



I. Background

Once known as Taylorville, The City of Groveland, Florida was incorporated in 1922. It is located in the southwestern part of Lake County in the central part of the state. The City has gone through many changes. Groveland first gained international recognition for a large sawmill and later its citrus groves. Over the past two decades, it has grown quite rapidly in both size and population. Groveland currently occupies a land area of approximately twenty-six square miles with a population of 18,255. Hundreds of new homes are built each year and The City has become an attractive location for new business. Recent additions include a Kroger-Ocado fulfillment center, an Amazon warehouse facility and other distribution centers planned for the near future.

According to the United States Census Bureau's population estimates for July 1, 2019, Groveland's Race and Hispanic Origin include: 66.6% White, 23.1% Hispanic or Latino, 21.2% Black or African American, 4.1% Asian, 2.8% two or More Races, 0.8% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and 0.2% American Indian and Alaska Native.

While Groveland continues to grow and maintain a reputation as the 'The City with Natural Charm,' its history is filled with pain and damaged relationships. The City is no stranger to racial strife and injustice. It is forever linked to the Groveland Four and was once known as a 'sundown town,' a place where an African American person could not be safely outside in town past sunset. Through these actions and events, The City has experienced an erosion of trust with the African American community locally and throughout the region.

The history of the Groveland Police Department (GPD) is also evolving. GPD has had leaders who betrayed public trust, didn't participate in community involvement and operated on old and outdated polices. In 2016, the former chief resigned amidst controversy. A year later, Police Chief Shawn Ramsey was hired. Chief Ramsey, an advocate for de-escalation and community policing, has said his goal is for, "Every resident to know every officer by name."

The current administration had to revamp the department and rewrite policies. Groveland Police also recently hired a Public Information Manager (PIM). The PIM was hired to provide the public with information about calls for service (traffic, business checks, use of force, arrests, etc.) via press releases and social media platforms.

Groveland Police Department's current administration also assumed command of the department in 2017, with a prominent goal of becoming an accredited law enforcement agency. GPD must prove they can meet all of the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation's 241 individualized standards that prove GPD's effectiveness, efficiency and professionalism as a law enforcement agency. The department is currently on track to receive

accreditation in early 2021. After securing state accreditation, GPD will be reviewed every three years in order to maintain their accreditation.

According to the Florida Accreditation website, “Accreditation increases the law enforcement agency’s ability to prevent and control crime and enhances community understanding of the law enforcement agency. Accreditation, in conjunction with the philosophy of community policing, commits the agency to a broad range of programs (such as crime prevention) that directly benefit the public. Accreditation creates a forum in which police and citizens work together to control and prevent crime.”

Currently, GPD has 41 certified police officers, ten communication operators and ten civilian positions within the organization. Twenty-three officers are Caucasian, five are African American, seven are Hispanic and one identifies as other. Five uniform positions are currently vacant. The police department works out of a concrete building from the 1960’s and a former construction trailer. Before 2021, a new multimillion-dollar Public Safety Complex is scheduled to be complete. The 33,000 SF multi-level building will house all public safety employees and will include an EOC Center and training classrooms.

II. Review

In June 2020, after the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, former President Barack Obama urged mayors to review their use of force policies and to sign the My Brother’s Keeper Alliance pledge. The protests over these killings and across the country in support for racial justice has prompted new conversations on how law enforcement interacts with communities of color.

Following former President Obama’s challenge to local leaders, Groveland Mayor Evelyn Wilson took the pledge which calls on mayors to commit to the following actions:

1. Review the use of force policies
2. Engage the community by including a diverse range of input, experiences and stories in your review
3. Report the findings of the review and seek feedback
4. Reform the use of force policies

The review group created by Groveland to examine its use-of-force (UOF) policy, includes City of Groveland officials, business owners and community stakeholders. The individual members of the group are:

- Evelyn Wilson
- Melissa Kenzig
- Linda Cowels
- Sam Brown
- Pernell Stewart
- Felicia Stewart
- Bob Proper

- Joe Reyes
- Kim Jemison
- Laverne Griffin
- Isaac Wilkes Sr.
- Margie Wilkes

The following members of the Groveland Police Department were also present at each meeting:

- Chief Shawn Ramsey
- Commander Ron Curtis
- Deputy Chief Armando Loney
- Public Information Manager Sarah Panko

This diverse group met on three separate occasions, investing more than six hours over several weeks to review GPD's use of force policies.

III. Findings

During the first meeting on July 7th, 2020, the group reviewed the number of calls for service and citizen encounters GPD has had over the last three years. The group was surprised to learn that out of 861 arrests there had been only ten uses of force from 2017-2019. Zero in 2017, eight in 2018 and two in 2019. The type of use of force used was five hands on, four Tasers, one hands on and Taser. There were zero chemical agents or shootings. The group also got a look at the demographics of the individual subject involved. According to the data, seven were Caucasian, two were African American, one was Hispanic. While age was not given, the sex of the individuals showed that nine were male and one was female.

