



# TOWN OF CORTLANDT

**Town Supervisor**  
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**Town Board**  
Richard H. Becker  
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## POLICE REFORM TASK FORCE COMMITTEE March 2021

Dear Supervisor Puglisi and Members of the Cortlandt Town Board,

Cortlandt's Police Reform Task Force respectfully presents the following report for your consideration and for further action locally and by Westchester County and New York State.

Following the death of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, Governor Cuomo directed all communities with a police department across New York State to begin the process of reevaluating police and law enforcement issues with community input in an effort to improve emergency services in their communities.

While the Town of Cortlandt no longer has its own police department (after it was disbanded in the 1990s saving Cortlandt taxpayers millions of dollars), the people of Cortlandt sought to have their voice heard by Westchester County and New York State as those entities review public safety policies. Cortlandt's public safety services are provided on a 24 hour basis by the New York State Police along with contracted services with Westchester County's Department of Public Safety to supplement those State Trooper services for two shifts per day. Supervisor Puglisi appointed Councilman James Creighton to chair Cortlandt's Police Task Force in October 2020, and a diverse committee made up of community residents (including community activists, former police officers, attorneys, educators and other concerned individuals) was empaneled shortly thereafter.

Beginning in November 2020, the committee began its work reviewing policing in Cortlandt with an eye toward improving emergency services provided by Westchester County and New York State. The Cortlandt Police Reform Task Force held a series of eight public committee meetings (via Zoom during the Covid-19 pandemic) and initially focused on recommendations set forth in Supervisor Puglisi's summer 2020 draft report as a starting point for discussions. Some members of the Town committee including its chair Councilman Creighton also participated in the parallel Westchester County Police Reform & Reimagining Task Force to ensure that Cortlandt's recommendations and inquiries were addressed in a timely manner.

As part of its process of seeking public input, the Task Force sought public comment on a continuous basis via email as well as through a community Public Comment and Listening Session (held on February 24, 2021). Members of the Westchester County Department of Public Safety and the New York State Police also attended and answered questions.

The Task Force reviewed all public comments and discussed all draft recommendations and now respectfully submits this report for your review, County/State referrals and further action.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Expand Cortlandt neighborhood use and police interactions with Neighborhood WATCH sites (including the web/app based watch groups like NextDoor.com )**

The electronic neighborhood watch sites have specific neighborhoods that are mapped out and the primary focus is neighborhood safety and information -- a great tool to assist in helping as eyes and ears for our police and for advising residents of issues/concerns.

(The Supervisor recommended the expansion of the Homeowners Association and regional network WATCH sites. *The committee unanimously encouraged this action/recommendation on 12/9/2020*)

- 2. Establish a Cortlandt Citizens Police Advisory Board to interact with local neighborhoods and provide a forum for citizens to bring issues, complaints, seek feedback and to engage the community with public education while also supporting the County's initiative to have a regional Citizens Advisory Board.**

(The Supervisor recommended that there be a public reporting and a possible Citizens Advisory Board with 5-7 members that meets quarterly and gives reports to the town board and police departments. The Westchester County task force has recommended the creation of a similar board with access to all communities as a shared service, particularly for disciplinary action or complaint review. The committee agreed that it made sense for the County to take the lead and for us to participate in that County board while also having a local police citizens advisory board for local information, issues and feedback. *The committee voted 8-0 to move this recommendation for a local Citizens Advisory Board to the Town Board while also supporting the County's recommended board [with 2 alternates also in favor and 1 alternate not in favor] on 12/9/2020*)

- 3. Both the Westchester County Department of Public Safety and the New York State Police departments should jointly hold community forums to explain their policies, recruitment and hiring practices and should participate in public updates, forums and information meetings in the Town of Cortlandt (at least twice per year).**

(The Supervisor recommended this and the committee unanimously encouraged this action/recommendation on 12/9/2020, updated with recruitment unanimously on 12/27/2020)

- 4. All officers patrolling in Cortlandt should be equipped with body cameras and every police vehicle with dashboard cameras. Body cameras and vehicle cameras should operate and record all police enforcement actions including arrests, vehicle stops, all emergency situations and to the extent allowable (e.g. when not involving confidential informants, victims, children, etc.) and the cameras should automatically activate and begin saving recorded information once vehicle sirens are activated, the cameras enter proximity of another officer/vehicle camera that has been activated or when manually activated by the officer pursuant to department policies and procedures.**

