

Community Policing delayed another three weeks due to Isom scheduling

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ALTON - Former St. Louis Police Chief Daniel Isom is set to address the Alton City Council following the apparent delay of the city's community policing model to reach its 30-, 60- and soon-to-be 90-day goals.

Alton Police Chief Jason "Jake" Simmons, Alton Community Relations Commission President Peter Hough and Alton Mayor Brant Walker's Chief of Staff Kimberly Clark were hoping Isom would be able to address the council sometime this week, but that address has been moved to June 14 instead. Each of the people involved hoped an address from Isom - who organized the "groundbreaking" community policing study through the University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL) - would properly instruct newly-

elected and newly-appointed city officials about the needs, methods and resources required to put this community policing plan into motion.

The city and Community Relations Commission had already missed their 30- and 60-day goals upon calling for Isom to speak. Both Hough and Simmons said those goals would be restarted following Isom's address to the council.

When asked what caused the delay, Clark said the city was struggling after the election to ensure the new administration was functioning. Hough cited the resignation of former Alton City Attorney Megan Williams, who acted as the "point person" for the community policing initiative due to the amount of legal issues the city must address to meet some of the initiative's goals - such as more diversity in the police department. That mantle was passed from Williams to newly-appointed Alton City Attorney Rodney Caffey during the middle of that first set of goals, which were started following a special meeting of the Alton Community Relations Commission held on March 15, 2017.

Williams finished her term as city attorney at the end of April 2017, leaving a vacancy in the commission - which was already shorthanded. Hough said the commission was cut to seven of a possible 11 with six members present to allow a quorum. Currently, Caffey will be replacing Williams, but that still leaves three vacancies the city has yet to fill. During the implementation of the community policing initiative, the commission has the duty to hold both the city (including the police department) and the community stakeholders accountable.

When Isom comes to speak to the city council on June 14 - a day before the 90-day goals should have been met - not even one of the original 30-day goals are likely to have been met. Those goals include the following:

- Identified teams
- Scheduled meetings
- Defined objectives
- Gathered statistics

Despite this seemingly-bleak perspective, both Hough and Clark are optimistic for the project's future. Clark said she was recently appointed by the mayor to act as a point person for the initiative, and she assured she would be committed to seeing it through to its completion during a Tuesday afternoon phone interview.

"We finished the applications for seats on the Community Relations Commission," she said. "We're sending them to Peter for approval. From there, we will be interviewing people for seat on the community relations board."

Hough agreed if the commission was given its full capacity of 11 possible members, it would be functioning better. He also agreed with Clark's faith in Chief Simmons to continue to progress toward the community policing model.

"I think the chief has a genuine commitment to the cause of community policing," Hough said in a previous interview with Riverbender.com. "Someone has to spend up to 10 hours a week working steadily on this, though."

To free more time for the chief, the City of Alton recently appointed Sgt. Terry Buhs as the deputy chief. Simmons said this promotion will ensure he has ample time to do what needs to be done for the cause of community policing.

Mayor Walker has also committed more resources, including his chief of staff, to the initiative, which is another factor making Hough feel optimistic about the possible success of the project. Clark continues to share his optimism since being appointed to the team.

"Jake and I have things to write up and present, and since things are changing in this administration, we need to rewrite," Clark said. "We're still going on and doing everything we need to do, but it will just be delayed a bit. We had to get over budgets, and we are now ready to get this hammered out."

The 60-day goals for the project, which have been missed as early as this month were the following:

- Develop a written plan
- Develop an evaluative strategy

Simmons described the original goals as "overly ambitious." He said, considering the April 4, 2017, elections in Alton, those goals were unrealistic for the administration to be able to meet within the given time. Community policing was one of the main points Walker voiced regarding his next term if he was reelected. Since reelection, the actual amount of work required to get this initiative moving with any momentum has been more than most of the people involved had originally expected.

Within 90 days (the day after Isom is set to speak to the council), the initiative's leaders, who are composed of both police administrators and community leaders, were supposed to have done the following:

- Present plan
- Approve plan
- Begin the implementation and evaluation process

Those 30-, 60- and 90-day goals will have their countdowns restarted following Isom's address on June 14. If all goes as planned, his address will help educate and inform newly-elected officials while also allowing the newly-minted team to implement the plan with a full board on the Alton Community Relations Commission.