

The time for the first community debate on policing in Pleasanton is now

The Pleasanton City Council requested the City Manager bring forward a draft action plan in July that will outline a process to discuss and evaluate community policing in Pleasanton. Adoption of the action plan would be followed by near term community listening sessions, Council-sponsored meetings regarding what policing looks like today and into the future, and some implicit bias and diversity and inclusion training for the City Council. Consideration of the action plan will occur in July either at a special or regular City Council meeting.”

That's how City Manager Nelson Fialho interpreted the direction given to him by the council majority about setting the stage for future community discussions on policing in Pleasanton.

The message was delivered during a somewhat unclear back-and-forth on the dais during the council reports portion near the very end of the four-hour public meeting via Zoom on June 16 (which featured more than a half-hour worth of public speakers on policing during non-agenda comment at the beginning of the meeting).

We translate that as the council majority want Fialho to draft an action plan that will outline the process for future community policing conversations, and then talk about that action plan — and only that action plan — during a public meeting before hosting a separate community listening session on policing at another time.

Not concurrently. Not after. Before. This precursor meeting at a yet-undetermined date in July, where the council will apparently try to limit public comment to only the draft plan, seems unnecessary in concept

and untenable in practice.

Just start the full conversation now.

Talking about the ground rules, the schedules and the formats for future discussions and decision-making is smart, but not prior to or independent of the first open community dialogue on the overarching topic. Vocal police reformists, adamant police advocates and every one in between want to speak their minds to the council, as soon as possible.

All five council members expressly said they want to be part of a community meeting with public comment on policing. The disagreement is on the initial timing.

This City Council doesn't shy away from tough conversations, tough decisions. But that may well be how this proposed precursor discussion on the ground rules will be perceived by a citizenry — on all sides of the debate — that seem to be demanding a full and open dialogue.

Yes it's important to have a roadmap to guide the city's decision-making process. A public listening session that takes the temperature of the room (i.e. gauges where members of the public are thinking right at outset) would have to be at the top of any competent action plan on this issue.

So why dance around it?

Open with a live forum, whether face-to-face in person or over Zoom, where any and all policing topics are on the table (for any resident, business owner, community leader, police officer or other person compelled to speak).

They don't want to be relegated to email, they don't want to answer an online survey, they don't want a webinar with the brand-new police chief.

It's clear what the people of Pleasanton want. They want a meaningful, honest discussion in front of the decision-makers. At the very beginning. And then more public conversations.

We know the first community meeting will be long, impassioned and uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable that in recent years multiple Pleasanton police officers have feared for their lives to the point they felt lethal force was their only option. It's uncomfortable how many long shifts police officers have to work. It's uncomfortable watching the police bodycam footage of officers' ultimately fatal encounter with Jacob Bauer. It's uncomfortable that there was no bodycam footage of John Deming Jr.'s death.

It's uncomfortable that so many people are uncomfortable with policing topics. Sharing your feelings, your experiences and your ideas, and listening to each other, will be freeing too.

But the public discussions are necessary. This first conversation is necessary, as soon as possible.

It's the logical opening step given the circumstances. If you want Fialho to present an outline or draft action plan at the beginning, great. As Councilwoman Julie Testa, the most vocal opponent of the precursor meeting, said: just do it on the same evening as the first listening session.

Don't, as Testa said, “put them in a box and limit what they can speak on” right out of the gate. Because frankly, we're concerned how that would look in practice.

You're going to tell them what they can and cannot talk about? On this issue?? At this time in America?!

Of course, yes, council members

could literally do that — demand that public comment stay on point to the so-called draft action plan without getting into the underlying or overarching issues. That's how they ensure meetings have decorum, remain productive and respect everybody's valuable time.

But effectively, what would that look like in this case? Mayor Jerry Thorne is going to tell city staff to cut the mic (or mute the Zoom audio, as it may be) if a speaker strays into their ideas for police reform instead of how to improve the “policing discussion action plan”? You can be sure it's not just going to be one speaker who does that. It would be dozens. It could be hundreds.

Bad. That's the answer. It would look bad. Maybe unsalvageable, politically.

So don't even try it.

We appreciate the desire of some council members to structure the conversation for thoughtful decision-making on policing policies in the city. Pleasanton is the “City of Planned Progress” after all. An action plan to frame the months of public discussion is a great idea — after you hear from residents what they want to talk about, not before.

When's the last time anyone saw protests of that volume or diversity of participants in Pleasanton? Not ever in our 21 years of publishing the Weekly.

Those voices (and so many more, on all sides of the issue) are crying out to be heard. Demanding it.

Hear them at the beginning so they will know you'll hear them in the end.

They don't want to be told what's on the table. They're going to set the table. Because Pleasanton is their house. Let them in. ■

Note that at the May City Council meeting prior to the George Floyd tragic event, Councilmember Testa asked that a discussion of police policies be placed on the agenda. Only Councilmember Karla Brown supported having that important and timely discussion. Every city council should take seriously the responsibility of police oversight by an independent group, not by a limited internal city/police overview.

Because we need leadership willing to have the difficult discussions of police review, we need to elect Karla Brown as mayor and Valerie Arkin and Nancy Allen to the City Council.

—George Reid

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LETTERS

Dr. Dave Marken's resignation

I address this email specifically to Trustees Kuo, Blackman and Cherrier.

(Tuesday) evening's DUSD Board of Trustees virtual meeting was incredibly sad/reckless. As I sat down to view the meeting and saw Dr. Marken's computer frame appear I could immediately see something was wrong — never did I expect to hear a resignation letter.

However, this look on his face has been seen numerous times by many

of us while addressing this board. It's a look of dissatisfaction. It's a look of an unsupportive “boss(es)” not being heard, defeated.

To lose our superintendent, who stepped in when asked by this district to lead us back to a unified district (post-Boozer) to lose him at this time is incredibly irresponsible of this Board of Trustees. I looked at your faces as he read his resignation letter and three of you were expressionless, nonchalant.

You should have said something meaningful, valuable, caring but you individually and collectively said

nothing. Is this the district we all work tirelessly for and do you truly represent us?

—Deeply saddened,
Karen Chamberlain

Pleasanton march

Dear Editor,

Congressman's Swalwell efforts on police reform at the federal level and information about the march in Pleasanton for unity on social justice are encouraging developments. Julie Testa (City Council, Pleasanton) deserves credit for her effective efforts with the organizers of the march (3,000 peaceful demonstrators) including handing out face masks to marchers.