

## **ACC Police Advisory Board Development Task Force Town Hall Feedback Summary**

Overall, there were many sentiments expressed that there is no need for oversight, that creating an oversight body should not be done, and/or that the case has not been adequately made for the need for civilian oversight of policing in our community.

Some respondents expressed that there is no need for creating an additional oversight body because there are already existing mechanisms to do so. Several people stated that the grand jury already covers the function of responding to police violence/misconduct: *“This function is already State-mandated via the Grand Jury.”* Others felt that the structures already operating within the police department are adequate for this purpose: *“The PD has Internal Affairs to handle any/all misconduct. It should not be left up to citizens to make any decisions whatsoever concerning misconduct of any officer.”*

The comments also contained many references to fear that creating civilian oversight is part of a broader effort to “defund the police,” will lead to more crime, and push business and quality police officers out of Athens. As one respondent put it, *“There is a strong initiative in ACC to oppose this board thinking that it is a plan to “defund” the police which gets lots of media attention. Suggest that some of those people who have those concerns be appointed to this board so their voices can be heard and they may be able to asway [sic] the fears of those residents.”*

In this vein, there appeared to be at least one “organization” that replied as the Chamber of the Commerce. It’s worth noting what they said: *“The Athens Area Chamber of Commerce has provided a statement to the Mayor and Commission as to why we believe these recommendations should not be approved. We are deeply appreciative of the time spent by the Task Force. Our concerns are: Do the number of current annual complaints justify hiring an Auditor/Monitor? From recent conversations with the Police Chief, the rate of complaints is around 1 in every 250 calls. Please have ample representation from the business community on Task Forces or Boards of this magnitude? These decisions are also related to economic development. We believe this will hinder the already difficult task of recruitment and retention. Having the Civilian Oversight Board reporting directly to the Mayor and Commission as opposed to the City Manager erodes the Manager’s authority. Finally, we believe the establishment of the Oversight Board will lead to a much greater politicization of the whole process.”*

While the majority of the respondents expressed displeasure about our proposed recommendations, there were some very positive comments. Here is one example: *“I think this is a great idea for the community. It is a bit unorthodox to be sure but if any time in history called for out of the box thinking its 2020. It’s not that we, the community, have any ill will towards our men (AND WOMEN!!!) in blue. Just the opposite! We so appreciative the hard work they do. Its just that some of us are concerned that they may be a little disconnected from the day to day lived experiences of those struggling to survive in our wonderfully diverse city. And I do not blame the officers for this. I believe they are victims themselves of an outdated system. A system conceived at a time when America had very different values than it does today. It is my heartfelt belief that it is this system that prevents officers from interfacing with the community on a truly humanizing level. This proposal is precisely the sort of forward thinking change that could begin to heal the heart wrenching chasm that exists between us. Thank you for listening to the community.”*

