

NYS Police Reform

And Reinvention

Collaborative

Village of Gowanda

Police Department

Reform and Improvement Plan

January 25, 2021

Executive Order 203

NYS Executive Order 203 authorizes the Village of Gowanda to collaboratively investigate its Police Department and develop a plan of reform to assure that the Police Department efficiently, professionally, and fairly serves the Village of Gowanda residents.

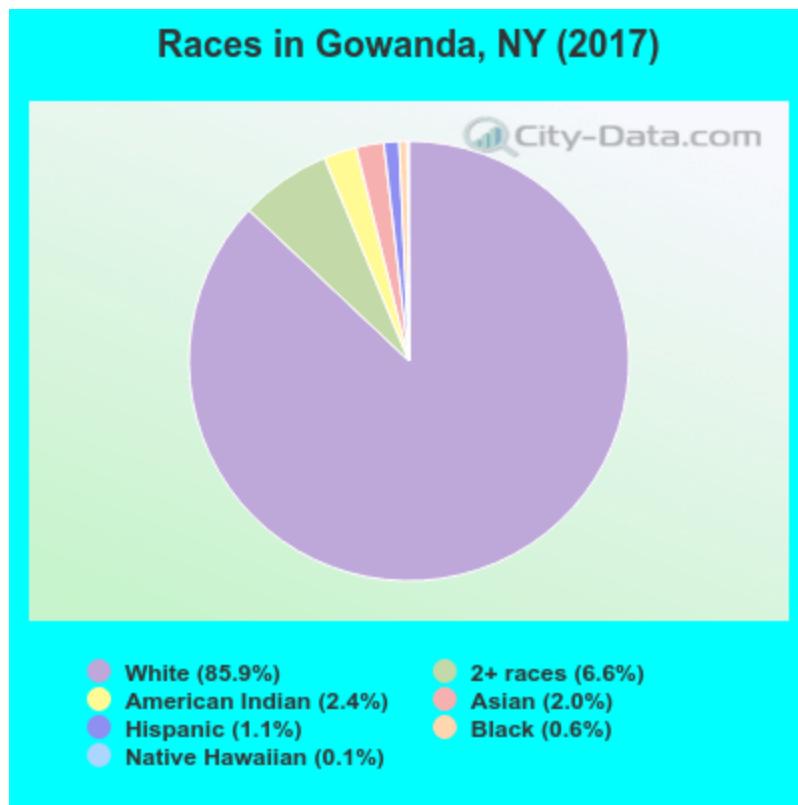
The Village has examined its Police Department according to the four major guidelines detailed in the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Resource & Guide for Public Officials and Citizens. A committee of stake holders met on 1/27/2021 to review the function and police strategies of the department. A draft plan was developed for presentation to the public at a Village Board of Trustees' monthly meeting scheduled for February 9, 2021.

About the Village of Gowanda

The Village of Gowanda is divided by Cattaraugus Creek. This creek composes the boundary between Cattaraugus and Erie counties. The northern section of Gowanda is located in Erie County, and the southern section is in Cattaraugus County. The Village has a total area of 1.6 square miles. The Village is located on [US](#) Route 62 as well as County Road 4 (Broadway Road), [NY](#) Route 39, and [NY](#) Route 438. The Cattaraugus Reservation is located to the northwest of the Village.

The median income for a household in the Village was \$29,565, and the median income for a family was \$39,094. As of the census^[6] of 2000, there were 2,842 people, 1,161 households, and 667 families residing in the Village. The racial makeup of the Village was 62.47% [White](#), 0.49% [African American](#), 41.54% [Native American](#), 0.35% [Asian](#), 0.21% from [other races](#), and 1.20% from two or more races. [Hispanic](#) or [Latino](#) of any race were 1.41% of the population.

The Village of Gowanda Police Department is the primary agency which is dispatched by Erie County Sheriff's Department. The Police Department patrols both Erie and Cattaraugus Counties in its jurisdictional boundaries. The Police Department utilizes its department cell phone to receive first aid and fire calls that are dispatched through the Cattaraugus County Sheriff's Department. The Village of Gowanda Police Department patrols the community full time, 24 hours per day, and 365 days of the year. The department employs 21 part-time police officers to patrol Village. Additional shifts are filled for special events, investigations and additional patrols from Memorial Day through Labor Day, patrolling approximately 750 hours per month.



Stakeholder Meeting January 27, 2021

Attendees: Officer in Charge Dennis Feldmann, Village Trustee Wanda Koch, Gowanda School District SRO Deputy Benjamin Shields, Business owner Derek Moritz and Deborah Brown (DDSO).

All members received a copy of Use of Force procedures, DCJS use of Force Model Policy and a copy of key questions and insights for consideration. At the meeting, Officer-in-Charge Dennis Feldmann explained that the Village of Gowanda Police Department is a full-service agency addressing all needs of residents. The goal of the police department is to professionally serve and protect its community. The Village Police Department is involved in all community events including all festivals, parades, races, school events and special events such as "Harley Days." The Village of Gowanda Police Department functions as a high visibility department patrolling all streets per shift, foot patrol, bicycle patrol and special details if warranted. The Police Department works in partnership with the Gowanda Fire Department and Gowanda Ambulance Service to provide the best possible services to the community.

Officer-in-Charge Feldmann explained that the model that the Board of Trustees adopted for its Police Department in 2017, transitioning to all part-time officers, provides its citizens police protection at a cost manageable by the Village. Additionally, local management of the Police Department permits flexibility to meet the community needs.

The Stakeholder Committee reviewed the Village of Gowanda's use of force policy. The Village of Gowanda's use of force policies conforms to New York State regulations. The Committee discussed taser and body camera use by the department. There was a consensus that both the taser and body cameras were both beneficial for the department and the Village of Gowanda.

The first item discussed was the use of the taser. Officer-in-Charge Feldmann explained that the dynamics of one officer patrols answering calls that the proper use of the taser usually leads to compliance from subjects. The proper use and the following of procedures has shown that it leads to less injuries to both the subject and police officer, which in turn limits liability.

The second item discussed was body worn cameras which had overwhelming support from committee. It was explained that all officers working for the Police Department overwhelmingly supported the use of body cameras. Although there are very few complaints regarding officers, the body cameras would either support or negate complaints, in which would reflect NYS Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative regarding transparency of alleged misconduct.

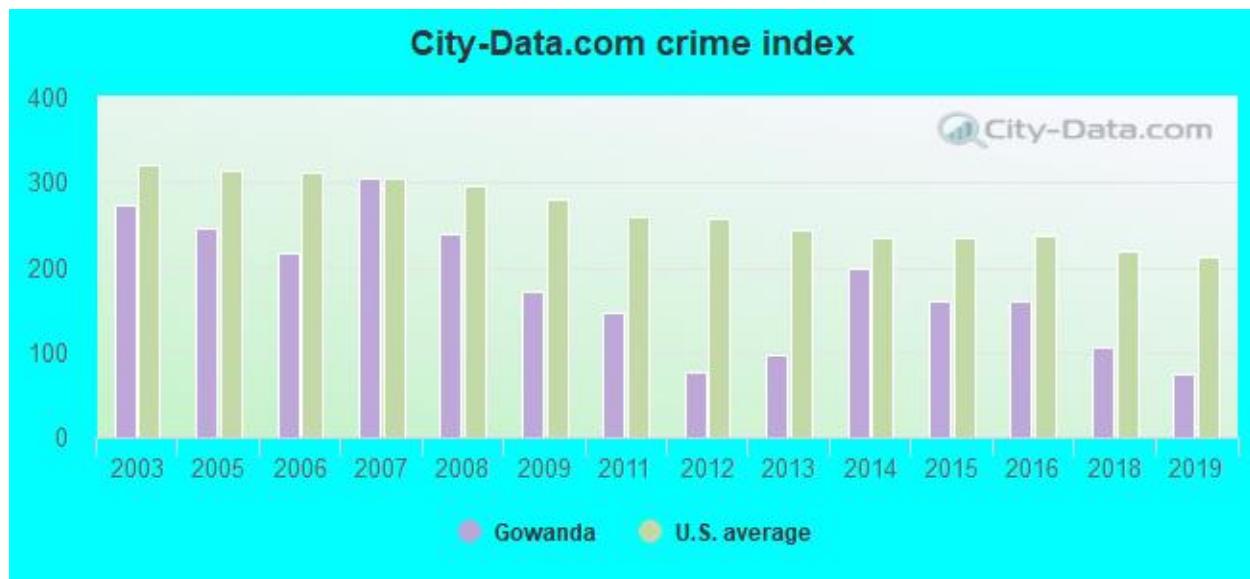
Alleged complaints against officers was discussed at which time Trustee Koch explained the process to stakeholders. Trustee Koch explained that either she or the Mayor are advised of complaint when received and again advised when investigation is concluded. Trustee Koch explained that if complaint was substantiated, the Village Board would determine course of action to be taken.