*(The Supervisor recommended this action generally and the committee unanimously encouraged this action/recommendation on 12/9/2020 as well as in later meetings including the meetings with County police on 1/13/2021 and State Police in attendance on 2/10/2021. The committee specifically noted the difference between County officers who are equipped with body cameras and automatic recording protocols that largely met the committee's concerns as opposed to the NY State Police who did not yet have body cameras; the County also seemed to have a clear policy and procedure regarding activation and saving of recordings for officer interactions in Cortlandt and the committee encouraged the NYS Police to bring its technology and policies in line with those of the County Department of Public Safety.)*

- 5. Diversity and Hiring Recommendations: The committee recommends that the police forces that serve Cortlandt should be diverse and reflect the community they serve. The committee recommended that both the County and State Police focus and increase their efforts in recruiting diverse, qualified individuals for our police officers – including increasing accessibility to test preparation materials and tutoring services for potential candidates. The committee recognized the challenges in place due to the civil service laws (particularly the “Rule of Three”) that do not allow departments flexibility in hiring officers and prioritizes strict test scores over soft skills or community relationships. The committee recommends that the NY State legislature review and amend the civil service laws to allow the best officers to serve our community while encouraging diversity in the police force and more local flexibility in hiring from civil service lists. The committee recommended that New York State and the County consider increasing the maximum age that an officer could join the academy and to review the requirements for education/college degree requirements. The committee also recommends that the police departments be fully accredited and that officers should continue to have a probationary period long enough to make a reasonable judgement (i.e., one year not including the time in the academy), and continue proper supervision during the probationary period. The committee recommends that officers probationary period be extended to two (2) years and adjust required supervised tours of duty accordingly.**

*(The Supervisor recommended this generally and the committee unanimously encouraged these actions/recommendations on 12/27/2020 as well as in later discussions with each of the police agencies. The committee unanimously recommended the extension of the probationary period in its 3/1/2021 meeting.)*

- 6. In light of recent New York State legislation making the use of neck restraints and choke holds illegal, the committee recommends that illegal chokeholds and neck restraints be banned from use within the police departments.**

*(The Supervisor recommended this generally and the committee discussed adjustment in light of the new legislation signed by Governor Cuomo on June 12, 2020 [Senate Bill S6670B] making choke holds illegal in New York State; the committee unanimously recommended this action on 1/13/2021)*

7. **The committee recommends that officers be trained to identify and properly handle situations and issues involving mental health, language barriers, people with autism and other difficult challenges that often benefit from de-escalation and interaction with mental health professionals or other services.**

*(The Committee discussed and unanimously recommended this action on 1/13/2021)*

8. **The committee supports the County's recommendations to participate in Project ABLE or a similar program to support training to create a culture of active bystandership and peer intervention in local police departments to help officers take action to intervene to prevent a colleague or supervisor from taking inappropriate or harmful action.**

*(The Committee discussed Project ABLE on 1/13/2021 and all members were provided links to the presentation by Westchester County Public Safety Commissioner Thomas Gleason on 12/11/2020; all agreed to add this recommendation unanimously on 1/13/2021).*

9. **The committee recommends that all officers be provided necessary vaccinations and testing for Covid-19 along with periodic drug and alcohol testing of officers and support for health issues, including mental wellness. The committee further recommends supportive wellness checks and proactive supportive services (either in concert with the Project ABLE program described above or otherwise) for officers who are temporarily not capable of responding reasonably.**

*(The Supervisor recommended this generally and the committee discussed further related supportive recommendations at several meetings all agreed to this recommendation on 3/1/2021).*

10. **The committee recommends that the County and/or New York State study and pursue the creation of a social service intervention unit either within the police force or as a separate emergency service provider incorporated into the 911 responder network (perhaps consulting with CAHOOTS - Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets - or a similar program) to respond to mental health care issues in partnership with local police authorities. We recommend the expansion of specialized teams to respond to mental health calls countywide and explore additional co-response initiatives which could be offered by the State or County as a shared service to multiple municipalities.**

*(The Committee unanimously agreed to add this recommendation on 1/13/2021 and 3/1/2021).*

11. **The committee recommends that all officers patrolling in Cortlandt be fully trained (both initially in an academy setting as well as on an ongoing continuing education basis). Education areas should include cultural diversity, recognizing and interrupting implicit bias, procedural justice and bias related crimes and incidents. Officers policing in Cortlandt should respect and treat all people with respect (regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) and should have a level of intercultural competency that reflects the varied cultures, religions, ethnicities and backgrounds present in Cortlandt and Westchester County.**

*(The Committee unanimously agreed to add this recommendation on 3/1/2021).*

- 12. The committee recommends that all policing agencies that provide public safety services in Cortlandt provide periodic written reports to the local elected officials (Town Supervisor and Town Board) on an at least quarterly basis on all police activity in the Town and as soon as possible when serious police matters occur in our community. The Committee recommends that non-confidential documents and other data should be available to the public to allow residents to assess the fairness of civilian police interactions. Such reports should include the number and type of police calls for service, action taken and demographic information (age/race/gender). Reports of discipline of officers responsible for patrolling in Cortlandt shall also be made available to the Town Supervisor and should be available to the public as required by amended state law and transparency policies.**

*(The Supervisor recommended this generally and the committee discussed this topic at several meetings and all agreed to this recommendation on 3/1/2021).*

- 13. The committee recommends that the police agencies in Cortlandt provide the public with information (either through the recommended Cortlandt Citizens Police Advisory Board or at recommended periodic community forums) regarding the step program for disciplinary actions, types of infractions or issues that are addressed by police agencies in house and when referrals are made to outside agencies for discipline. The Committee encouraged an environment that reinforces positive community engagement by identifying and valuing skills and competencies within police officers. These characteristics are essential for a successful officer-community relationships. The committee also recommends that citizens be provided with easier ways to provide feedback, complaints or reports (both positive and negative) to allow Cortlandt the ability to understand the experiences of its residents with policing agencies and to allow ways to advocate for change and to properly recognize officers who go above and beyond the call of duty to assist Cortlandt residents.**

*(The Supervisor recommended this generally and the committee discussed further related supportive recommendations at several meetings all agreed to this recommendation on 3/1/2021).*

- 14. The committee recommends that any officer who engages in serious unlawful conduct while on duty and is terminated following conviction of a felony shall lose any public benefit or contribution for any pension or other benefits otherwise available for terminated employees.**

*(The Committee discussed unlawful officer conduct at several sessions and recommended deterrent consequences for a felony committed while performing public service functions similar to those imposed by law upon elected officials or for a dishonorable discharge from the military to act as a stronger deterrent for the rare bad actor. All agreed to this recommendation on 3/1/2021).*

- 15. The committee recommends that officers should be required to explain to a person stopped the reason for the stop. Officers should at all times provide identification and/or wear a clearly visible badge or nameplate that displays their name and badge number.**

(The Committee discussed on a number of occasions how this simple step, which is largely already an existing police policy as confirmed by the State and County police, could help prevent unnecessary stops and would assist in ameliorating the feeling reported by many people of color that they are being harassed. *All agreed to this recommendation on 3/1/2021*).

- 16. Limit the use of unannounced, no-knock warrants to the most severe circumstances (and only approved for use in the rarest of circumstances and only with judicial preapproval).**

(The Committee discussed this subject on numerous occasions and, while such tactics have rarely, if ever, been used by County or State Police in recent memory, the Committee agreed that such tactics should only be used in the rarest of circumstances where there is imminent danger posed to the community and is consistent with a bill recently introduced in the NYS legislature. *The committee voted 8-0 to recommend this action [with 2 alternates also in favor and 1 alternate not in favor] on 3/1/2021*)

- 17. The committee recommends that policing agencies in Cortlandt not use “quota systems” and that productivity measures for officers should be qualitative and promotion or other incentives should not be based upon numerical or quantitative metrics.**

(The Committee discussed this issue on a number of occasions and confirmed that quota systems are not in place with the State and County police. *All agreed to this recommendation on 3/1/2021*).

- 18. Police misconduct based on a person’s color, religion, country of origin, gender identification or sexual orientation should be recognized as such. Officers involved should be subject to federal, state and local hate crime laws and referred as necessary.**

(The Committee discussed this issue on a number of occasions. *All agreed to this recommendation on 3/1/2021*).

## APPENDIX

Following the death of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, Governor Cuomo directed all communities with a police department across New York State to begin the process of reevaluating police and law enforcement issues with community input in an effort to improve emergency services in their communities. (Executive Order 203).

While the Town of Cortlandt was not mandated to perform a police review, the people of Cortlandt sought to have their voice heard by Westchester County and New York State as those entities review public safety policies. Supervisor Puglisi appointed Councilman James Creighton to chair Cortlandt's Police Task Force in October 2020, and the Town advertised seeking members of its police review committee. A diverse group made up of community residents (including community activists, former police officers, attorneys, educators, people of color and other concerned individuals) was empaneled shortly thereafter.

Beginning in November 2020, the committee began its work reviewing policing in Cortlandt. The Cortlandt Police Reform Task Force held a series of eight public committee meetings (on November 30, 2020, December 9, 2020, December 21, 2020, January 13, 2021, January 27, 2021, February 10, 2021, February 24, 2021 and March 1, 2021 via Zoom during the Covid-19 pandemic) and focused their initial recommendations using Supervisor Puglisi's summer 2020 draft report as a guiding point for early discussions. Some members of the Town committee including its chair Councilman Creighton also participated in the parallel Westchester County Police Reform & Reimagining Task Force, and members of the County Task Force were invited to Cortlandt's committee meetings as were members of the New York State Police and the Westchester County Department of Public Safety.

