies who I am both professionally and personally. This way of thinking is the culture that I foster within the individuals that I work with. We are a team working together to make sure we are completing our responsibilities at an effective level to best serve the community we swore an oath to protect and serve.

2) Continued review of any use of force and police practices

I reviewed the Departments Policies and Procedures which is done on a yearly basis. Again, our profession like many continue to change therefore we need to change with it. Many of the suggested changes from (EO203) related to Policies were already included within our Policies. Specifically, our Use of Force Policy which was written in line with what NYS suggested. All Use of Force incidents are reviewed by both Supervisors within our Department and then sent to NYS as part of a for their review.

3) Transparency

The words Transparency and Accountability and how it relates to the Police profession is something I take very seriously. We, as a Village have had many conversations over the last handful of years regarding the addition of (Body Worn Cameras). This conversation had both financial and liability concerns, among others. It became clear over the last year that the idea of adding BWC's to our Department was more of a desire and need. The Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative talked about Transparency and Accountability. I believe there is no clearer ability to be transparent and accountable than to have BWC's as part of our patrol functions. Again, after much discussion the Village agreed to move forward with the addition of BWC's to our Department in January of 2021. Part

of this process included implementing a Policy specific to the use of the BWC program. This process included input from the Legislative body which did lead to the ratification of the current Policy.

4) Training and education

Another area of need that was widely discussed was the idea of training and education. We train in many different areas of need that effect our profession daily. This training consists of all levels of Use of Force to include (Verbal De-Escalation, hands on tactics, Pepper spray, Taser, and Firearms). Other trainings that are completed annually consist of (Implicit Bias & Racial Profiling, De-Escalation techniques, Duty to Intervene and Cultural Diversity). We also train in areas to include Leadership in Action, Transparency in Policing, Officer Wellness, Mental Health, Workplace Violence, Sexual Harassment and Scenario based SIMS training.

The training and experience learned through the profession is extremely important and will always be at the top of the ongoing pursuit to put us in the best position possible to serve our community. Continuing education and/or in-service training helps ensure that we all can refresh skills learned in the past, and to develop new skills.

We also look ahead with the promise to again take part in the traditional annual community events that have been shut down during the COVID pandemic. We need the opportunity to interact with the community which will once again provide the ability for conversation and togetherness.



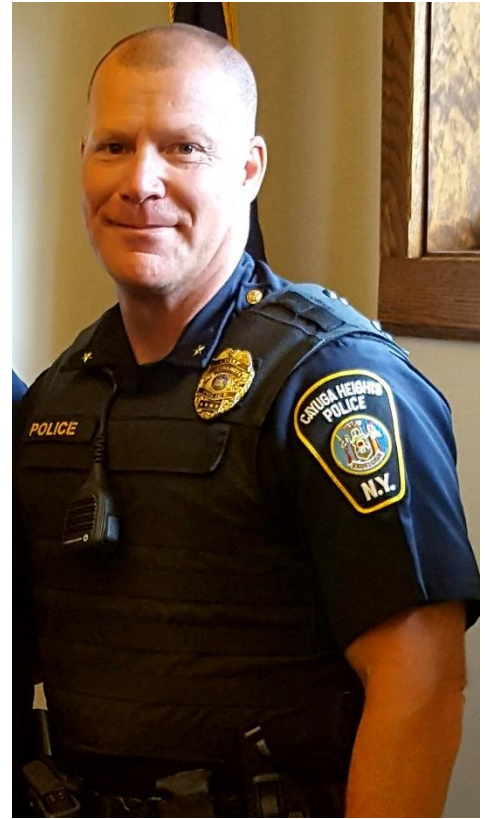
Entrance to Sunset Park

We have missed out on many events, for example: the Cayuga Heights Fire Department Annual Open House, IC3 Event, Fireworks at Sunset Park Detail, Girls and Boys Scouts visits, Northeast Elementary School Halloween Parade, and the Cayuga Heights Elementary School 5K Run. The plan and hope are that we will soon be able to take part in the above-mentioned events among others, as we hopefully break through to the other side of this year long pandemic.

Chief's closing statement

In closing, it goes without saying that Executive Order 203, presented additional challenges this past year that already included the COVID pandemic concerns.

Executive Order 203 proved to be an opportunity to completely review the way the Police Profession operates. It gave law enforcement the ability to hear from community members, in hopes of identifying ways to better serve the communities they represent. I believe there needs to be continued conversations moving forward and it is essential that EVERYONE puts in the effort. We, as a profession, must continually work to identify areas where we can improve and become more efficient. It is also imperative that the general public have a better understanding as to why and how our profession operates.



I believe we will continue to make significant improvements if we are willing to not only listen but to hear each other. As I stated in my opening letter, this can be accomplished through sustained commitment and willingness to treat each other respectfully and with kindness.



Thank you to the following resources for supporting our community's development of

The Cayuga Heights Police Department

New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Plan:

