

Wilmington police chief: 'Give me a chance'

Christina Jedra , The News Journal Published July 18, 2017

Meet the first teamWochit



Wilmington Police Chief Robert Tracy speaks to city residents on July 18 alongside City Council (Photo: Christina Jedra/THE NEWS JOURNAL)

Three months into his job as Wilmington police chief, Robert Tracy said he is working to bring community policing and accountability to the department.

At the first of what will be several "Community Conversations with City Council," Tracy told a room of several dozen residents that the Police Department has to build trust — in some places, from the ground up.

"We in policing have done a very bad job of gaining trust in some communities," he said at the Wilmington Police Athletic League. "It starts with these community meetings, transparency, having a dialogue, being respectful. Respect in the community is going to come back."

The event was part of a listening tour that is an "outreach initiative designed to engage Wilmington residents in their neighborhoods around important issues impacting their quality of life," according to [a news release from City Council President Hanifa Shabazz](#). Dates, times and locations for future events have not been announced yet.

The chief [joined the department in April](#) during a year that has seen escalating violence. Since January, 116 people have been shot, and 21 of them have died, according to [data tracked by The News Journal](#). Children, including a 6-year-old boy, are among the victims.

Tracy, who started his career at the New York City Police Department, said he hopes to infuse Wilmington's department with community-policing strategies he learned in his first job.



Wilmington Police Chief Robert Tracy talks to city residents at "Community Conversations with City Council" on July 18. (Photo: Christina Jedra/THE NEWS JOURNAL)

"I'm going to be here for you," he said. "There's sincerity in my heart. But I can't tell you that. I can only show you with my actions. Give me a chance."

While many residents, including some commenters at Tuesday's meeting, have advocated for the return of the Police Department's community policing unit, Tracy said he believes every officer should function as a community police officer.

A review of police data shows that about half of officers' time is not spent responding to 911 calls, Tracy said.

"So what are we doing?" the chief said. "We've got to go to community meetings. When we're not answering 911 calls, what are the conditions you want us to take care of?"

At the meeting, Tracy took questions and addressed concerns from residents about gun violence, nuisance complaints and illegal dirt bikes. He said residents should expect to see officers walking around their neighborhoods and interacting with neighbors.

STORY: [Wilmington City Council kicks off 'listening tour' Tuesday](#)

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Tracy explained his public safety plan, which involves focusing on the small percentage of the population that perpetuates criminal activity. He estimates the people committing crimes represent only one-half of 1 percent of city residents.

We're keeping Santa busy delivering fun perks! Look for different surprises throughout the month.

"We know who they are," the chief said. "We know how to identify them. It's associations; it's groups. These groups are in beefs with each other and go back and forth."

Part of Tracy's strategy will be following guidance from his friend, New York criminologist David Kennedy, who advises bringing at-risk individuals into meetings with law enforcement officials. Instead of threatening the potential offenders, officials will appeal to their emotions.

"We say: 'Please put the guns down. We want you to succeed. You're hurting the community. And we need you to stop,'" Tracy said.

The meetings will serve as a warning about the consequences of crime. They can also put violence in perspective for those engaging in it, Tracy said. The chief may invite people to the meetings who have lost family members to gun violence or victims healing from gunshot wounds.

Tracy also envisions a partnership with social service agencies. If residents maintain a criminal lifestyle because they cannot otherwise hold a job, the chief would like to connect those people with what they need – driver's licenses, job training and the like.

"Nobody wants to die," he said. "A lot of them are scared. Some of them want help. A lot of them need help. Let's provide that service."

Tracy said this strategy has been successful in his previous roles in Chicago, where he was chief crime strategist, and New York. Results, though, will take time, he said.

"We are just scratching the surface. This is a just a start."

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"I'm going to be here for you," said Wilmington Police Chief [Robert J. Tracy](#). "There's sincerity in my heart. But I can't tell you that. I can only show you with my actions. Give me a chance."

What do you think of his plan? Have you seen officers walking around your neighborhood?

Wilmington police chief: 'Give me a chance'

Twelve weeks into his job as Wilmington police chief, Robert Tracy said he is working to bring community policing and accountability to the department.

DELAWAREONLINE.COM|BY CHRISTINA JEDRA

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[Cassandra Marshall](#) YES. Walking and driving. We had a community cleanup a few Saturdays back and one of the officers walking at 7th and Washington put on some gloves and helped us. Even recruited some other helpers.

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Muggsy Martelli Waste of money should keep cummings .him and mike p got go

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Luigi Vitrone I LOOK OUT ON LINCOLN ST,EVERYDAY,FOR 12-15 HRS,NEVER SAW ANY WPD,ON FOOT,A BLUE MOON,ON BIKES.I HELPED WRITE THAT GRANT,15 YRS AGO,TO US DOJ,FOR GRANT MONEY,FOR BIKES,TRAINING,CERTIFICATION,UNIFORMS.THEY ARE IN A CLOSET,GOD KNOWS WHERE.

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Frank Hawkins Not on my block.

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Laura Stimson Peter I've noticed an increased presence in the Triangle

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Nadine Frost I saw a few over the last month, but they were nowhere to be found this evening, when we had a small riot in my block. It lasted more than 20 minutes, and no police could be found. 🙄

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Kathleen Patterson replied · 1 Reply



Bill Parker I see the Bikes in the BID where the money is. No Foot Patrols on the West Side,

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Ashley B. Cloud I saw an officer walking down West Street in Quaker Hill yesterday afternoon after 2 years of not seeing any, it was a positive sign (IMO) and I hope it yields positive interactions, increased trust and better results

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Kevin G A Melloy I've noticed a much more visible presence. Presence and engagement are key for sustainable community policing. For some mostly only seeing officers at a crime scene to seeing on a regular beat, both the officers and the community are better off. Regular face to face interaction with familiar officers rather from a patrol car zooming from one crime scene to another is both crime preventative and community building.

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Kathleen Patterson It has been almost 2 weeks since a community block meeting, residents report an increase in patrol and quick response time. Time will tell if efforts improve the climate.

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Larry Smith I have heard Chief Tracy's plan to reduce crime in Wilmington. Wilmington Heights Neighborhood Association supports his policing plan for the City of Wilmington.

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Sean Reilly Lt Dan is our WCC (QHill) 'Go To Cop'. He is assembling a 5 person team, hand picked by him to work in those blocks to 1st better understand who lives here, what's their issues are, how they can best serve those here. YES, VERY excited about the civilized approach by a most caring cop.

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Jaehn G. Tindley Dennis

I represent Vandever Ave Civic Assn, where areas targeted as hot spots and the presents I have seen as well as others that mentioned to me; that the presents is great walking, staged at known areas of problems 17th St, 22 & Carter Vandever Ave pick any block. So yes blue presence is there. I suggested to members if you see blue thank them for the attention, but not only that become vigilant because the peace you enjoy now if should stop Remember when! Folks we have to help in our own discreet way, support the local Civic Association and become the force uniting with the force and drive the raff from our communities. The only way! CP is great but I am with the chief EVERY Officer is CP. The Commander of sectors can bring or assigned an officer to attend CA meetings. Kudo's to Capt. Akil who represent Sector 1 Excellent in detail and response. Be well