All meetings were public, and further public comment was sought from the community in a public comment and listening session held on February 24, 2021 at 7 p.m. via Zoom. Community members were also encouraged to email comments to any member of the committee or to a special email address [PoliceReformTaskForce@townofcortlandt.com](mailto:PoliceReformTaskForce@townofcortlandt.com) publicized for this purpose.

TOWN OF CORTLANDT  
**POLICE REFORM TASK FORCE**  
**WEBINAR**

WEDNESDAY  
FEBRUARY 24, 2021

7:00 P.M.

[HTTPS://US02WEB.ZOOM.US/j/85026741742?  
PWD=ZEZIMU8oMS9YYTRGQWDLGCSUHNCCZ09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85026741742?pwd=ZEZIMU8oMS9YYTRGQWDLGCSUHNCCZ09)

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DIAL (FOR HIGHER QUALITY, DIAL A NUMBER BASED ON YOUR CURRENT LOCATION):  
US: +1 646 558 8656 OR +1 301 715 8592  
OR +1 312 626 6799 OR +1 669 900 9128  
OR +1 253 215 8782 OR +1 346 248 7799  
WEBINAR ID: 850 2674 1742  
PASSCODE: 406004

**PUBLIC FEEDBACK: GENERAL SESSION**

**Cortlandt's Police Reform Task Force Committee was made up of the following diverse members of the community (spanning a range of geographic locations, political views, gender, race, police experience, social justice involvement, etc.):**

Members (9):

James Creighton, Chairman – Town of Cortlandt Councilman

Jameela Adams-White (chair of Social Justice Comm/Police Reform of CCoHope INDIVISIBLE)

Ira Gurkin (school administrator, middle school principal, educator and former pharmacist)

Barbara Halecki (former Master Plan Committee Member, family member of police officers)

William Hodge (retired Senior Investigator, New York State Police Department)

Larry Kressley (community organizer, former member of Town's Diversity Task Force)

Ian Orr (attorney, civil litigation including Civil Rights matters)

Ken Russell, Sr. (senior citizen, veteran, retired as Lieutenant - 25 year member of NYPD)

Brian Tubbs (former Chief of the Buchanan Police Department, Member Ambulance Corp.)

Alternate Members (3):

Ken Russell, Jr. (recently retired supervisor, Sgt., New York Police Department)

Rowan Lindley (college educator, member of Social Justice Comm of CCoHope INDIVISIBLE)

Debra Cohen (WCAI, member of Social Justice Committee of CCoHope INDIVISIBLE)

Attending regularly:

Dr. Richard Becker, Deputy Supervisor/Town Councilman

Town Staff support provided by:

Michael Cunningham, Deputy Town Attorney

Claudia Vahey, Director of Human Resources

Special thanks to guest presenters:

Linda Puglisi, Town of Cortlandt Supervisor

Colin Smith, County Legislator (District 1)

Debra Carter, Town Councilmember

Sgt. John Butcher, Westchester County Department of Public Safety

Sgt. Trenee Young, New York State Police

### **E.O. 203 NEW YORK STATE POLICE REFORM AND REINVENTION COLLABORATIVE,**

June 2020

*Each local government entity which has a police agency operating with police officers as defined under 1.20 of the criminal procedure law must perform a comprehensive review of current police force deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, and develop a plan to improve such deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, for the purposes of addressing the particular needs of the communities served by such police agency and promote community engagement to foster trust, fairness, and legitimacy, and to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color.*

*The full version of the Executive Order follows:*





No. 203

EXECUTIVE ORDER

NEW YORK STATE POLICE REFORM AND REINVENTION COLLABORATIVE

**WHEREAS**, the Constitution of the State of New York obliges the Governor to take care that the laws of New York are faithfully executed; and

**WHEREAS**, I have solemnly sworn, pursuant to Article 13, Section 1 of the Constitution, to support the Constitution and faithfully discharge the duties of the Office of Governor; and

**WHEREAS**, beginning on May 25, 2020, following the police-involved death of George Floyd in Minnesota, protests have taken place daily throughout the nation and in communities across New York State in response to police-involved deaths and racially-biased law enforcement to demand change, action, and accountability; and

**WHEREAS**, there is a long and painful history in New York State of discrimination and mistreatment of black and African-American citizens dating back to the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in America; and

