

## Action Plan in response to Cultural Assessment of the Apex Police Department

Recommendation	Action Plan
Create Diversity, Equity, and Belonging Manager Position and fill the position in the current fiscal year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research job specifications and create a job description</li> <li>• Submit to Personnel Committee for approval</li> </ul>
Form an APD Diversity, Equity and Belonging Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create committee mission and goals</li> <li>• Solicit for a diverse group of members</li> </ul>
Empanel a cross-departmental diversity council (or other name) to continue the momentum started with the training done in FY 2020-21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create council mission and goals</li> <li>• Solicit for a diverse group of members representing all departments</li> </ul>
Provide additional racial equity training for all personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build upon current training offerings</li> <li>• Scenario based training</li> </ul>
Support the on-going effort, begun by a patrol officer, to form a work group for LGBTQ members (sworn and civilian) to provide mutual support and foster a greater sense of belonging in the organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunity and assistance to the officer</li> <li>• Create work group purpose and mission</li> </ul>
Deploy an application that will allow staff members to make anonymous reports regarding incidents of bias, racist behavior, or other similar conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research appropriate applications</li> <li>• Create guidance for how to handle reports</li> </ul>
Create a Citizen Advisory Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research board utilization and structure – in NC and nationwide</li> <li>• Develop the mission and function of the Board.</li> <li>• Consult via Town Manager with Mayor/Council regarding the intent of the Board</li> </ul>
Facilitated listening sessions between elected officials and APD staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Godwin to meet 1 on 1 with each elected official</li> <li>• Create schedule</li> <li>• Obtain services of facilitator</li> <li>• Create “ground rules” for conduct of the sessions</li> </ul>
Disciplinary Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review current process</li> <li>• HR to be consulted/involved in all matters beyond a written warning</li> <li>• HR to receive copy of all initial complaints (internal and external)</li> <li>• Town Manager to receive a monthly report of all on-going investigations and their status including those closed during the month</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town Manager to provide to Council a data summary regarding open/closed cases and their source (internal/external)</li> </ul>
Promotional Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review current process to ensure it is as objective as possible</li> <li>• HR to continue to be involved in promotional processes</li> </ul>
Internal Empowerment and Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review current internal communication practices</li> <li>• Determine the needs of staff as it relates to receiving information and how best to deliver information</li> <li>• Determine how best to communicate decisions in terms of at what level they are made – help mitigate against the narrative that elected officials are to blame</li> <li>• Evaluate methods for spontaneous anonymous feedback</li> </ul>
Policy Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review policy enforcement to determine if inequities exist</li> <li>• Determine how to make improvements to ensure policies are equally applied</li> </ul>
Equitable Policing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review calls for service to neighborhoods with predominantly racial/ethnic minority residents to determine if there is evidence of lack of a proper and timely response to calls for service</li> <li>• Continue consistent review of all use of force incidents to ensure there is no bias reflected in the application of force</li> </ul>



*CONFIDENTIAL*

Apex Police Department  
**CULTURAL ASSESSMENT**

October 2020

*Requested by & Submitted to:  
Apex Town Council*



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### SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

In September 2020, the Town of Apex Council engaged DHRS to conduct a cultural assessment of the Apex Police Department. Gracie Johnson-Lopez, Principal met individually with members



of the Town Council to understand the goal, scope and expected deliverable. These sessions were quite transparent and revealed an aligned Council committed to community policing, sustaining an inclusive work culture and understanding the impact on policing amidst the current racialized climate.