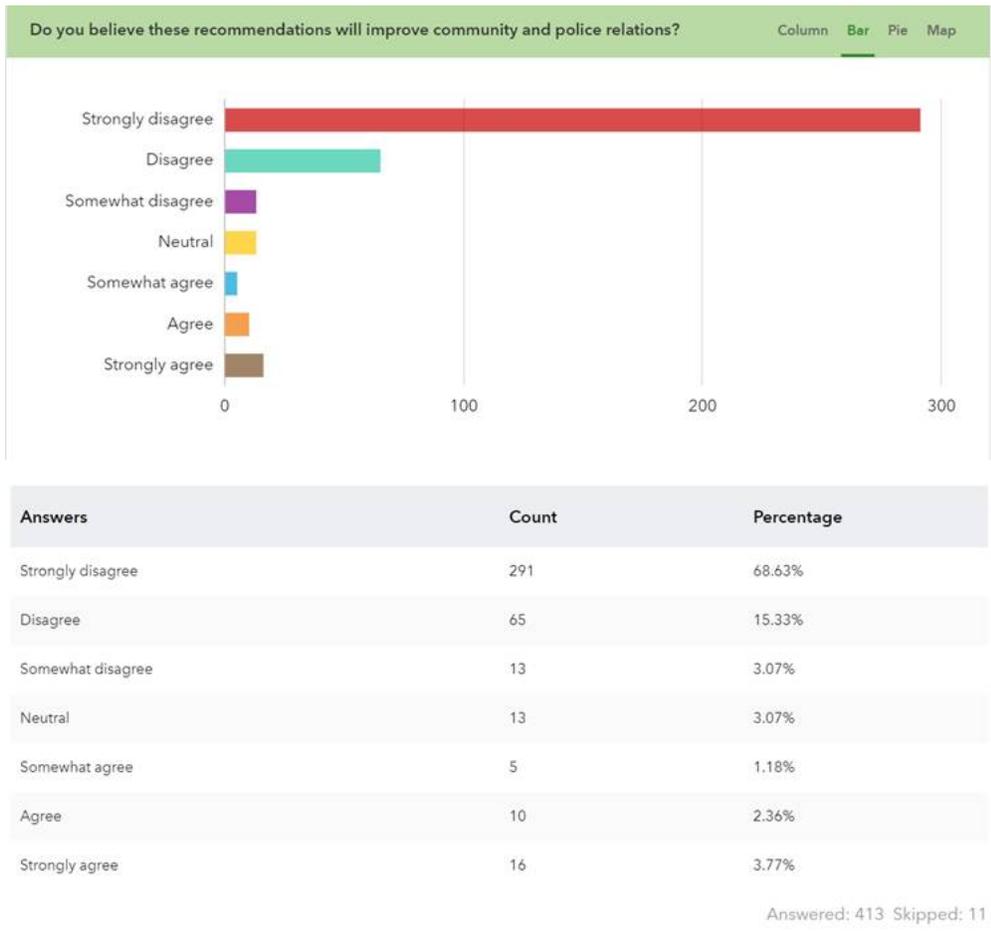
In total, we received more than 400 responses to the survey, as well as some additional comments through the ACC online comment form. There is no way to tell whether these responses come from unique individuals or whether they are all Clarke County residents. One comment suggested that the feedback we received is also coming from Oconee County: *“A bunch of Oconee residents are circulating &*

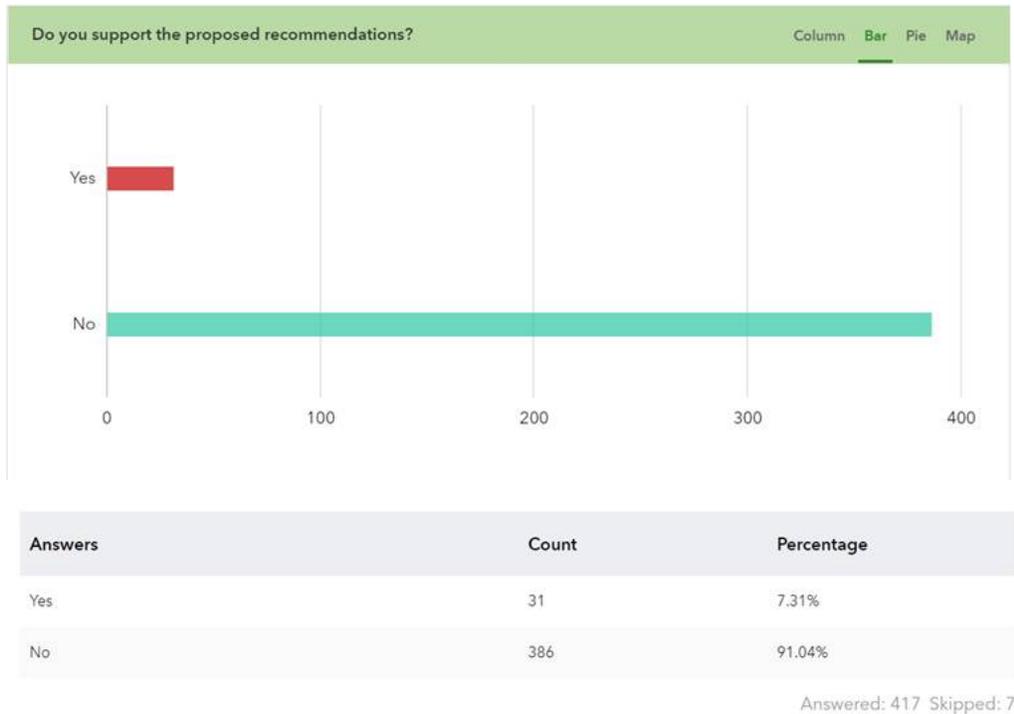
responding to this. *Only Athens-Clarke residents should be heard on issues of our government.*” Again, we have no way to tell to what extent this is true.