**WHEREAS**, this recent history includes a number of incidents involving the police that have resulted in the deaths of unarmed civilians, predominantly black and African-American men, that have undermined the public's confidence and trust in our system of law enforcement and criminal justice, and such condition is ongoing and urgently needs to be rectified; and

**WHEREAS**, these deaths in New York State include those of Anthony Baez, Amadou Diallo, Ousmane Zango, Sean Bell, Ramarley Graham, Patrick Dorismond, Akai Gurley, and Eric Garner, amongst others, and, in other states, include Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Laquan McDonald, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, Antwon Rose Jr., Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, amongst others,

**WHEREAS**, these needless deaths have led me to sign into law the Say Their Name Agenda which reforms aspects of policing in New York State; and

**WHEREAS**, government has a responsibility to ensure that all of its citizens are treated equally, fairly, and justly before the law; and

**WHEREAS**, recent outpouring of protests and demonstrations which have been manifested in every area of the state have illustrated the depth and breadth of the concern; and

**WHEREAS**, black lives matter; and

**WHEREAS**, the foregoing compels me to conclude that urgent and immediate action is needed to eliminate racial inequities in policing, to modify and modernize policing strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, and to develop practices to better address the particular needs of communities of color to promote public safety, improve community engagement, and foster trust; and

**WHEREAS**, the Division of the Budget is empowered to determine the appropriate use of funds in furtherance of the state laws and New York State Constitution; and

**WHEREAS**, in coordination with the resources of the Division of Criminal Justice Services, the Division of the Budget can increase the effectiveness of the criminal justice system by ensuring that the local police agencies within the state have been actively engaged with stakeholders in the local community and have locally-approved plans for the strategies, policies and procedures of local police agencies; and

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of the State of New York, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the Laws of the State of New York, in particular Article IV, section one, I do hereby order and direct as follows:

The director of the Division of the Budget, in consultation with the Division of Criminal Justice Services, shall promulgate guidance to be sent to all local governments directing that:

Each local government entity which has a police agency operating with police officers as defined under 1.20 of the criminal procedure law must perform a comprehensive review of current police force deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, and develop a plan to improve such deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, for the purposes of addressing the particular needs of the communities served by such police agency and promote community engagement to foster trust, fairness, and legitimacy, and to address any racial bias and disproportionate policing of communities of color.

Each chief executive of such local government shall convene the head of the local police agency, and stakeholders in the community to develop such plan, which shall consider evidence-based policing strategies, including but not limited to, use of force policies, procedural justice; any studies addressing systemic racial bias or racial justice in policing; implicit bias awareness training; de-escalation training and practices; law enforcement assisted diversion programs; restorative justice practices; community-based outreach and conflict resolution; problem-oriented policing; hot spots policing; focused deterrence; crime prevention through environmental design; violence prevention and reduction interventions; model policies and guidelines promulgated by the New York State Municipal Police Training Council; and standards promulgated by the New York State Law Enforcement Accreditation Program.

The political subdivision, in coordination with its police agency, must consult with stakeholders, including but not limited to membership and leadership of the local police force; members of the community, with emphasis in areas with high numbers of police and community interactions; interested non-profit and faith-based community groups; the local office of the district attorney; the local public defender; and local elected officials, and create a plan to adopt and implement the recommendations resulting from its review and consultation, including any modifications, modernizations, and innovations to its policing deployments, strategies, policies, procedures, and practices, tailored to the specific needs of the community and general promotion of improved police agency and community relationships based on trust, fairness, accountability, and transparency, and which seek to reduce any racial disparities in policing.

Such plan shall be offered for public comment to all citizens in the locality, and after consideration of such comments, shall be presented to the local legislative body in such political subdivision, which shall ratify or adopt such plan by local law or resolution, as appropriate, no later than April 1, 2021; and

Such local government shall transmit a certification to the Director of the Division of the Budget to affirm that such process has been complied with and such local law or resolution has been adopted; and

The Director of the Division of the Budget shall be authorized to condition receipt of future appropriated state or federal funds upon filing of such certification for which such local government would otherwise be eligible; and

The Director is authorized to seek the support and assistance of any state agency in order to effectuate these purposes.



BY THE GOVERNOR

Secretary to the Governor

G I V E N under my hand and the Privy Seal of the

State in the City of Albany this

twelfth day of June in the year two

thousand twenty.

**SUPERVISOR PUGLISI'S DRAFT POLICE REPORT (Summer 2020)**  
**[Also annexed as an exhibit to the Westchester County Police Reform & Reimagining Task Force Report]**

**Town of Cortlandt's Report on Public Safety  
and Policing Improvements  
by Supervisor Puglisi  
August 2020**

The Town of Cortlandt benefits by having not one but two police departments that work well together for our community's protection and safety (New York State Police and Westchester County Police).