DHRS was tasked with interviewing each member of the Apex Police Department (APD), on site at the Town Hall. Six professional facilitators were assigned to conduct these in person interviews in socially distanced and confidential spaces. The Town of Apex HR department scheduled one hour individual sessions and notes were captured during the session without identifiable information. The introduction and questions below guided the individual discussions:

*"We are an external vendor conducting a cultural assessment of the police department on behalf of the Town Leadership. Information obtained from this review is confidential and the summary report will not contain names or other identifiable information. Your feedback in this assessment is important. My role here is to ask questions. Please answer the questions as candidly and honestly as possible. I will take notes during the interview which will be summarized into an overall report without names. Do you have any questions as to what was just explained before we start?"*

#### Questions Asked:

- *How long have you been an employee within the dept?*
- *Who do you report to*
- *How would you describe the current work environment within the Apex Police Department?*
- *How comfortable are you expressing a concern or a different point of view than that of the leadership?*
- *What do you like most about working in the Police Department?*
- *What would you change to improve the morale or to build trust within the Department?  
There would be leadership changes?*
- *Describe the leadership style within the Department.*
- *Have you ever experienced or have knowledge of others who have experienced intimidation or threat of losing their jobs? If so, describe what happened and who was involved?*
- *Would you recommend the Department as a great place to work to a friend or relative?*
- *What is the current climate associated with race relations?*
- *Is there anything that I have not asked that you believe would be helpful for the town leadership to hear?*



During our work, we noted a small number of officers/staff (13) were somewhat defensive, resistant or chose not to answer some of the questions. One officer came in and stated he was recording the session. About 15% indicated they were not comfortable there would be no repercussions for speaking but proceeded to participate. Another officer stated that a group of officers had met, shared the questions being asked by DHRS and was planning to respond in the same manner. Another officer began the interview by saying that *"dept policy states that there can be no comments made about policy procedures or on-goings to the public...and therefore I will refrain from answering any questions that would make me go against policies."* These tactics were not unexpected by the skilled interviewers and at all times, the process was couched and evaluated to understand the existing internal culture of the APD in relationship to the external culture which it serves and protects.

This summary and its findings are based on the perceptions, perspectives and experiences of APD employees, APD Chief of Police, all command leadership and data provided by the Town of Apex Human Resources Director (Exhibit A & Nepotism Policy) and the facilitators' observations. DHRS requested APD exit interview data but was advised that data was not readily available. Every member of the APD had multiple opportunities to participate and we believe all did so with the exception of four people on leave and any newly hired officers.

A general consensus exist that nothing will come out of this assessment. This consensus was expressed by at least twenty APD employees. A high level of frustration exist at being asked for feedback without any evidence of being heard from previous assessments. Based on the findings from the May 2019 assessment by UNC School of Government (Exhibit A) which parallels to the findings of this assessment, their questions and frustrations appear to be valid. We hope that the Council will readily conclude and agree that a timely response to the findings of this report is of necessity.

## FINDINGS

### A. Leadership/Culture

The APD is described as a close supportive family-like environment by many and characterized as a great place to work. Benefits, pay, low crime rate and career opportunities were repeatedly cited as reasons they love working for APD. Others described the culture as toxic, stressful, horrendous, less than poor, petty, retaliatory and an absence of leadership. Both these realities appear to co-exist due to an internal structure which is consistently described as hierichial, militaristic and ineffective for cross collaboration and timely decision-making.



The culture reveals the existence of deep loyalties, professional pride and a commitment to upholding the community (of yesterday). Like many law enforcement and membership organizations, a commitment to following the line exist and loyalties must not be divided. Yet, like many families, it is unaware of the dysfunctionality and impact of its protectiveness for some members of the team at the expense of the greater good.

We began with interviewing the Chief followed by those in Command. Each painted a picture of a well ran, efficient, disciplined, harmonious and model police department.