The survey asked three questions:

1. Do you believe these recommendations will improve community and police relations?  
Respondents could choose from seven responses ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (including a Neutral response).
2. Do you support the proposed recommendations? Answer choices: Yes or No
3. Do you have any questions or concerns about the proposed recommendations? This is an open-ended response for comments.

**Responses to the first two survey questions:**





From the several hundred comments that were left in response to the question, **“Do you have any questions or concerns about the proposed recommendations?”** the following themes were repeated. We focus here on the comments that are substantive and/or actionable for our recommendations. Specific comments are quoted in italics.

**Board composition:**

A prominent concern in the comments focused on balance on the civilian oversight board. *“I support a citizens review board but only if it is balanced and impartial.”* In particular, there was significant concern about bias against the police. *“Former law enforcement board members would be of great assistance & have their pulse more than others on the committee...What guarantees can citizens have that such a board will welcome input from citizens who support our police & have a positive impression of the police?”* In addition, there was desire expressed that the business community be represented. *“Where is the business community listed? They need to be represented.”* Multiple objections were voiced to having people with criminal records on the board (though often within the context of if formerly incarcerated people are on the board, then there needs to be former law enforcement, too). Other constituencies mentioned for inclusion on the board are: people who have been victimized/brutalized by crime, religious leaders, people that represent the lower income community in Athens, senior citizens, and mental health providers.

Some additional general comments about board composition:

- *Pg. 3 Appointment of members - diversity. Suggest that you add something to the effect that diversity should be an overall goal since complete diversity that represents all demographics in ACC is next to an impossibility on a eleven person board.*

- *11 member at-large board risks missing demographic groups (two major components -, medical community and education - not mentioned). Board should reflect of specified demographic groups - not entirely at-large.*

Finally, there were some questions about how individuals will be selected to serve on the board. *“It is not entirely clear to me how to become a member of the COB. Do interested individuals have to be recommended by some recognized Athens-Clarke County organization? Could a neighborhood sponsor or nominate someone?”*

### **Board focus/scope:**

Several concerns were expressed about the scope of the board’s work and focus:

- As written, the recommendations seemed to some respondents to be *“too punitive towards police; not enough about improving community relations.”*
- Many expressed that this board and auditor will create overreach, micromanage police chief and dept., and amount to political interference in police work. This was linked to concern that the force will lose more officers, lower morale, and won’t be able to hire quality officers.

There were also questions about the role of the auditor in general, and specifically related to mediation:

- *As for the Auditor, is it intended to replace the normal investigative authorities of the police? As written, it would authorize the auditor to decide what is appropriate for mediation, what is deemed a legitimate internal investigation, when the police have to do more work.*
- *How can the Auditor establish a mediation program? Does not seem like mediation is the role of this office.*
- *One consideration, from page 6: "Complaints with allegations such as excessive force, criminal misconduct, unauthorized use of force, unlawful search and seizure, and/or racial discrimination shall not be appropriate for the mediation program." Why not these cases? Will there be a program to mediate for these types of cases? Maybe I have misunderstood, but aren't these the exact types of cases that a mediator would be most useful for?*

One respondent asked about overlap between the board and the auditor: *“...redundancy of authorities between the auditor and COB as well. What are issues or areas of oversight where the board would act but the auditor wouldn't? Or vice versa. How might the two bodies complement each other, and how might there be redundancy in a way that isn't beneficial? Having two bodies seems to really be effective if they have different capabilities and perspectives.”*

Another respondent asked about how success of the oversight entity(ies) will be evaluated: *“How are you going to measure “success” for the auditor/monitor and/or the board? How many policies are re written? Count of investigations/officers fired? Who is going to hold them accountable and keep biased people from furthering agendas and not looking at the evidence?”*

