

November 8, 2007

Licton Springs Community Council Report for November

North Precinct Advisory Council Report for November 7, 2007

The November meeting opened with a fairly good crowd, including several new faces. After the initial introductions and inquiries about the press (none this time either), the meeting moved straight away to the featured guest of the evening. Our guest speaker was Kathryn Olson, Director of the Office of Professional Accountability.

The Office of Professional Accountability is the office within the Seattle Police Department that receives and investigates complaints by citizens about police misconduct. The office is headed by a civilian. Its mission is to provide for citizen oversight of the citizen complaint process; to promote public awareness of, and full access to, that process; and to advance reforms that increase police accountability to the public by the Seattle Police Department.

The Director of the OPA is a civilian appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council on May 7, 2007. The Director oversees the intake, classification, and investigation of complaints, certifies investigative findings, and makes recommendations on disposition and discipline to the Chief of Police.

Kathryn Olson began by giving us a rundown on her background as it applies to the job of Director of OPA. She is the second appointed Director of the Office of Professional Accountability. She obtained her undergraduate degree in Applied Behavioral Sciences from University of California, Davis in 1975, and her Juris Doctorate degree from the Case Western Reserve University Law School in 1982. She initially worked as an attorney with the Women's Law Fund in Cleveland, Ohio, and then Assistant Director of the Fair Employment Practices Clinic and Lecturer in Law at Cleveland-Marshall College of Law. Ms. Olson joined the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1991. She most recently served as a Supervisory Trial Attorney in the Seattle Field Office, where she oversaw attorneys and support staff in enforcing civil rights laws in Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Idaho, and Montana. Her responsibilities included managing investigations and litigation alleging violation of Title VII, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Equal Pay Act, or the Americans with Disabilities Act. Ms. Olson is a certified mediator and frequently makes presentations on a variety of substantive and procedural topics related to labor and employment issues associated with a diverse workforce.

Seattle has a unique system of oversight. ( It's very complicated and hard to understand.) We use a "three pronged system" that is composed of (1) an outside civilian overseer, (2) an auditor, and (3) the OPA Review Board.

Complaints of police conduct are investigated by the Investigation Section of the OPA. The Director oversees the intake, classification, and investigation of complaints, certifies investigative findings, and makes recommendations on disposition and discipline to the Chief of Police. The OPA Director also reports to the Mayor and the City Council on OPA activity, issues concerning the professional standards of the Department, and recommendations on strategies and policies to improve complaint gathering and investigative procedures. Finally, the OPA is involved in community outreach to promote and demystify the citizen complaint process, and to receive feedback from the community and the officers on ways to improve the process.

The Director then took questions from the floor relating to the operation of the OPA process. There were many questions asked and most fell into the following categories (taken from the OPA handout):

#### Will my complaint be investigated?

All complaints are reviewed and documented. The complaints are classified according to their nature and the seriousness of the allegation. Some complaints are resolved at the supervisor level without formal investigation. You will be informed of the classification of your complaint and the method by which it will be resolved or investigated.

#### Who will investigate my complaint?

Your complaint will be investigated by police sergeants who work in the Investigation Unit of the Office of Professional Accountability (OPA). That unit will forward its investigation and recommended findings for review by the civilian Director of the OPA. The Director may concur with the recommended findings, direct additional investigation, or recommend a different finding to the Chief of Police. (The Chief has the final say in the matter and the Director of OPA reports to the Chief.)

#### What happens after I file a complaint?

If your complaint is assigned for investigation, the OPA will send you a notice that includes a case number. You will also be provided with the name and telephone number of the investigator assigned to your complaint so that you may call with any questions or concerns. You may be asked to give a more complete, tape-recorded statement at a time and location convenient to you. You may also be asked for any additional documentation that relates to your complaint and, if appropriate, you may

be asked to allow photographs of any injury or property damage, and to consent to the release of any medical records associated with your complaint.

#### How long will it take to investigate my complaint?

The goal is to complete the investigation into your complaint within 90 days. If it appears that the investigation will take longer, they will provide you with status reports every 60 days.

#### Will I be notified of the outcome of my complaint?

Yes. If your complaint was assigned for Supervisory Referral, you will receive a closing letter describing what steps were taken to resolve the issue. If your complaint is assigned for investigation, you will be advised of the steps that were taken to investigate, the outcome of the investigation, and an explanation of the conclusion reached.

(My little question evolved around whether the OPA was proactive as well as reactive in its quest to resolve problems before they grow legs. Answer: Yes, and would like to be more so. Second question was “who keeps an eye on the Chief?” Answer: The Mayor.)

Your complaint is very important, and they will make every effort to ensure that it receives full and fair consideration. If you disagree with an OPA decision, have questions, or are dissatisfied with the process, please contact the OPA.

In addition to investigating misconduct, the OPA is involved in community outreach to inform citizens of the complaint process and the OPA’s role. The OPA provides information through its website in addition to radio, and newsletters. The OPA is also actively involved in making presentations at community meetings and schools. Please contact them if you would like to have the OPA Director or representative speak to your group or attend a community meeting.

#### Community Forums

The OPA holds community forums to encourage dialog about the citizen complaint process at SPD. The OPA Director and members of the Investigation Section meet with community members to talk about the types of complaints OPA investigates and tell you more about the process. These forums are also an opportunity for the OPA to listen to your concerns or suggestions. As stated earlier, the whole process is cumbersome and hard to understand. Different circumstances elicit response from one or more of the three bodies that make up the OPA.

News from the North Precinct would be the new Operations Officer, Lieutenant Clay Monson.

We were all sad to hear that our Liquor Control Board Officer, Bernie Harrigan, is retiring as of the end of the year. Bernie had a lot to do with keeping the sales of liquor to minors in check and tavern owners in line. (Going to miss that guy!)

At next month's meeting there is to be a food drive for non-perishable goods to be handed out AFTER the holidays. That's when the food banks are REALLY out of food. (Stop by the Precinct anytime and drop off a can of something or bag of rice or beans.)

Ken Thompson