[REDACTED]

The Chief shared numerous initiatives he has implemented to foster open communications, ensure all voices are heard and that career opportunity decisions are fair. He proudly shares how he stands behind his Command but also holds them accountable. His sees his work outside of the office, especially on the national level as necessary and due to the community and the Towns' support.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## B. Racial Tensions

Recent Black Lives Matter peaceful protests have fueled an unhealthy “*us versus them*” dynamic between the Town Council and APD. The majority of officers stated they feel unsupported by the Town Council for not supporting the “Back the Blue event(s)”. Their articulation of the events and depth of the anger is cause for concern as the disappointment and frustration experienced seems to have triggered a need to respond and seek external community support. BLM was often phrased and seen as being equivalent to being anti-police. While a spectrum of perspectives exist, this is a highly sensitive issue possibly being further flamed by leadership. Three officers stated [REDACTED] recommended they join the Back the Blue Facebook Group. [REDACTED]

Details of the BLM event as told by many in the APD ranged across a spectrum of “never heard about it (very few) to the Mayor and his daughter were carrying signs to “F” and defund the police.” Themes and statements made during the interviews include:

- *The Mayor crossed the “blue line” and allowed his daughter to start the whole thing. The Mayor needs to apologize.*
- *The Town Council does not support APD*
- *The officers were disappointed with the Chief when he decided to lock arms and take part in two of the marches that were in Apex.*
- *George Floyd did not die due to the cops – he was a drug head and ask for it.*
- *BLM is an anarchy to create division and over throw the police.*
- *Town Council should let Drew do his job and they mind their business.*



- *BLM vs Trump calls from neighborhoods has lead to assault charges. Apex is a bubble, things happen and you never hear about it.*
  - *There is no police brutality, the media is fabricating lies and making our jobs harder.*
  - *We keep riff-raff out of Apex. We only see blue.*
  - *Media coverage causes anger amongst officers*
  - *No Issues within the dept but officers upset with the current climate nationwide. It is hurting morale.*
  - *In regards to dealing with the community....the black community "hates" the PD. The PD is abusive to minorities...and only "serves" the wealthy "white" side of Apex. The Facebook post about interacting with the community is "fake" and non-reflective of how the lower-income community is really treated.*
  - *When policing the minority side of town...officers may not show up to calls....or come to calls very late.*
  - *The police dept has issues with diversity all across the board, women/LGBTQ/race and the Apex PD has little to no diversity at all.*
  - *Officers are on edge, standoffish with clients, current climate has officers on edge. A primarily white unit but we work well and get along among ourselves.*
  - *HR is pushing us to hire more minorities rather than qualified candidates.*
  - [REDACTED]
  - *I know where the Mayors' family lives and I have stopped his relatives. He has changed since becoming the mayor.*
- One officer stated he has received calls on "suspicious black men" who were not breaking any laws. When asked if he educates the people who generate those calls he responded that he has to be careful of accusing citizens of racism. The majority of officers responded that they do their jobs without regard to color or other factors everyday and resent being characterized by a few bad apples. They believe they treat everyone with kindness, fairness, and respect.  
There were also a few who spoke very highly of the mayor and did not share in the "noise" about him.

### C. Communications

The leadership structure and style are aligned with the practice of follow the chain of command. The APD team shared that it wants there to be a real open door policy where you can "skip" whoever you like in the Chain of Command to speak to a higher ranking leader without the fear of hurt feelings and reprimand. Repeated themes or suggestions include:

- [REDACTED]

- *Remove the fear of decision making. Everyone is afraid of making a decision because of what their leaders may say or do.*
- *Give more support to officers...so they can feel free to do their jobs effectively and safely.*
- *Make sure everyone has a clear understanding of what the day-to-day work is on patrol. Leadership seems to have forgotten how much work really goes into being on patrol.*
- *Figure out why there are so many internal complaints.*
- *Would want there to be a real open door policy where you can "skip" whoever you like in the Chain of Command to speak to a higher ranking leader...without the fear of hurt feelings and reprimand*
- [REDACTED]
- *Remove the fear of decision making. Everyone is afraid of making a decision because of what their leaders may say or do.*
- [REDACTED]
- *More consistency in processes, promotion processes, special unit processes. More consistency in being able to talk with supervisors.*
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

The current top down style of communication appears to create a great deal of frustration for officers, inconsistency in the application of policies and practices and barriers to ideation from those who are more client-facing.

