



Newly appointed Police Chief Andrew Shearer reported that one of the major points to come out of the recently conducted community safety survey was the need to expand community engagement with particular attention to marginalized populations and newer and younger residents. He said it is important to meet people where they are and for officers to become more involved and visible in the community as forced isolation because of the pandemic begins to ease. He said that the survey revealed that trust in the police has declined among 20 percent of the population and that only 55 to 60 percent of the survey respondents perceived that the police are engaged in the community. In response to a question, he agreed that “coffee with a cop” ideas are good, but simply not adequate to restore the level of trust that is desired. Rebuilding engagement with the community this summer is one of his highest objectives.

Chief Shearer said improving transparency is another goal to help build community confidence. He praised the recent inauguration of cameras in the system – body cameras and cameras on the front and rear of police vehicles provide an ability both to reassure the community and a chance for officers to review interactions to make sure that proper procedures and policies were followed in every case. He also said the department needs to do a better job in communicating with the community after a complaint is made. Development of creative follow up strategies was another focus he noted came out of the community survey. “When people make a report,” he said, “they want to hear back on what actually happened.”

Chief Shearer also discussed the unmanned aerial vehicle program (drones) that was instituted recently. The program has been live for 11 weeks and the drone has been deployed 21 times. There are clear restrictions on the use of drones in state and federal law. They cannot be used for “random surveillance,” They also cannot be weaponized. Except in emergency circumstances, like while a crime is in progress, they cannot be used without a warrant. One such use would be the search for a potentially violent suspect, where a drone can be used to search an area before officers enter the area, improving safety for both the public and officers, and making the search more efficient. The drone has been deployed for crime scene investigation, to support canine officers, for crime scene photography and in connection with bomb threats or a hazardous materials call. Detail flight and operational records are kept for each deployment and can provide important information if there is a concern that the drone was not used appropriately.

Chief Shearer also reflected on the effect of Measure 110 now that it has been in place for a year. Measure 110 in effect decriminalized possession of small quantities of various illegal substances by converting possession into a violation with a \$100 fine. That fine is waived if the offender asks for a health screening, and the penalty for failure to appear was eliminated.

The response to Measure 110 has not been what legislators anticipated, Shearer said. Of over 2,000 citations only 92 individuals called for a screening and only 19 requested services. Meanwhile, he said, the rate of overdoses continues to climb. Springfield Police responded to 58 overdose calls in the first four months of the year. The chief is concerned that most of the opioid pills on the street are counterfeit (not produced by recognized pharmaceutical makers) and fentanyl is in almost all counterfeit opioid pills.

