



Township of Woodbridge

Human Rights Commission

Township of Woodbridge

One Main Street • Woodbridge, New Jersey 07095

Email: HRC@TWP.WOODBRIDGE.NJ.US

Web: <https://www.twp.woodbridge.nj.us/945/Human-Rights-Commission>

“Ten Towns, One Community”



Dated: August 9, 2021

RE: 2021 Recommendations for the Woodbridge Police Department, Domestic Violence Response Team and the Department of Health, Addiction Services and Mercury Survey.

Police Department

Recommendations:

1. **Public Relations/Perception:** All institutions whether they be public or private depend on the good will and trust of the public and/or their clients. Reputations can be enhanced or destroyed by perceptions that may be real or unreal. The key to keeping the trust of the public/clients and maintaining a solid reputation is to develop and sustain a forthright public relations initiative. The tragic events of last year and the assault on our Nation’s Capital on January 6, 2021, illustrate how powerful events can destroy reputations. Based on public comment made at the Woodbridge Town Council and Woodbridge Human Rights Commission meetings, there is a need for the members of the Police Department to reach out and communicate with the community. Although the members of the Police Department are very visible at community and school events such as concerts, parades, athletic events, etc., there is a compelling need for the population at large to get to know the police officers who monitor, protect, and serve our ten communities. This could be accomplished by having police officers introduce themselves, explain their role(s) and duties at PTO, PTA, senior centers, community organizations, etc. Or perhaps, as a police officer is patrolling a neighborhood, simply park his car; knock on the door of a few residents; introduce him/herself; explain his or her role; simply ask if they have any safety concerns and distribute a generic Police Department business card. Getting to know the person behind the badge, would greatly add to reducing mistrust among our diverse community and especially among our minority populations. Mayor McCormac presently holds annual coffees to meet and greet our residents, why not invite a few officers to become participants at this informative community gathering.



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Police Department Continued

2. **Employment Diversification:** The Police Department must develop a strategy and policy that when implemented will result in the diversification of the members of the department by attracting qualified women and men from minority groups. (NJ A-1138 effective February 1, 2021). Additionally, the Woodbridge Town Council should introduce and adopt an ordinance or resolution for law A5122/S3220 which permits the exemption from the Civil Service Law Enforcement Examination for entry-level law enforcement police officers.
3. **Number of Police Officers:** The Police Department must avail the criteria and supporting data to the public during the administration’s annual budget hearings, that determines and explains the need for the number of officers for the department to function properly and efficiently.
4. **Bias Training:** NJ (A3641) requires the Department of Law and Public Safety to add implicit bias training to the cultural diversity training curriculum for law enforcement officers. This bill makes cultural diversity and implicit bias training mandatory and requires all state, county, and municipal law enforcement departments to provide this training once every five years. This law went into effect on March 1, 2021. In a joint-statement, Assembly members Reynolds-Jackson, Murphy, and Timberlake. defined and explained the need for bias training. They said, *“the automatic association people make between groups of people and stereotypes about those groups has been shown to have significant influence on the outcomes of interactions between police and residents. Implicit bias can be expressed in relation to non-racial factors, including gender, age, religion, or sexual orientation and not only racial incidence. If there is any profession that cannot afford to have or show bias or discrimination in the act of doing their jobs, it is law enforcement.”* Because the Department of Law and Public Safety has yet to develop implicit bias training courses, the WHRC recommends that the officers of the department immediately avail themselves to take cultural diversity and implicit bias training courses that are available at Rutgers University and through the New Jersey PBA. Additionally, WHRC strongly recommends the department to compile a list of training and professional development programs in which our officers participate and place the list on the department’s website.



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Police Department Continued

5. **Body Cameras:** The Police Department must conduct a public relations campaign introducing how the department will use body cameras as set forth by NJ S-1163 which mandates that police wear cameras most of the time and NJ A-4312 which spells out specific regulations to govern the use of cameras. Pending the distribution of State funding, these two pieces of legislation will go in effect in June 1, 2021.
6. **Arrests by Race:** The WHRC would like to revisit, with the appropriate officer(s), the number of arrests by race for further clarification.
7. **Internal Investigation Procedures:** The WHRC would like to revisit, with the appropriate officer(s), the Department's internal investigation procedures regarding an officer's use of force and review the new State guidelines regarding the same.

