

# **UPDATE: Alton Police Chief and Community Relations Commission discuss community policing initiative**

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**ALTON** - While the goals set by the "groundbreaking" community policing initiative have been delayed by as many as 90 days in Alton, neither Alton Police Chief Jason "Jake" Simmons or Community Relations Commission (CRC) President Peter Hough are stopping.

Simmons delivered an update to the CRC Wednesday, June 7, after Hough and Simmons met with Alton Mayor Brant Walker and his chief of staff Kimberly Clark in May. 30-, 60-, and 90-day goals set by an expansive community policing survey of both the citizens of Alton and the Alton Police Department by former St. Louis Police Chief Daniel Isom through the University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL) and a consulting firm have not been met as of yet, and Isom is scheduled to speak to the Alton City Council regarding that platform on June 14, which is almost exactly 90 days from when the 30-, 60- and 90- day goals were set by the CRC. As of yet, none of those goals have been met.

### **What were those goals?**

The CRC was charged with ensuring these goals were met by community stakeholders. They were designed through joint focus groups containing both leaders in the community and the Alton Police Department. Each goal and plan was discussed with representatives from several professions and organizations before being galvanized into the ultimate goals for the platform.

### **Those goals are as follows:**

- Communication/Positive Interactions Between the Community and Police
- Education and Awareness
- Police Department Diversity

To ensure these goals were met in a timely fashion with all responsible parties being held accountable, the CRC established 30-, 60-, and 90-day goals, which were to start from a [special meeting of the CRC](#) on March 15, 2017, during which the data from the community policing initiative was revealed.

Within 30 days, the CRC was supposed to ensure the following:

- Identify Teams
- Schedule Meetings
- Define Objectives
- Gather Statistics

Within 60 days, the CRC was supposed to ensure the following:

- Develop a Written Plan
- Develop an Evaluative Strategy

Within 90 days, the CRC was supposed to ensure the following:

- Present Plan
- Approve Plan
- Begin the Implementation and Evaluation Process

When Isom comes to speak to the Alton City Council Wednesday, June 14 (89 days following the decided starting point for the goals), none of these goals have been met.

### **Why have none of these goals been met?**

On April 4, 2017, the people of Alton chose to reelect Walker after a long and arduous mayoral campaign between four men. While one of Walker's main running points was community policing, many in the city were not aware of the tremendous amount of work required to put this plan and its goals into action.

"I thought these goals were a little more than ambitious," Simmons said in a previous interview with Riverbender.com.

When Simmons and Hough met with Walker and Clark last month to share ideas, Hough said Walker was extremely receptive to "getting the ball rolling" on the community policing initiative - even offering Clark as an envoy from the city to work on the initiative.

Soon after that meeting, the Alton City Council approved the hiring of Sgt. Terry Buhs to the position of deputy chief, a position which was left vacant since 2009 due to funding issues.

That promotion of someone loyal to the mayor, chief and City of Alton, as Simmons described him, guaranteed more free time to Simmons, which he could use for community policing. Hough said at least 10 hours a week should be dedicated to the cause of community policing.

Since Buhs's promotion, Simmons has said he has been able to dedicate more time to community policing.

"Having a deputy chief has freed up time, bettered communication and bettered training," Simmons said. "Our internal survey said the guys wanted to improve communication, morale and training issues."

Simmons has also announced a few new positions in the Alton Police Department. Sgt. Pete Vambaketes will leave his position as the head of the force's drug unit to become

the department's full-time training officer. Detective Marcos Pulido will assume Vambaketes's role as head of the drug unit. The traffic department will change leadership from outgoing Sgt. Mark Dorsey to Sgt. Joel Bromaghim. Current acting traffic supervisor Jason Cole will return to patrol. Simmons hopes these moves will help allow more training and communication within his department.

Outside of the police department, the CRC has also been short-handed. It is currently four members short of its full board, and therefore dangerously close to not having a quorum at any given meeting.

Hough said the loss of former Alton City Attorney Megan Williams on the board has not been filled either. Williams was once the point person for the city regarding community policing. She resigned from her position at the end of April 2017.

To remedy this, Clark has worked on applications for citizens to join the CRC. Those applications will soon be available online, and Hough said anyone who has a vested interest in the continued positive growth, safety and overall well-being of the City of Alton is welcome to apply. The final decision on each applicant will be based on the decision of Walker, who appoints board members.

### **What about the future?**

No one has stopped their work toward a comprehensive community policing platform being implemented in Alton. While the election, a short-handed board and a resignation may have delayed the process, Hough, Simmons, Walker and Clark have all assured Riverbender.com in previous interviews they are each dedicated to the work needing done.

After Isom speaks to the Alton City Council, especially its new alderpersons, the 30-, 60- and 90-day goals will restart. Hough also expects Walker to start appointing applicants to the CRC as soon as applications begin making their ways to his office.