

Village of Athens, NY

Civilian Oversight in Policing

Local Law #:

Proposed:

Adopted Via Resolution:

Section 1: Purpose

To monitor and review the policies and practices governing the Athens Police Department which were updated and established as a result of the 2020 New York Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative in order to maintain an open, communicative, and mutually respectful relationship between the Police Department and the at-large community it serves.

The Civilian Oversight Committee may make focus-based recommendations to the Village Board to support the maintenance and enhancement of police and community relations.

Section 2: Definitions

Ombudsman - a person who has been appointed to look into complaints about companies and organizations. Ombudsmen are independent, free and impartial – so they don't take sides.

Unconscious Bias - social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.

Village of Athens Resident - Individual whose primary residence is within the Village of Athens boundaries, who pays Village taxes and is a registered voter in the Village of Athens

Village Complaint Form - Form available via the Village Website or the Village Office with which to file a formal complaint to the Village of Athens

Section 3: Committee Composition, Appointment, Vacancy and Removal

The committee will be made up of a minimum of five (5) and up to nine (9) Village of Athens residents who are not serving in an elected capacity in the Village or Town of Athens. The Committee will be officially appointed by the Village Board. The committee should be composed to include a diverse range of perspectives and experiences in order to best represent and serve the community, support the Athens Police department, and fulfill the committee's purpose. To ensure the best possible contribution of ideas, feedback, and insight, the diverse demographics and varying tenures in the community should be a primary consideration of the Village Board when selecting candidates for appointment. Creating a diverse and inclusive

committee that can represent the current and future interests of the Athens community is essential to the success of the Civilian Oversight Committee.

The members of the committee will select an appointed committee member as chair to serve as such for a period of one year and notify the Village Board of the selected member.

In order to attract interested community members, a notification of open committee seats shall be posted on the Village of Athens website, the Village designated newspaper of record, and social media outlets, no less than two months prior to member selection with instructions on how to apply. Interested residents will apply by submitting a letter of intent, an example of which can be found on the Village website.

Term of appointment shall commence on April 1, 2022. For the first three years, term lengths shall be staggered such that approximately one third of the committee has a one-year appointment, one third a two-year appointment and the remainder a three year appointment. All subsequent appointments will be three-year terms.

At the recommendation of the committee, when any single member of the committee misses two consecutive meetings or more than three quarters of the regular meetings, a member may be dismissed from the committee by the Village Board. Replacement appointments will be made as necessary by the Village Board to fill unexpired terms.

Section 4: Roles & Responsibilities

A) Committee Training

Civilian Oversight Committee members shall participate, within the first year of appointment, in an orientation provided by the Village of Athens Police Department. This orientation could include an introduction to various policing topics such as police procedures, use of force, vehicle stops, warrantless arrest, search and seizure, and community policing. Records of orientation completion will be provided to the Village Board by the Committee Chair.

Failure to complete the above-described orientation within one year of appointment may be deemed a proper cause for removal from the committee by the Village Board.

B) Police Training

- a) The committee shall review the officer training records in order to ensure compliance with annual training requirements.
- b) The committee may audit police training sessions.
- C) Handling of Public Complaints
 - a) Members of the community who perceive actions of an Athens Police Officer or the Department to be biased or inappropriate, may register their complaint with a member of this committee.
 - b) Any Committee member receiving such a complaint shall immediately inform the full committee of all specifics. The committee will expeditiously share and review the complaint with the Village Board Police Liaison to the committee.
 - c) Complaints received in this fashion must be submitted by the committee via an official Village Complaint Form.
 - d) When the committee deems it appropriate, a Committee Member may be assigned as an ombudsman to look into the complaint. An ombudsman assigned will remain independent, free and impartial and will review any findings and recommendations with the committee prior to submitting the findings/ recommendations to the Village Board.
- D) Assistance to Police
 - a) Committee can serve as a resource for officers in need of assistance communicating with the community.
- E) Communication & Public Information
 - a) Twice annually the committee will hold reviews with the Village Board and designated Police Department representative(s) during normally scheduled meetings of the Village Board. During these reviews the Committee Chair will present on:
 - i) Activities of the committee (trainings audited, complaints received, public interactions/ feedback)
 - ii) Status of policy reviews
 - iii) Help needed/ concernsAdditional meetings may be called for by the Village Board.
 - b) The Committee shall hold a public meeting at least once per year to conduct its regular responsibilities and for the purpose of inviting public input or comment. Meetings shall be posted publicly in accordance with the open meetings law.
- F) Other assignments
 - a) The Mayor and/or Village Board may request further assistance from the Committee based on specific needs or issues in the Village.

Section 5: Access to Information

- A. The Village Board will provide access, via the Village Board Police Liaison, to the number and nature of arrests, incidents and complaints in Athens Village to the Athens Civilian Oversight Committee. This information will be provided on a quarterly basis and will be broken down by Police Officer so that any current trends can be identified.
- B. In the event that there is footage of an incident that is called into question about fairness or legality, the Civilian Oversight Committee may be granted access to that footage.
- C. Should there be a complaint brought to the Civilian Oversight Committee, where the complainant does not feel comfortable going to the Village Board or the Athens Police Department; additional information pertaining to the incident will be made available to the Committee by the The Village Board in order to assess (a) whether the committee will assign an ombudsman for the civilian or officer. And (b) for any assigned ombudsman to gather the information needed to make a recommendation.

Section 6: Police Liaison to the Committee

The Village Board Member assigned to Police Liaison will also act as liaison to this Committee. The liaison will be a resource, who provides information and support to the Committee, such as:

- Keeping the committee up-to-date on upcoming training and community engagement events.
- Provide-ing the Committee with answers to questions that the Committee may have of the Police Department and its policies.