

Comments from Ralph Monsma
June 5, 2017
1350 Red Leaf Lane
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Chair Baum, and Members of the East Lansing Human Relations Commission,

This evening you have preliminary consideration of draft Ordinance NO. 1463 to guide review of public safety investigations of emergency medical service, fire, and police personnel in the City of East Lansing. This is an important duty brought to the East Lansing Human Relations Commission (ELHRC) based on its previous service in implementation of review of citizen or employee complaints alleging inappropriate conduct by police personnel toward a member of the public.

Over the past few years the East Lansing Police Department (ELPD) has taken many positive steps in bringing its operations to the attention of the citizens of East Lansing and surrounding communities. The ELPD outreach to neighborhood organizations, service clubs, schools, businesses, medical facilities, crime scenes, and traffic accidents greatly improve the relationships within the city government, its residents, and visitors.

I believe a clear presentation of the many steps taken by the East Lansing Police Department in presenting information to the public is a central priority. The ELPD needs to inform the public of their operations. They need to ask for the involvement in and understanding of the continuing steps in advancing community engagement, training and monitoring the work of the East Lansing Police Department. The ELPD have a policy on the website and a form for submitting complaints to the ELPD on interaction with their interaction with the Department.

We should look at the bigger picture of what we need to know and how to communicate it before further consideration of this draft document.

Here are some questions and recommendations to consider:

1. How does this incorporate input from the public, that is, an individual, a group or groups of people from the community in the review of the process and the ability to inform the discussion at the table?
2. How does this ordinance give East Lansing residents assurance of accountability for Public Safety in East Lansing?
3. Where is the opportunity for input from persons with knowledge of incidents in East Lansing questioned within the community and discussed in social media?
4. What attempts were made to inform people of the development of this ordinance?
5. What is the outreach to the persons most impacted by police action today?
6. How is the outreach to the persons most impacted by police activity concentrated, especially to persons with broken taillights, persons of color, persons with disabilities, persons without documentation, persons with hearing, speech, or language issues?

7. How were these persons informed of this proposed ordinance?
8. What use is made of records of police involvement in traffic stops, traffic warnings, emergency runs, response to crimes in progress, to home invasion, to calls for assistance for planning and budgeting purposes.
9. What percentage of follow up to calls are made to persons who request assistance?
10. What is the current use of body cameras, collection of information from dash and body cameras, and their use in supervision?
11. How does FOIA relate to the materials presented in a public safety review investigation?
12. What role does contract language have in discussion of cases before a public safety review board?
13. Does this proposed ordinance reduce the information available to the Human Relations Commission in presenting information to the community on public safety concerns?
14. There appears to be confusion regarding the role of the ELHRC, the ELPD, and the proposed PSRB. It is hard to see what the relationship between the ELHRC and the PSRB is following approval of Ordinance NO. 1463 as currently prepared.
15. My recommendation is to have the ELHRC select a subcommittee to seek out community members interested in educating persons on opportunities for increased attention to public safety concerns which may arise upon or out of contact with police, fire, and EMS personnel. Engage these community members in the creation of information to be provided through social media outlets that engage persons in dialog about bringing police community relations topics before the city and engaging the Neighborhood Associations, Service Clubs, Schools, Landlords, Condo Associations, Housing Management Agencies

APPENDIX 1

On page 2, of the draft it reads: “(2) The dispositions of any and all pending complaints since the previous meeting of the Board, which shall include a summary of the complaint, how it was generated, the basic factual findings of the Department, the final determination made by the Department and whether the complaint resulted in any discipline, or any changes in Department policies or procedures that will be made as a result of the incident. The Board shall not be advised of the name or identifying information of any complainant or witness, the name or identifying information of any employee that was investigated or the nature of any discipline that was imposed. The Board can be advised of protected class status as outline in Sec. 22-31 and Sec. 22-32 of the City of East Lansing Code of Ordinances. The Board and individual Board members do not have the authority to review any portion of the investigative file but may ask questions of the Chief or the Chief’s designee consistent with this provision.”

NOTE! The word “written” had been added before “summary of the complaint,” in the previous version but it has been removed in this version. WHY WAS THE WORD WRITTEN REMOVED? Is all of the interaction with the public at the PSRB oral? Can the ORAL DISCUSSION be recorded at the meeting?

The above is the ENTIRE text describing what the Board has access to. It is extraordinary that a review board would be created that receives only an oral summary and may not see “any portion of the investigative file but may ask questions.” How can they make a serious conclusion about anything based only on oral discussion? This cannot possibly be a best practice.

How would a person who submitted a complaint know the resolution of the matter? What process for getting the decision out to the person submitting the complaint and to the employee against whom the complaint was filed would be in place?

We are talking about the issue of accountability of the police regarding public complaints. The point we are making is that there are a lot of things the community needs to have from its police. Good training, for example, and the public having access to policies. We appreciate that progress has been made in some of these areas.

We ALSO want good accountability to the public regarding complaints made against officers, particularly by people who are African American or of another protected class in the East Lansing ordinance. Having good public accountability can enhance trust between the police and the community, so it is important to pursue. But trust will not be enhanced if a new review structure is set up that is not actually designed to be effective – the public will see through it!

So we need to take time to do it right, and to include input and advice from knowledgeable people who are willing to listen to and seek contact with the people who are most affected.

Do not approve this ordinance. Start over your own effort to bring more attention to continued improvement in police community relations.

Sincerely, Ralph Monsma, with thanks to the thoughts of others.