#### **D. Potential HR Risk(s)**

While the scope of this review was to assess the culture without addressing specific HR issues by name, the report would be grossly incomplete without highlighting the [REDACTED] most often mentioned as problems for the APD across classification, gender and race.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## E. Other Observations

During the interviews, many seized the opportunity to share concerns and recommendations. The most repeated themes (not already covered) are included below:

1. The vest selected was not the one requested. Why ask for our opinion if you are not going to listen. We want outer carrier vests.
2. Town Council should do ride alongs...if they are going to make decisions for PD they should be more interactive with the PD
3. Clear understanding of how training days will be paid
4. Need more diversity in the police department. Women aren't treated equally....if you are a member of the LGBTQ community you are not treated equally.
5. Need community forums – to be able to listen to one another
6. The number of internal complaints vs external complaints. Look at exit interview data.
7. Equality training would benefit top leadership and could filter down the ranks.
8. Allow officers to grow beards.
9. Include and treat civilian staff with more respect
10. We need a way to keep officer feedback anonymous

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The APD needs consistent and present leadership. [REDACTED]
2. Appointment of a formal **Citizen Advisory Committee/Board** to sustain trust within the community, have policy review and to enhance transparency. The Committee should reflect the diversity of the Apex community with a focus on race relations, community policing and standard procedures within the PD. The Advisory Group could provide input to the Town Manager and Town Council.
3. Implement ongoing facilitated Listening Sessions between the Town Council and members of the APD. A great deal of misinformation has been allowed to fester about the Council and especially the Mayor which has resulted in resentment, distrust and a question of support. Current events and social unrest around racism and police brutality continues to weigh heavily on the department, especially police officers. A strong dose of appreciation and show of support from the Council by the Council is greatly needed. The message should not be one sent through the Town Manager or Chief of Police; but rather a time for the PD to interface directly with their Council. We believe this engagement is critical and of a high priority.
4. Race and Racism in Apex Police Department. The good news is that the Black and Hispanic populations are low among the citizenry. Racial bias and blind spots appear to be deeply entrenched into the APD culture. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A culture exist and is being supported where officers were comfortable making comments that were blatantly racist and out of touch for serving a multiracial community. The entrenchment goes deep and will require a multi-pronged approach to change and build a culturally competent and caring APD to serve and protect a diverse community.

- ✦ Require 2 – Day Racial Equity Training for all Leadership and Police Officers by the Racial Equity Institute
- ✦ Add a Diversity Officer to the leadership team within the Department (law enforcement officer) with a dotted line reporting relationship to the Council for a specified period of time. This position will serve as Champion for the Advisory Committee and work with Human Resources on training, disciplinary actions, exit interviews and police recruiting.
- ✦ Target more Black, Hispanic and women in the recruitment strategy.
- ✦ Implement a Diversity Committee within the APD. There are officers who want to see a more inclusive culture and their voices are currently marginalized. This will build additional champions within the department and create opportunities for sharing, learning and unlearning.
- ✦ Bring in speakers, leaders and engage in more opportunities to educate officers about racial differences.
- ✦ Hold ALL officers accountable for their actions and honor and celebrate their contributions toward closing the racial divide.

## SUMMARY



We believe, the Town of Apex is up to the challenge of building a sustained culture of respect, inclusion and belonging within the police department that reflects the communities it serves. The assessment by the Town Council has opened dialogue and has sparked hopeful though guarded optimism that the Council is committed to address many of the ongoing historical issues within the police department.

For your consideration, DHRS respectfully submits this report with recommendations for immediate and long-term implementation. It is our hope the Council will adopt the recommendations and embark on a new course of action that will bring to life a police department where all employees and its citizens can be proud of; where the values of transparency, open communications, accountability, shared vision of inclusion and a consistent presence of leadership are well integrated into the cultural fabric of Apex.

Submitted by Gracie Johnson-Lopez  
President & Senior Inclusion Strategist

ATTACHMENT  
Exhibit A