The Stakeholders Committee commended the Police Department with their community policing policies. Members stated that commitment by the Police Department to community policing was very apparent with their observations throughout the year.

Reform considerations were addressed which included the use of Social Service and Crisis Service personnel to respond to scenes regarding distressed individuals. Stakeholders were made aware of our outreach programs including Lake Shore Behavioral, Zoar Valley Clinic, Crisis Services and County Social Service Departments. Officer-in-Charge Feldmann explained that these departments usually request police to respond along with services. It was also noted that when a call is made for police, the individual is usually very distraught and may become a danger to themselves or others. Procedure was explained that individuals are usually transported by ambulance for their well being to a care facility. Discussion included the length of time it would take personnel to our community based on its location and availability of counselors. Training was addressed regarding de-escalation, diversity and critical incident situations. Retention and hiring of officers was discussed.

Police Call Data

The Village of Gowanda Police Department answered 6,221 calls from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2021. There were 163 incident reports completed by officers which included 72 custodial arrests, mostly for New York State Penal Law offences. There were 398 traffic citations issued for violations of the New York State Traffic Laws. Additionally, officers responded to 54 traffic accidents.



New York State Reform Guidelines and their Application to the Village of Gowanda Police Department

1. What functions should the police department perform?
 - a. Determining roles of the police
 - b. Staffing, budgeting, equipping
 - The Village of Gowanda Police Department is a full-time Police Department that employs 21 part-time police officers. The department handles all complaints generated throughout its jurisdictional boundaries. The department utilizes mostly Erie County Sheriff's Department and New York State Police for secondary assistance if needed. The Erie County Sheriff's Department provides dispatching services the police department. The Village of Gowanda appropriated \$272,930 for Police protection for the 2020/2021 budget year. The budget appropriations allow the department to offer effective and cost efficient service to the community.

2. Employing Smart and Effective policing Standards and Strategies
 - a. Procedural justice and community policing
 - b. Law enforcement strategies to reduce racial disparities and build trust
 - c. Community engagement

- The Village of Gowanda Police Department partners with the Gowanda Central School district with events including homecoming, parades, and graduation, prom and drug and alcohol forums presented. The department also works with the school administration on outreach programs. The department has mentored students and is involved with BOCES for internships. The department attends all community events and meets with citizens on a daily basis.
- The Village of Gowanda includes one woman, four Native American and one African American among its workforce that helps to reduce racial disparities and builds trust amongst our citizens.
- The department is partnered with the Seneca Nation of Indians, Erie County Probation and Cattaraugus County Probation in a diversion program to place offenders into treatment programs instead of incarceration.

