Summary: August 27, 2020 Listening Session with United Black Voices of Sonoma County

On Thursday, August 27, 2020, Santa Rosa Chief of Police Rainer Navarro, Community Engagement Division Director Magali Telles, Community Engagement Coordinator Danielle Garduño, and Economic Division Director Raissa de la Rosa, met with six members of United Black Voices of Sonoma County for a listening session and dialogue.

Discussion Points

Discussion Point One: Community Safety
Staff asked all participants what it means to feel safe in their community. Most participants stated that feeling safe in the community means being able to comfortably step outside their homes and being able to go anywhere freely, feeling like they are not being followed or watched. Several others mentioned concern for their children and grandchildren – one participant stated, "Knowing when my son leaves the house, he won't be pulled over. My grandson is 4-years old and sees what happens. If my family is safe when they leave (the house), then I don't have to worry."

Others specifically mentioned feeling safe means being free from the judgement of law enforcement officers and other members of the community. "My presence (in the community) is not viewed as I'm guilty of something when I'm walking around." Another participant stated that feeling safe is "having officers not treat Black people as suspects" There was a general agreement among participants that being a person of color in Santa Rosa and Sonoma County brings a level of suspicion from law enforcement and the general public.

There was also a general agreement among participants that there needs to be a public recognition of the issues people of color experience with law enforcement. Several participants stated that officers need to be held accountable and until they are, they know they will be able to get away with treating people of color a certain way. A sentiment that was shared throughout the listening session was that law enforcement officers need to treat citizens with respect.

Participants also spoke about having a sense of community was an important factor in feeling safe. "As Black people, we don't always have that opportunity." Some suggestions offered by the participants included having their own community center, having resources available for themselves and others, and having environmental safety. One participant spoke specifically about language accessibility issues, particularly around emergency alerts and notifications like Nixle. "Many of the Eritrean community didn't know about the curfew because the Nixles are in English. We need them in Tigrinya. We can translate, but we need you to distribute (the Nixle message)."

Discussion Point Two: Community Experiences with SRPD
"I will admit, I get afraid when police officers enter the room."

The group also discussed their experiences with SRPD officers and also shared suggestions on how SRPD can strengthen their relationship with the community. Several participants shared personal experiences with SRPD.

One participant shared that her sister, a disabled individual, was locked out of her office one day and could not get back in. Someone called the police while she was trying to get back in and two officers arrived. She was harassed by the officers and she was too scared from her experience that she did not

want to file a complaint. She has since passed away and the issue was never resolved.

Another participant described a more recent incident that occurred with himself, his cousin and an officer from the SRPD. His aunt was in a car accident and taken to a local hospital. His cousin tried to speak with the officer who arrived at the hospital to take the woman's statement. The woman's daughter (cousin of participant), explained that her mother does not speak English and asked the officer if she could translate for her. The officer refused the request and demanded to know where the patient was located. The cousin called the participant and asked for his assistance. He arrived at the hospital and made the same request to the officer. The participant stated that the officer was rude to participant and cousin and continued to refuse request for translation. After several requests from the family members to assist with the woman in the accident, the officer turned on his body worn camera. The officer eventually left without taking the woman's statement and the participant and his cousin were not allowed to help her with translation at the hospital. This left them both frustrated, but he stated what was more frustrating was the officer's rudeness towards a family who was scared and concerned for their family member. He said he feels that some officers play mental mind games, which in turn diminishes the trust and integrity that other officers have tried to build with the community. "Officers are supposed to have these community serving roles."

Another participant said that while she hasn't had any negative interactions with SRPD officers, she has heard stories from others about their experiences, including stories of others who have been profiled and followed by the police. She stated that she sees more young men of color having issues with police in Santa Rosa than young women or men of an older age.

One participant asked about officer discipline and if there is a threshold of the number of complaints that result in more severe discipline. The Chief explained that there is a process that has been in place for the last 10 years – the process includes looking at an officer's number of complaints and use of force incidents during their evaluation and also when a complaint comes in. The process helps with addressing the issues early and often and also helps in determining what kind of discipline is used and also what kind of training might be needed.

Other Topics Discussed:
The participants were given an opportunity to ask questions of City staff during the listening session. The following questions were answered:

Are there police officers involved in community organizations?

The participant asking this question stated that it is important for the community to know how officers are involved in the community. Police Department staff are involved in the community through taking part in non-profit boards, church involvement, coaching team sports, and mentoring youth.

The Chief also mentioned that they encourage participation with the Santa Rosa School District and Roseland School District in career days, reading to youth, and teaching life skills curriculum. SRPD also has staff who have participated in job fairs doing mock interviews with youth and portfolio days (listening and providing feedback to youth on class projects).

How does your department incorporate the community's interest in decisions that the department makes? Are there any guidelines or guiding principles for determining what is good for the community?

The Chief spoke about the formation of a new SRPD Community Engagement Team, which will be

focused on community engagement related activities, events and initiatives. In addition, the Chief also mentioned that he is working with Community Engagement staff on putting together a Chief's Community Ambassador Team, which will be comprised of community members who will bring issues of concern regarding public safety and law enforcement to the Chief and City staff, and who will also assist with SRPD community outreach and engagement efforts.

What is the Chief doing to decrease racism within the SRPD?

The Chief responded by saying that the SRPD recognizes that everyone comes in with their own implicit bias, something that is different than racism. Aside from providing implicit bias training for all officers, there are several opportunities that will be coming up to address this. School Resource Officers will be working with Community Matters on cultural competency trainings. The Chief also mentioned that he is committed to working on making sure there is fair racial representation in the hiring process at SRPD.

In addition to SRPD, the Chief also mentioned that he is working with Human Resources on putting together trainings around race, cultural competency and implicit bias for all City staff.

Does the SRPD ever train the public on police procedures?

Yes, the SRPD has a Community Policing Experience (CPE) that is available for all residents who are interested in participating. The CPE is 8 weeks long and about 3 hours per week and is designed to enhance relationships by familiarizing participants with the Santa Rosa Police Department, its policies, and practices. The intent of CPE is not to train individuals to become police officers, but to show participants first-hand the daily responsibilities and expectations of the occupation of police officers and other department employees.

There is also a Youth Community Policing Experience and a Spanish-speaking program called Policía y La Comunidad.

At what point are body worn cameras turned on?

Currently, the point where a body worn camera gets turned on depends on the situation. For example, at the Wednesday Night Market, officers have their cameras on, but are not recording sound. If officers are responding to a call for service, they must turn their cameras on as soon as they step out of their vehicle. In order to reduce human error, the SRPD is looking into an automated system where the body worn cameras are automatically turned on the moment an officer steps out of their vehicle.

What are some things SRPD is doing to de-escalate mental health issues?

SRPD officers receive crisis intervention training which covers response to mental health issues. In addition, the SRPD currently works with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Sonoma County Behavioral Health, and other non-profits to look at a different response to mental health calls for service.

Through the City Council's Public Safety Subcommittee, the City is also looking into establishing the CAHOOTS Program here in Santa Rosa. CAHOOTS, or Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets, is a program from Eugene, Oregon, that provides immediate stabilization in case of urgent medical need or psychological crisis, assessment, information, referral, advocacy & (in some cases) transportation to the next step in treatment. The responding team includes a medic and a crisis worker. The City is currently in the research and consultation phase with this program and looks to implement it in the next 6-9

months.

Outcomes and Next Steps
- Staff will follow-up with United Black Voices on scheduling a future meeting with the group as well as their participation in the Multicultural Roots Project.