Draft Community Engagement Plan for the
Common Council Organizational Committee
Subcommittee on Police and Community Relations

The Common Council Organizational Committee Subcommittee on Police and Community Relations (the Subcommittee) held its first meeting on September 14, 2016 and confirmed the following objectives:

 a) Provide a forum for residents and members of the Council to discuss police and community goals, priorities and interactions. Build a deeper understanding of policing for elected officials and members of the public; and,

 b) Explore models and options from other communities related to policing and other police policies; and,

 c) Provide a forum for information sharing regarding police training, policies, data and trends including detailed presentations from the MPD related to policing; and,

 d) Make recommendations to the Council on short-term policy, procedure and training while waiting for the results of the Ad Hoc Review of Police Policies and Procedures.

The Subcommittee reaffirmed a commitment to an effective public process with robust public dialogue. In particular the Subcommittee selected a desired level of engagement which facilitates community members shaping city priorities and plans. (See attached community engagement continuum). This plan is a draft framework intended to be as a living document and a resource for the Subcommittee.

Background

People of color, especially young people of color get their media and information via the web and particularly social media more than other groups.   People of color and low income people are less likely to attend public meetings held in government buildings downtown on weekday evenings than higher income white people. Some members of the public especially those in leadership roles express fatigue at the idea of yet another focus group or stakeholder meeting without a clear plan to utilize the input. Residents have voiced concerns that this Subcommittee which complements the Police and Fire Commission, the Public Safety Review Committee and the Ad Hoc Police Policy and Procedures Committee is not separate and distinct in the eyes of the members of the public.

Reports from the Madison Police Department illustrate that arrests of African Americans are significantly higher African Americans in the City population. In 2015, 41% of adults arrested were African American, while African Americans represented less than 8% of the population in 2010.   National statistics demonstrate that more frequent contact with police can be linked with negative consequences for residents. There are a number of individuals and organizations who are dedicated to issues pertaining to policing in Madison and that this work and information may be useful to the Subcommittee.

Serving as a police officer is a difficult and dangerous job, one that has come under increased pressure in recent years. Madison residents and elected officials want to be safe and support Madison Police Officers in their effort to do their jobs. It will be essential to learn from officers and others about serving as an officer in uniform.

Proposed Steps to Improve Public Engagement

1. Utilize websites, videos and social media strategies to communicate information about the Subcommittee. Provide opportunities for the public to engage through a web contact form/email. The planned website on the Common Council page will allow for input from members of the public to share their views. The Subcommittee meetings will also be videotaped to allow for convenient viewing of the content.

2. Adapt ground rules at Subcommittee meetings to allow for greater flexibility and a more welcoming dialogue.

3. Coordinate regularly with the Ad Hoc Committee on Police Procedures and Training to ensure that the work of the two bodies is complementary rather than duplicative.

4. Learn as much as possible from police officers, trainers and legal authorities about the day to day operations of the police department as well as the framework of laws and policies which govern MPD. Seek to understand the goals and the limitations of police work.

5. Clarify the purpose of the Subcommittee and its relationship with the other police related committees in Madison, especially the on-going work of the Ad Hoc Review Committee on Police Policies and Procedures. The role of the Subcommittee should be clearly communicated on the website, as well as verbally whenever the Subcommittee is discussed.

6. Clarify how all resident input will be considered in the Subcommittee's work. Explain what participants can anticipate at key milestones and at the conclusion of the committee.

7. Schedule meeting times and locations to provide maximal access to low income communities young adults and people of color.

8. Reduce the potential for participation fatigue by focusing on relationship building and dynamic conversations rather than traditional focus groups or listening sessions. Instead, gather information from materials released by local groups related to Subcommittee issues and analyze that material. Participate in local meetings hosted by community organizations related to policing, listen and gather feedback there. Identify themes and priorities that are repeated, though do not fail to notice rarely mentioned but important concerns. Maintain a database of the information shared through this participation.

Identify individuals and organizations discussing and working on policing in the community. Build authentic relationships with these groups. Assign a committee or staff member to connect with the various groups and report back to the committee about their concerns.

Conclusion:

The Subcommittee Community Engagement Plan will serve as a living document with regular updates and amendments. The Community Engagement Plan will serve as a reference for the Subcommittee, reminding members of their commitment to transparent and authentic engagement with the public (without creating an undue burden on those most impacted by policing). The Community Engagement Plan is a recognition that the Subcommittee is here to learn and committed to listening.