

## Police chief presents 3-year plan to improve department

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### Content

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Lancaster Police Chief Don Roper spent his first five months in his position drafting a holistic three-year plan for the department.

Roper, who was hired last August, presented his plan Jan. 31 at a City Police Department and Court Administration Standing Committee meeting.

The plan focuses on curating a brand for the police department and working on the “customer service” aspects of the job — how its staff interacts with those they serve.

“Since the first four months after being appointed chief of police, I’ve been going and meeting with a number of different members of the community and different organizations, stakeholders basically, in Lancaster County,” Roper said.

He said his outreach efforts were to make introductions, but to also take the time to hear what the community’s issues are for the police department to address.

Roper’s proposed three-year plan looks to examine and improve multiple departmental systems, such as adjusting organizational structures, current job assignments and responsibilities, adding oversight and succession planning, having the deputy chief or major act as second in command, having a professional standards lieutenant, records specialist, communications supervisor and jail or court administrator.

“First of all, I want to look at departmental image. What is our brand? What is the culture? What direction are we going toward? We want to create a culture of professionalism, a culture where we are recognized professionally by our peers,” Roper said.

“Second, I want to make sure that we have an emphasis on customer service,” Roper said. “As an organization, the Lancaster Police Department needs to have that emphasis on customer service for the town. Someone comes into the police department, they need to be

treated as a customer, basically. They're coming to us when they have a problem, and we approach that as problem-solvers."

The longest process the department is undertaking is the accreditation process, which Roper said will take between 12-18 months. The process, governed by the S.C. Law Enforcement Accreditation (SCLEA), is a voluntary initiative that looks into the police department's practices and processes and works to improve professionalism and training for each employee.

The process involves five steps: application, self-assessment, on-site assessment, council review, and maintaining compliance and reaccreditation. Roper said the department is working with an accreditation manager, who has been creating benchmarks for the department to meet along the way.

Roper said the accreditation process will put the structure in place to make sure that the department moves in a positive direction to improve professionalism and oversight.

"We have to have good policies in place. We need to make sure that we're following those policies, and that our folks are trained in the policies. They know what the policies are, and that we have proof that we're following the policies, following best practices in law enforcement," Roper said.

In light of increased calls for police reform and abolition, especially during the summer of 2020, Roper said this community has expressed support for the Lancaster Police Department.

"The community (nationwide) is making these demands. You hear 'defund the police;' you hear all of the other demands that are made on police departments," he said. "What I'm seeing is our community is supporting us and given us an opportunity to improve, and they will to work with us."

Roper also said that young officers run the risk of being unsupervised and untrained, which can lead to issues down the line. His goal by putting proper systems into place is that every officer will undergo training and supervision to mitigate as many issues and scenarios as they can, and improve their policing practices.

"I think this plan will get us there where we need to be and I appreciate the support of the council and the city administrator," Roper said. He also thanked his staff, specifically Kendra Maloney, administrative assistant and victims advocate, and Erin Tindal, public information officer, for their support.

## **Child images**

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