This Police Plan was established in the year 2000 after the town board and I eliminated for fiscal reasons the small local police department that had been in existence since 1980. This small department was comprised of a Chief of Police, nine other officers and a few dispatchers. However, several of its members were out on 207C and therefore we were faced with not having a full police workforce, but we still had to pay their salaries and benefits. Therefore, the new plan was voted on by the entire town board and for twenty years the two police departments have served our community well.

This plan not only brought more officers but more resources to benefit our Cortlandt residents and businesses (i.e. helicopter and canine services, laboratories, the best up-to-date vehicles and equipment including state-of-the art technology). If the Town had to duplicate these items and services it would have been extremely expensive for our taxpayers who were paying close to one million dollars each year back in the 1990's.

However, there is always more to do and improvements are always needed. We are aware of what is occurring throughout the Country regarding some negative police actions that has been harmful to individuals and to our society in general. Therefore, suggestions to improve and to evolve with the goal to have more inclusion, equality and better communication between police departments and the community is the mission of this report.

1. We have a few Neighborhood WATCH organizations throughout the Town, but more are needed to expand communication and to have contacts in each area for the police departments to connect with when there are safety issues.
2. Consider a Citizens Advisory Board to hear issues/complaints from the citizenry and act as a go-between for the neighborhoods, citizens and police departments. In no way, shape or form would they be making decisions on cases. That's why we have our justice department and our two elected town justices. They would be charged to meet at least quarterly and give reports to the Town Board and to the police departments. The Town Board would appoint the 5 – 7 members of this Citizens Advisory Board and set the guidelines.
3. Both Police Departments should jointly hold community forums to explain their policies and practices when responding to regular police calls and to 911 calls, as

- well as, update the public on any other issues that may arise. They should meet at least twice a year with the community
4. Educate the public on the current diversity in their departments. How many minorities are employed, trained, and also are promoted based on merit to higher positions. Increase the number of minorities including women in the police departments across the board. The police department must reflect the ever changing demographics of our region, State, County and Country.
  5. Report on the diversity training offered and protocols. Explain how often this training occurs and increase the number of classes. They should be mandatory. This is a very important issue.
  6. Make it mandatory to wear and at all times operate body cameras. Also, place cameras on all police vehicles. These cameras will provide accurate and clear pictures of what took place at each scene, crime scene and during arrests.
  7. Make disciplinary records more transparent especially in the areas of interacting with those involved in an altercation and/or arrest. Include why and for what reason are they being disciplined so that the public understands and knows that the situations are being dealt fairly with for all involved. Also, explain the step program for disciplinary actions. How many times has an officer been disciplined and for what infraction/issue should be made public. These practices would make it clear to the public that an officer is being disciplined, given better training and if need be terminated.
  8. Provide written reports to the local elected officials. In our town to the Supervisor and Town Board at least on a quarterly basis, if not more frequently on all police activity in Cortlandt.
    - a) What kind of police calls?
    - b) What were the police actions taken at each scene?
    - c) What and how was the interaction with the individual(s)?
  9. Needed: More drug and alcohol testing of officers and of course the continuation of Covid 19 testing.
  10. Ban chokeholds and neck restraints in all cases.
  11. Continue and increase the communication to the Town Supervisor or designee when not available, in order to report serious police matters in our community.

In conclusion:

The Governor of New York State has by executive order mandated every community (local, County) to submit a report to him no later than April 1, 2021. Even though we don't have a local police department, but a County and State Police Cooperative Plan for our community, we still want to offer suggestions for Police/Community improvements. We want to be part of the discussion as we go forward for equality and justice for all.

The most important part of this plan is the increased communication with our police departments, residents, officials and community.

Submitted by:  
Supervisor Linda D. Puglisi and  
Town Board

## **PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS AND COMMENTS**

**While not all discussions by the Committee resulted in official recommendations, the Committee recognized the value in raising other issues for Town Board, County or New York State action in the future.**

### **Community Policing**

**In the discussions within the Committee and with the public, the topic of Cortlandt’s unique policing structure and geography often noted a frequent perception that the NYSP/County solution does not provide for robust community policing as that term has come to be used. Discussions have led to a possible recommendation to consider adding an additional County Officer who could handle Town requested targeted speed patrols, loitering in parks, quarry issues and direct support for park rangers, quality of life, court coverage when needed and other local public safety issues. Members of the County Police appeared generally supportive of such a recommendation, and the Committee discussed the merits but did not elevate the idea to a formal recommendation, leaving the idea for further evaluation and study by the Town Board.**

### **Potential of Upgrading the Crime of Resisting Arrest**

Numerous discussions were held by the Committee regarding a suggestion to consider elevating the crime of actively resisting arrest, with a suggestion to change the New York State Penal Law to upgrade the crime to an “e felony” if there was an injury to an officer and to a “d felony” if there was an injury to non-participant in the police activity. The Committee discussed this issue extensively and various suggestions were made in an effort to build consensus for a recommendation on January 27, 2021 and March 1, 2021. Following those discussions, the Committee ultimately decided not to make a formal recommendation. However, the discussion raised a number of points New York State legislators may wish to consider.