3. Fostering Community Oriented Leadership, Culture and Accountability

- a. Leadership and Culture
- b. Tracking and reviewing use of force and identifying misconduct
- c. Internal Accountability for Misconduct
- d. Citizen Oversight and other external accountability
- e. Data, technology and transparency
- The Village of Gowanda Police Department is led by Officer-in-Charge Dennis Feldmann who reports to the Village Mayor and Police Liaison. The Officer-in –Charge provides reports at every monthly meeting which are open to the public and to comment. The Village Board allows the Officer-in-Charge to respond to citizens concerns during meeting's if needed. The Police Liaison reviews all reports submitted. Additionally, the Mayor and Trustees make themselves available to address all concerns/complaints regarding police services. Additionally, the Village Clerk and Treasurer are available in their offices during the work week to address concerns including filling out complaint form. Hence as a Village, Officials and employees serve their neighbors. The Village is committed to hiring professionals in law enforcement. Officer-in-Charge Dennis Feldmann is a EAP specialist, certified instructor, field training officer, is certified in critical incidents and certified in Supervision and Command. Also, all employees are a right to work/non union employees covered by New York State Civil Service Regulations. The Village deals with all employee complaints and problems. Complaints are reviewed and investigated by the Officer-in-Charge and in turn consultations are made with the Village Mayor and Liaison regarding same. If discipline is warranted, it is administered by the Village Board, which illustrates civilian oversight of the disciplinary process.

4. Recruiting and Supporting Excellent Personnel

- a. Recruiting a Diverse Workforce
- b. Training and Continuing Education
- c. Support Officers Wellness and Wellbeing

- The Village of Gowanda Police Department is a full-time Police Department employing part-time officers. The department employs several officers that have or are currently employed in other police agencies. The officers that are not employed by other agencies receive training through department by four certified field training officers following New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services regulations. Police shifts are filled after officers submit their availability each month for the following month's schedule. Most training of officers is often provided by their full-time agency. If training is needed, officers are either sent to the Erie County Basic Training academy or conducted in house by Instructor Certified officers. Retention of officers is difficult for those officers only working in a part-time capacity as they move on when they receive full-time status with other agencies. The Officer-in-Charge maintains a list of potential officers that have shown interest in working for the Village. Training of officers has become a priority with the changes affecting law enforcement including change the age, bail reform, use of force, de-escalation and discovery procedures. There is annual training in firearms, use of force, blood borne pathogens and sexual harassment. Also the Department is utilizing online training regarding de-escalation and racial diversity. Training opportunities including on-line and in person opportunities are posted on bulletin board. Also officers have received training in NARCAN, AED/CPR, DWI detection and apprehension, stop the bleeding and OSHA/PESH.

Public Comment and Survey Results

- The Village will be soliciting public comments from February 10, 2021 through March 10, 2021

The Draft Reform Plan to Improve Police Services

The following Village of Gowanda Police Department Improvement Plan is based on the careful review of the Stakeholder's Meeting and the analysis of Police Department function, leadership, and recruitment as suggested in the NYS Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Resources and Guide for Public Officials and Citizens

1. Complaint form is available during business hours from Village Clerks office and is posted on the Village website www.Villageofgowanda.com/clerk-office/
2. Officer-in-charge will track any and all complaints (including complaints regarding tickets) to evaluate for patterns, need of training, and discipline to achieve better accountability.
3. Officer-in-Charge will recommend to the Board of Trustees updates in use of force policy to specifically address chokeholds to conform to new NYS DCJS/Federal guidance.
4. Officer-in-Charge will review policies and procedures annually to insure Department tactics and procedures are in line with law enforcement practices.
5. Board of Trustees will budget additional hours specifically for departmental training.
6. Officer training will include annual diversity, de-escalation and crisis intervention training.
7. Officer-in-Charge, Village Mayor, Village Attorney and Village Trustees will continue to welcome engagement by residents and concerned citizens to address perceived issues in a timely manner.