From: Patrick Conant <patrick@prcapps.com>
Sent: 4/26/2018 1:08:23 PM
To: esthermanheimer@avlcouncil.com
Cc: Cathy Ball <cball@ashevillenc.gov>,Councilwoman Gwen Wisler <gwenwisler@avlcouncil.com>,Brianhaynes <brianhaynes@avlcouncil.com>,Vijay Kapoor <vijaykapoor@avlcouncil.com>,Julie Mayfield <juliemayfield@avlcouncil.com>,sheneikasmith@avlcouncil.com,Ke
Subject: Following up on Code for Asheville's Presentation and Staff Reports

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Members of City Council and City Manager,Â

First, I want to thank you for allowing me to present on behalf of Code for Asheville and our coalition of partners at Tuesday's Council meeting. I strongly feel that greater transparency is key to allowing our community to participate in the important process of building a 21st Century Police Department, and I appreciate the way in which all of you have expressed a sense of urgency on this matter.Â

As we head towards the May 15th meeting, I wanted to follow up regarding the staff reports which will be generated for that meeting. I am available to answer any questions from Council members or City staff to clarify the intent of our proposal.Â

I am not entirely clear, however, as to the specific focus of the reports being generated by staff. I know that the IT Staff report analyzed the question of cost within their department, in response to a clear request from the Public Safety Committee. At Tuesdayâ€™s Council meeting, it seemed that Council was asking for staff to prepare an "action plan" to implement this proposal, and I think that would be a fantastic report to help us get started on this important effort.Â

With that in mind, Iâ€™d like to to offer some suggestions for the remaining staff reports that will help us move this proposal forward.

I understand that Council will be interested in your Legal Team's analysis of the information we have requested be released to the public, and I Â hope that I provided enough context to clarify that we are simply requesting "data" related to reports that are, in some cases, restricted in nature. This is an important distinction, because while the full content of reports, such as Use of Force, may be restricted due to personnel exemptions in the public records law, factual data does exist, which is useful for trend analysis and is public record.Â

I have been told that APD has concerns about our proposal, but I have no further details. I absolutely support and understand any discussions around privacy considerations for the data we are requesting. I would strongly recommend that a staff report that raises privacy issues should also include actions that can be taken to address these concerns - thus providing us with a clear, actionable path forward.Â

Another consideration that has been raised is how we can ensure that the data released is â€œinterpretedâ€ in a productive manner. On this point, I would welcome a proposal from APD to create a collaborative process to discuss the data and policies we are requesting. However, that effort should be a complement to the release of information to start a greater community discussion, not a justification to delay its release.Â

In all cases, I hope to see a staff report that provides Council and the public with a way we can make this proposal work for our community and our police department. There are certainly careful considerations in this process, but I feel they are items we can successfully address, just as other cities across our country have done.Â

What I would find less helpful, however, is a report that simply states objections to our proposal, without providing recommendations that would allow us to address those concerns and move this important effort forward before our Council turns its attention towards the adoption of the budget.Â

Our City has a strong Open Data Policy, and Code for Asheville would not have brought this proposal before Council without this existing commitment to transparency. Ashevilleâ€™s distinction as an â€œOpen Data Cityâ€ is one of the key building blocks that I hope will allow us to finally break through decades of struggle with police/community relations.Â

Finally, I would respectfully request a copy of any staff reports that are generated in advance of the May 15th meeting. I believe itâ€™s much easier to simply loop me in, and it saves the time of both City staff and my team to avoid requesting that information via a public records request.Â

Also, if appropriate, I would be more than happy to provide a brief response to the staff reports presented at the May 15th meeting, if Council would see fit to allow me to provide a brief follow up in the presentation portion, or open a public comment period after the reports are provided.Â

Our community and City Council are in agreement that we need swift action to restore public trust in our police department. The pace of progress to this point has been slow; every day, week, and Council meeting that we donâ€™t take action, only makes the future work of rebuilding trust even more difficult. I am ready to roll up my sleeves, and there are hundreds of people in our community who feel the same way - please take action to allow this important work to occur before itâ€™s too late.Â

If there is any way I can assist in the process of moving this proposal forward in advance of the May 15th meeting, please let me know.Â

Thank you,

Patrick Conant
patrick@prcapps.com
PRC Applications
www.prcapps.com