The review group learned that GPD's use of force policy follows the model policy put forth by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and was also developed with the "National Consensus Policy and Discussion Paper on Use of Force" in mind. Recently, the Florida Police Chiefs Association (FPCA) issued a report on Use of Force policy endorsing the Consensus Policy in part, with several substantive exceptions.

The Subcommittee on Accountability and Societal Change report submitted to the FPCA recommends that warning shots be prohibited and endorses the Consensus Policy's recommendation to prohibit vascular neck restraints unless deadly force is authorized and recognized that, in some circumstances, shooting at a moving vehicle may be required for the preservation of human life.

GPD's policy states that chokeholds such as tracheal chokes and carotid restraints, also known as "lateral vascular neck restraints," are not trained on and is not encouraged or permitted. GPD's policy follows the recommendation on shooting at a moving vehicle and prohibits warning shots unless the use of deadly force is justified, it will not pose a substantial risk of injury or death to the officer or others and an officer reasonably believes it will reduce the possibility that deadly force will have to used.

The group was introduced to GPD's Use of Force Continuum titled, "Use of Force Guidelines." The guidelines provide the level of force an officer is expected to use in response to the level of a suspect's resistance. The group also compared GPD's policy to Campaign Zero's #8CantWait and found all eight measures are being used by GPD. The campaign found that the eight types of restrictions identified below are associated with lower rates of excessive force by police:

1. Ban chokeholds and strangleholds
2. Require de-escalation
3. Require warning before shooting
4. Exhaust all alternatives before shooting
5. Duty to intervene
6. Ban shooting at moving vehicles
7. Establish use of force continuum
8. Require all force to be reported

During the second meeting on July 14, 2020, members shared their personal experiences when dealing with law enforcement, specifically with the Groveland Police Department. While the new police administration continues to cultivate strong community relationships, there are still raw emotions as members reflected on their own encounters with different police departments.

The group learned that while the police department is very young, with an officer averaging two to three years on the job, GPD is the third highest paid police department in Lake County. Members of our group felt positive about a younger police force since many of them will come in with a fresh, anti-racist mindset.

The group also watched "Use of Voice not Force," a TEDxEustis Talk by Sgt. Fred Jones of the Lake County Sheriff's Office. The video talks about RITE training, or Racial Intelligence Training and Engagement. The training teaches emotional intelligence to those in law enforcement, corrections, government and corporations. As of 2019, all of Groveland's employees have completed this training. The City also includes it in new hire orientation.

IV. Recommendations

The third and final meeting was held on July 21, 2020. This meeting was focused on a review of the group's recommendations. The following recommendations are to be considered as possible improvements to the Groveland Police Department's policies and procedures:

1. Commit to being more transparent to the public in reporting the number of times force was used by an officer, the number of internal investigations conducted and the outcome of the investigations.
 - The Groveland Police Department researched additional performance management tools to include early warning signs, databases to track use of force, misconduct

complaints, internal affairs investigations and vehicle pursuits. Chief Shawn Ramsey is asking for \$2,500 a year for that software database.

2. Advance the ongoing efforts to obtain accreditation for the police agency.
3. Enhance training pertaining to use of force and de-escalation techniques.
 - GPD’s policies already require de-escalation and use of force training annually, however, the group would recommend efforts be made to provide additional de-escalation training.
4. Have GPD be required to report officer involved use of force and officers who have been terminated to a state or national governing body.
5. Seek out diverse members of the community as a scoring member during the interview process for all certified police applicants.
 - Adding a civilian to the pre-screening employment process during the oral interview for all new hires within the police department allows GPD to be transparent and strengthen public trust and credibility. That civilian will be able to see if a potential officer has any racial biases.
6. Enhance community policing efforts encouraging citizen engagement within underserved areas of The City.
 - The group also talked about GPD’s new program with LifeStream. Through a Bureau of Justice Assistance Grant, the police department will soon have a licensed clinical social worker available to them. The social worker will partner with a sworn officer and respond to all non-criminal calls for service that are mental health and social work related.

With agreement, these recommendations can be implemented immediately and will positively impact The City.

V. Conclusion

The group is grateful to Groveland Mayor Evelyn Wilson in leading the way and taking the first steps by signing the My Brother’s Keeper Alliance pledge to commit to review, engage, report and reform The City’s use of force policies.

The group was surprised to learn the use of force total numbers and demographics:

2017: 0 uses of force

2018: 8 uses of force, 2 Black, 5 White, 1 Latino, 7 Male and 1 Female

2019: 2 uses of force, 0 Black, 2 White, 2 Male and 0 Female

The group acknowledges that the identified number of times force was utilized by members

of the Groveland Police Department in comparison to the overall number of citizen contacts remained notably low and appears non-biased in nature.

The group believes that the department continues to cultivate strong community relationships, respects the values of the community, embraces inclusiveness, diversity and community policing. The group also believes that more needs to be done and more can be done. The group feels that The City needs to respond in a thoughtful and productive way, and it is vital that The City take clear and direct action.

The group applauds the effort towards accreditation and supports extra investment in training. The group believes that this recommendation, if implemented, will assist in making GPD an even more outstanding department. The group encourages the department and The City to continue this conversation.

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