First, resisting arrest was agreed by all to be a concern that often sets in motion a quick, downward spiral of events that often can be far more serious than the original reason for the police stop. A potential upgrade to the resisting arrest law could provide a deterrent to those who might ignore the consequences of resisting a lawful order due to a perception that a resisting charge is not serious or is often thought of as a “junk charge.”

Ultimately, while a balanced approach to law reform was sought, the Committee was unable to arrive at a consensus on this issue. There may be an opportunity during community outreach events to stress the need for cooperation and compliance with the police. As was said by a member of the Committee, “a police officer should be treated by a civilian with the same respect that a civilian expects from an officer” and “that ‘de-escalation’ on both sides is required if we’re to make any progress on this front.”

## **Additional Public Comments and Recommendations From the Public**

“98% of police work is call for service. Praise for the police is needed and we do not want to alienate the police. We have to bridge the gap between the police and the community. The citizens need to know how difficult police work is; it is not an easy job. I don't think there is a problem in the Town of Cortlandt with the police.”

“I reached out to a few friends re: community input to our task force. I got these ideas / comments back:

- Body cameras are a great idea.
- Police officers (besides being trained to hit center mass) should also be mandated to become proficient at disabling a suspected offender. This may avoid undue heartache when dealing with the mentally ill, a frightened juvenile, or domestic violence disputes which seem to be some of the most dangerous encounters for police officers.
- Police officers' current presence in our schools as Resource or DARE officers is an excellent way for children to see them as community helpers.
- If they don't already, perhaps police departments could sponsor individual sports teams in the community. A member of the department might even attend a game to root on the team as its sponsor. It would be great if their child were on the team as part of the concept of community policing in that an officer works where he or she lives.”

“Can I have a history on the relationship with the NYSP and the barracks at the train station and the Village of Buchanan and do they work together?”

“I have seen the Buchanan police around interacting and got that neighborhood feeling from them, which is great. With the NYSP - it doesn't feel like a neighborhood thing.”

“Everyone has heard of their Miranda Rights and as these questions get propagated into some form of rules or interactions - how will that be conveyed into something real and given to the public so when I get stopped this is what I should understand - usually you do not find out until something happens and a lawyer may tell you what you should or shouldn't have done. How will the final end product of this be conveyed to the public?”

“I would like to understand if social media of our officers is being considered and if so, how? It would seem if someone holds strong negative views toward things on social media that would translate to their views in the real-world and would impact their work and ability to keep all members of our town safe.”

“It didn't say ban illegal chokeholds, it said ban chokeholds in all cases.” “If they are banned, all the chokeholds would be illegal. Which chokehold would not be illegal?” “The way it is written right now is there is no ambiguity in it. There should be no, if and ands - it should be the law that we follow or it is not.”

“I know that there are other towns and cities that are in the process of revamping their police department and how they view policing. Are we looking to do anything like the Cahoots programs in Portland and Ithaca - to respond with non-armed officers or other personnel that are not police, to respond to mental health situations where an arrest may not be needed?”

“Re: chokeholds - I wanted to speak to the comment about how they are illegal now but in certain situations that that would be up to a jury of their peers to decide. I do not love that answer. I work in a school with children on the spectrum and we have to get trained several times per year with refreshers and re-certifications on Therapeutic Crisis Intervention. I feel like the focus of the training that I get is to de-escalate and at the last resort, physical intervention. And the physical interventions are designed specifically and get revamped often so as not to harm or injure the children in any way. I don't feel like the police department's training is keeping this in mind. I don't think they are being trained not to harm anyone. I get they are in a dangerous position when they first respond, but the response is not always appropriate de-escalation. I have seen some police that do a beautiful job with de-escalation but I have seen some that exacerbate the situation. They need better training and to not harm the people they are to protect. I do not know if that language is included in the recommendations. I do not think a chokehold is ever appropriate. There are other ways to secure and sedate a person without an arm or knee on their neck.”

“You are then still left with the problem when it gets to the courts. How many times have we seen juries vote to acquit because the bar is set so high to convict police officers for brutality. If they were even slightly concerned about their safety then anything is allowed and that has got to be reformed. Any officer can say they were afraid for their life - but that bar is so high that we are letting all this brutality and racist policing go under the radar and not calling it out and it is unacceptable.”

