

Supervisor Brian Kulpa's - September 2022 Column



“We Are Amherst” – three simple words that bring us together as a stronger community. That phrase became the title of the town’s mission to modernize the Town’s policing policies, procedures, and practices to better address the needs of its citizens and stakeholders, and to improve and promote public safety, community engagement and trust.

In June 2020, during the first few months of the COVID pandemic, the Governor at the time issued the Executive Order “New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative” that required municipalities with police forces to create a plan for reform. Although it was a strenuous time, the Town rose to the challenge to improve and adopt policies and created “We Are Amherst.”

I am extremely proud of our police department under the leadership of Chief Scott Chamberlin. Earlier this year I attended the exit interview with a panel of NYS Division of Criminal Justice assessors who had extremely high praise for the department. After an extensive onsite review, the panel described the department as a gold standard. They announced in June that with unanimous approval, Amherst received NYS Law Enforcement Reaccreditation status for the next five years.

While [“We Are Amherst”](#) touched on many aspects of the department’s operations, I think the most visible and relatable initiative has been enhancing our Community Policing Division. With strong support from myself and the entire Town Board, the officers make every effort to engage with the community and in doing so can determine the community’s needs. If you don’t already, please follow the Amherst Police Department on social media ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) & [Twitter](#)) to stay up to date on events and programs. Community Policing was extremely busy this summer. Not only did they organize fun events, officers made an effort in their day-to-day duties to interact with the community.

And that effort is making positive changes. We are developing positive relationships with children and adults alike. As I said, while the Community Policing events are highly visible, the deep impact they have isn’t always seen. A recent WKBW feature story, [“How Amherst Police are building positive relationships with the community.”](#) noted a Yale University study that found that a “single, positive, ‘non-enforcement-related’ encounter with a cop enhanced their legitimacy and increased people’s willingness to cooperate with police.”

We got to this point thanks to everyone who participated in developing “We Are Amherst” and who continues to be part of the important discussions to improve future police policies. That includes our school districts that the department works very closely with to examine their needs. The Town’s School Resource Officer (SRO) program has been extremely successful. Not only did the volume of calls from the schools drop significantly, but the officers have forged relationships that improve the overall health and wellbeing of students. Mental health training and awareness is another issue that the department is focused on constantly improving.

We are also building a stronger department for the future. In July, our department coordinated a multi-agency recruitment event at the Town’s Training Facility. The first of its kind, this large event allowed anyone who is interested in taking the Police Officer Exam to obtain critical information to start a career in law enforcement. By doing so, we can reach a more diverse candidate pool.

When we started this effort, it was a mission to examine current practices and make necessary adjustments to better serve and protect in a more equitable and just manner. I believe we are succeeding. "We Are Amherst" creates a stronger community, and one that I am proud to serve alongside our police department.

[Town of Amherst Police Department Website](#)