### **Board governance/authority:**

Numerous responses questioned the recommendations for bypassing the county manager. Here are some of the issues/questions raised:

- *the mayor and city manager are the civilians over the police department already. Is the appointed City Manager not capable of hearing feedback and implementing changes?*
- *“While I believe there are many positive recommendations in the draft ordinance, I believe the achilles' heel is the reporting structure of the Auditor/Monitor. While I understand the Task Force is only making a recommendation, this strategy sets up a serious potential conflict political fight from the beginning that will carry over into the workings of the Committee. The Manager has implied (and rightfully so) personal matters should never get into the political arena. I believe he will oppose having additional staff outside the management structure. If the Mayor and Manager change the suggested line of reporting to have it under the Manager (as is should be) their are several anti police Commissioners that will try to override their position, thereby creating a political fight that will be controversial throughout the life of the oversight Committee. I recommend a reporting structure under the manager. The ordinance can always be amended in the future if it does to work.*
- *assuming that this Board is Advisory only and does not have any line authority over the ACC police dept. The line authority should rest with Mayor and Council*

Additional comments about the authorities of the board/auditor:

- *Authority and Mandates conflict with the statement of Independent Functions and Framework - Personnel review and budget input are outside the purview of an appointed civilian board.*
- *Annual review of the Chief is a personnel matter spelled out in the Charter - not a board matter.*
- *Why should the Auditor's terms of employment differ than other ACC employees? The removal process should mirror the remainder of the ACC employees. Who gets to be on the screening committee to hire the Auditor/who picks them? Who oversees the auditor who has "unfettered" access to everything (data/facilities) of the PDs?*
- *Why should this board & auditor have access to outside legal counsel? Did we not learn our lesson with the board of elections?*
- *Accountability and conflicts of interest that could arise in the COB. How are they evaluated, removed?*

### **Board training:**

There were a few comments and questions about training for civilian oversight board members:

- *I will accept the Chief's invitation to attend training sessions and the citizens police academy. I would recommend this as a requirement for members of any citizen oversight committee.*
- *"training": it should be compulsory that every person take at least one ride-along with a patrol officer for a full shift, and ideally more than one ride-along, since without this real experience, I really do not think people fully realize what a policeman goes through (and risks) daily on duty. Also I certainly hope that the "training" will include a full session on Advantage and the existing police - mental health partnership since most people are not aware of it.*
- *Training: only 20 hours per year? With so much to learn and comprehend? How much are the trainers paid? 'One ride along with ACCPD per quarter per board member" Will this give a realistic look into the daily expereince of ACCPD? Who mandates this?*

### **Board access to information:**

Quite a few respondents commented about the board and auditor having “unfettered access” to files and information. The main concern seems to be that board/auditor will have access to personal information they should not have access to.

**Budgetary concerns:**

Survey respondents also expressed concern about how this would be paid for, particularly the auditor position. One reason is the added expense to the county budget. Another reason was the expressed opinion that board service should be voluntary:

- *No other boards are paid; this opens legal issues/suits.*
- *Board should serve as volunteers as duty to community, not for pay;*
- concern expressed that this may affect impartiality if board members worry about losing stipend for expressing unpopular opinion

One respondent suggested that funding should be sought from sources outside the local government entirely: *“The oversight committee should be funded by the community and grants, there could be a perception that ACC government will cover for ACCPD. Whoever holds the money makes the rules, with the money coming from ACC government they will hold influence over the oversight committee.”*

## **Appendix A: Copy of Survey<sup>1</sup>**

### **Feedback- Police Advisory Board Development Task Force Summary Recommendations Survey**

**Do you believe these recommendations will improve community and police relations?**

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Neutral

Somewhat disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

**Do you support the proposed recommendations?**

Yes

No

**Do you have any questions or concerns about the proposed recommendations?**

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<sup>1</sup> Survey was open from December 11, 2020 through January 3, 2021. 424 responses were received. A Spanish translation of this survey was opened on January 14, 2021 and closed February 10, 2021. One response was received.