“Why do we have the NYSP and not a Town police in Cortlandt? Did we ever just have a Town police where it could be that kind of neighborly, friendly type? I understand Cortlandt is a large area. Please give me clarification.”

“Regarding the complaint/incident report form - if you have an issue do you call the barracks and they can send it to you or you can pick it up?”

“It seems the police force should be reformed more so on the way they treat women around these parts. I am glad to see reform based on something that occurred in another state, but the police around here don't even stop ongoing harrassment. I have been attacked verbally and my property physically by a neighbor across the street for 10 years! He has eavesdropped, spied, dumped on my land and shot my house full of BBs. Just 3 weeks ago he came on my property to yell at me and call me a fat ugly bitch. He further had highly private information which I have no idea how he obtained other than sorting through my mail. The police have DONE NOTHING TO MAKE IT STOP. This same man has targeted other neighbors through the town and police in the past. He has harrassed my animals and shined flashlights in my windows causing me a lack of sleep for 3 months. The police sent investigators in unmarked cars to intimidate me. Sorry Linda, we might be forced to reform based on what happened in Minnesota, but women have been under scrutiny here far longer than minorities.”

“Thanks Linda. I am willing to bet if I ever crossed the street for 10 years straight solely to trespass and harass him, I would have been arrested already. Probably on the 2nd trespass.”

Re: Police Radio Issues: “Maybe we could have a conversation about the radio tower at the Cortlandt Ambulance building and if it's possible, what would be needed from everyone involved to use it to enhance the PD radio communication.”

“As I tried to indicate ... this letter is ... a plea to you and the Cortlandt legislators to understand that we are concerned about those officers who should not be in law enforcement as they are a danger to the community. Discussions could continue after the report is submitted as we are all committed to the long range safety of the community, which does and must include law enforcement.”

“I am a resident of the Town of Cortlandt who had the misfortune in October 2018 to have an interaction with a Westchester officer. He came to my house to question my grandson about someone that he knew that was called out of school by her friend. The police officer wanted to know what my grandson knew. The officer came to the door and never introduced himself to me nor did he state why he was there. I made the mistake of letting him into my house. The longer he was there the more I realized how rude and obnoxious he was. He was totally unprofessional, threatening, intimidating and a liar. He was exactly the opposite one would expect an officer to be. He showed me exactly why police have the terrible reputation that they have and why they should be totally investigated. I was also told that police can lie to get whatever it is they want. So it comes down to disrespectful, rude liars are the people that we are expected to trust to help us. Needless to say, I have lost any respect for any police officers or police department.”

Note: **draft survey** was prepared - our Police Citizens Adv. Board could conduct this or others.

“Dear Sir, This is to place on record our appreciation and thanks for allowing (Sgt. John Butcher/ Trenee Young) the opportunity to share (his/her) knowledge and expertise with our Town of Cortlandt Police Reform Task Force. During our meeting Sgt (Butcher/Young) answered our questions honestly and with knowledge of the subject matter. (His/Her) presentation and knowledge of your agency was well received by the members of our committee. You should be heartened to know that Sgt Butcher/Young is representing your agency to the best of his/her abilities. We are grateful for his/her service in ensuring the safety of our community. We look forward to further cooperation with the dedicated members of your department. Warm regards,”

James Creighton: “Thanks to Supervisor Linda Puglisi and Deputy Supervisor Richard Becker for their thoughtful recommendations and comments to our committee as we worked together on this important review of policing in our community. We also thank County Executive George Latimer for the County’s partnership in this process and especially County Legislator Colin Smith for his excellent work as part of the County’s Police Reimagining Task Force committee (and its Accountability working group) and for ensuring that Cortlandt’s voice was heard in the County discussions. It has been an honor to chair this task force and work with these amazingly dedicated residents who spent countless hours researching, discussing and finalizing the various recommendations with the invaluable input from our community. These proposals will help make our unique policing program in Cortlandt even better while improving community communication and relationships with our emergency services personnel.” “While there have been calls this year from some in this country to ‘defund the police’, this has been a misnomer. Here in Cortlandt, we are proud of our police and seek to improve the job they do through this reform and reimagining process. We recognize that the majority of police calls are for service (often medical emergencies or car accidents). The job they do is not easy, and they cannot do that job effectively without being given the support they need. We recognize that change is often difficult, but honest discussion often leads to good solutions. We in Cortlandt hope that our calls for the County and New York State to improve and properly equip our law enforcement and emergency services professionals will be heard and acted upon favorably.”