Woodbridge Township's Domestic Violence Response Team

Recommendation:

The Township's Domestic Violence Response Team does an excellent job advocating for victims of domestic violence. The DVRT provides education, support, and resources to break the cycle of domestic violence. The WHRC strongly urges Mayor McCormac and Director Hubner to find a more appropriate and suitable room to interview victims of domestic violence and provide a more favorable climate to explain resources that are available.



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Woodbridge Township Department of Health and Human Services

Recommendation:

Director Dennis Green and his staff gave an extremely informative and detailed overview of the many services provided to township residents and businesses. Some of the many services provided by the department are nursing clinic services; transportation for seniors; operating the Senior and Youth Centers; overseeing the animal shelter; providing health education; conducting safety and health inspections of businesses, etc. The comments from the public were very complementary to the presentors regarding the many services provided by the department. There was however, one area of concern brought up by several members of the public regarding the lack of services for the youth of the Township that may be experiencing a crises. After evaluating the public comments regarding the youth in crises issue, the WHRC recommends that the Health and Human Services Department dedicate a section of their website that would contain go-to-information for both Township youth in crises and for the LGBTQ community. This information should also be made available to the Woodbridge Township Board of Education for dissemination to their school nurses, counselors, teachers, and coaches.

Woodbridge Township Addiction Services

Recommendation:

Dr. Bonnie Nolan presented an outstanding overview of the multiple services that the Township provides to individuals suffering with addiction. It has come to the attention of the Human Rights Commissioners that the general population is not aware of these services. Therefore, it is the WHRC's recommendation that the members of the Township's Health Department develop a public relations program that would highlight these services in order to make residents of the Township more aware of them.



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Mercury Woodbridge Township Resident Survey

Recommendation:

The WHRC carefully reviewed and studied the Mercury Woodbridge Township Resident Survey administered on February 8 – 11, 2021. Overall, the data generated in the survey indicated that the residents feel that the Township is moving in the right direction and that the municipality received very positive responses in the areas of core public services. Nevertheless, the results of the Mercury Survey also indicated, that across all five Township Wards, the following issues were most important to township residents. The issues in descending order are

- Property Taxes (5)
- Schools and Education (5)
- Attracting Business (4)
- Social Injustice (2)
- Transparency in Government (2)
- Improving Roads and Traffic (2)

The purpose of the Human Rights Commission as set forth in Ordinance 2-37, section 4 is as follows:

The purpose of the Commission shall be to make recommendations to the Mayor for the formulation of policies in an attempt to foster, through community effort, goodwill, cooperation and conciliation among the groups and elements of the inhabitants of the Township with the intent of eradicating bias in our community due to race, color, creed, gender, ethnicity, physical, mental, or cognitive disability, religious affiliation, political affiliation, or sexual orientation.

Therefore, based on the Purpose of the WHRC, the Genova Burns subcommittee recommends that out of the six issues identified by the residents in the Township’s Five Wards, the Commissioners will only explore and act on the issues of Schools and Education and Social Injustice.

Although the designers of the Mercury Survey did not define Social Injustice, the following generic definition will be used by the Commissioners of the WHRC.

Social injustice creates conditions that adversely affect individuals and communities. It denies individuals and groups equal opportunity to have their basic human needs met. It violates fundamental human rights. It represents a lack of fairness or equity. Some examples are, but not limited to, discrimination, gender bias, racial profiling, denial of access to goods, services, employment opportunities, education, health care, etc.



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Mercury Woodbridge Township Resident Survey Continued

The Mercury Survey indicates that 4% (16 residents) out of a sample of 400, who interacted with the Woodbridge Police Department experienced some type of discrimination or biases. Additionally, 2% (seven residents) out of the same sample indicated they experienced discrimination and/or biases when interacting with a public-school employees or officials. The WHRC Commissioners whole heartly agree with Mayor McCormac when he says that “Even one person experiencing discrimination and/or biases, is one too many”. Recognizing that the WHRC does not have the resources or supporting data to thoroughly investigate and evaluate the aforementioned, the Commissioners would like to partner with the Mayor and Township Council to develop a strategy and/or campaign to combat discrimination and bias wherever they might exist within the Woodbridge community.