

MEMORANDUM

To: Selectboard

From: Peter B. Elwell, Town Manager

Re: Community Safety Review –
Next Steps for Implementation

Date: February 25, 2021



RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Selectboard approve moving forward on implementation of recommendations set forth in the Community Safety Review Team's (CSRT's) report dated December 31, 2020, in the manner described in this memorandum and the attached implementation table.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A Reminder About the Context and Purpose of these Documents

During its meeting on January 19, 2021, the Selectboard unanimously approved the following statement: "The Selectboard gratefully accepts the Community Safety Report and directs Town staff to provide additional information regarding the recommendations in that report to help the Selectboard make decisions on Town actions to move forward with this work." This memorandum and the attached implementation table comprise Town staff's "additional information regarding the recommendations ..." in furtherance of that Selectboard action. As your Town Manager, I am responsible for these documents. In preparing them, I collaborated extensively with Assistant Town Manager Patrick Moreland and Interim Police Chief Mark Carignan and occasionally with other members of the Town staff and with Town Attorney Bob Fisher. The information and advice offered in these documents is informed by our professional experience in local government management and municipal law enforcement. It also – and importantly – is informed by our observations of the CSRT's work during September-December of 2020; our review of the CSRT's report and recommendations; our consideration of the presentation made by CSRT facilitators and project leaders Emily Megas-Russell and Shea Witzberger at the Selectboard meeting on January 5, 2021; the lengthy discussions among community members, CSRT members, and the Selectboard at Selectboard meetings during the summer of 2020 and on January 12+19, 2021; our conversation with the project leaders on February 5, 2021; and our many and varied communications with other community members throughout this entire Community Safety Review process.

Acknowledgement of Harm / Commitment to Reckoning + Collaboration

We acknowledge that centuries of white people holding power in our country (including here in Vermont and in Brattleboro) has perpetuated systemic racism that has caused and still causes harm to people of color throughout our country (including here in Vermont and in Brattleboro). We acknowledge that this harm is caused not only by overt acts of personal and systemic racism, but also more insidiously by the unintentional impacts of unconscious bias. We acknowledge that the harm caused by systemic oppression (both intended and unintended) extends beyond people of color to include LGBTQIA+ people, people living with disabilities, psychiatrically labelled people, and other individuals and groups who carry historically marginalized identities. We acknowledge that, as documented in the CSRT's report, people here in our community have experienced harm from the existing systems in our community. Finally, we acknowledge that as people in positions of authority today we have an obligation to develop a more complete understanding of the harm that is being experienced and to take action to reduce and prevent such harm as we move forward from this time. Therefore, we commit ourselves to an ongoing process of reckoning with the harm caused by existing systems in Brattleboro and with our roles and actions within those systems. We further commit ourselves to approaching this work and future corrective actions with humility and reflection in collaboration with individuals and groups who have been negatively impacted by these systems.

Pace and Timeframe

During our work on these two documents, we found it difficult to reconcile the need to slow down and reckon with the need to act urgently to reduce harm. After struggling with this dynamic tension and discussing it with the CSRT facilitators and others, we have determined that spending more time addressing this aspect of the work at this time would be an impediment to getting started on implementation. The fact is that accomplishing meaningful and lasting systemic change will require urgency and also will require patience and perseverance. We believe some of the CSRT's recommendations lend themselves well to immediate implementation. Others will take years to implement either as they are currently described or in some other manner that will evolve through future collaboration with and among people and organizations inside and outside our community. The majority of recommendations fall somewhere in between. We believe, therefore, that it is important to get started on the overall body of work, to trust that we will find the appropriate pace for each separate item within this body of work, and to use the accountability process described below as a means for calibrating (and regularly recalibrating) our pace and priorities in this work. For that reason, we have not commented on the timeframe for each specific recommendation and we advise against (at least for now) identifying any particular subset of recommendations as being of greater or lesser priority than the others. (Out of respect for the work of the CSRT and for future reference as we track our implementation progress, we have retained CSRT's noted timeframe at the end of each individual recommendation in the implementation table.)

Accountability

The work ahead is essential, complex, and in some ways never-ending. Therefore, it is important that we establish a method of holding ourselves accountable (and being held accountable by the community we serve) over time as we proceed with implementation. Staff recommends periodic status reports and discussions at Selectboard meetings. This will enable us to keep the public informed of our progress and engaged in our work. We envision these sessions not only as a way to measure the progress we are making, but also as an opportunity to (as noted above) reprioritize our work and recalibrate our pace, as needed. We recommend that the first such session be held as a special Selectboard meeting devoted entirely to this one topic on August 9 or August 23, 2021. We recommend that particular timing because it is approximately 5 months from now (time enough to get started and have some progress to assess) and because it is prior to the preparation of the Town's FY23 budget (allowing that accountability session to inform the budget preparation process that will follow). We recommend that the frequency of future sessions (or at least the timing of the second session) be determined by the Selectboard at that August meeting, after receiving input from the community and Town staff.

A Word About the Format of the Attached Implementation Table

The individual recommendations in the CSRT's report are not enumerated. We have assigned numbers to them so as to more easily differentiate them as implementation moves forward. We believe that this will be helpful from the start and that it will become increasingly important as we proceed deeper into implementation. We have kept the individual recommendations clustered within the four broad categories that were set forth in the CSRT's report, so that it is easy to see at a glance which individually numbered recommendations are viewed by the CSRT as essentially related to other individual recommendations. We reviewed this ordering process with the CSRT facilitators and confirmed that it is in line with the CSRT's intentions. The wording of the recommendations is taken verbatim from the CSRT's report. To the right of each individual recommendation is a column labelled "Town Unilaterally?" in which we declare whether the Town has the ability (legal authority and capacity) to implement that recommendation without relying upon the action(s) of others. To the right of that column is another column labelled "Notes" in which we comment upon each recommendation in a way that we hope will be helpful to both the Selectboard and the public in further considering this overall body of work.

PBE:
Attachment