



Message from Mayor Dan Richardson

May 18, 2021

After reading newspaper coverage about the Michael Francisco/City Market incident, my mom texted me, "it sounds like the Town has some explaining to do." I am sure many people feel like my mom and want more explanation.

As many of you know by now, we are encouraged not to comment regarding active criminal investigations to prevent undue influence, but I realize that the public continues to have questions. Beyond wanting more explanation about the incident, many have called for the Board of Trustees to drop the charges. However, once charges are filed, the decision of whether to pursue them rests with the Town prosecutor, not the Mayor, Board of Trustees, or the Town Manager.

In any case, now that the criminal investigation is complete, Carbondale Police Chief Wilson and Mr. Francisco have recently participated in a facilitated discussion to share perspectives, and the charges against Mr. Francisco have been dismissed; we now can reflect on what happened.

First and foremost, I want to own my portion of this unfortunate incident and apologize. In retrospect, although I was briefed within 24 hours of the incident, other members of the board of trustees first learned of it from press coverage. The Board of Trustees has recognized the need to improve our communication, and my response to this incident only confirms this need.

However, we are making some forward progress as well. Given all that has happened around the country, we have recognized the value in reviewing our own vision for community policing. So last fall, the Town committed to facilitating a community discussion to update our vision for community policing. By signing the 'Obama Reimagining Policing Pledge,' I, on behalf of the Town, also committed us to evaluate our policies, training, and culture. It is unfortunate that we decided to wait until after COVID and after Chief Wilson settled into his new role.

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This work may or may not have affected how this incident was handled, but we now have a greater appreciation for the need to do this work as soon as possible. I apologize that the Town has not followed through sooner.

Regarding the incident itself, it was unfortunate, to say the least, and I am sorry that it happened. What I cannot know is the perspective of each person who played a part. I know that we each hold our own truth, and I respect that, especially in situations like this. I believe that earnestly seeking others' perspectives will be an invaluable part of learning from what took place. I am very grateful to Barb Chambliss who has championed Restorative Justice as a path for all parties to better heal, understand, and learn from this incident.

I also know that this situation escalated instead of de-escalated. Video footage documents what physically happened, but there are many other variables, including human perceptions, that must be considered in order to understand why things happened the way they did. An independent evaluation will hopefully allow us all to learn and grow after this incident. I am grateful that our staff and police department are willing to participate fully in that process.

For too long we have asked our police to be prepared for every situation – from rescuing a cat in a tree, to responding to unnerving levels of violence. Asking our police officers to all be superheroes is unrealistic, but we can continue to learn and improve. Policies, procedures, and training all need to continue to evolve here in Carbondale and around the country. I assure you that the Town is as committed to learning as anyone else--I ask for everyone to get involved and learn, and then hold us accountable for our resulting commitments.

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An evolution in Town policing has already begun under Chief Wilson. Some notable progress to date includes planning of our 'citizens academies,' increasing our funding to the Hope Center to develop a more comprehensive approach to situational response, hiring a communications consultant for better community dialogue and transparency, creating a new trespassing response procedure, hiring a consultant to conduct an independent evaluation of the incident, as well as an evaluation of our policies, training, and culture.

These actions are a step in the right direction, but we know there is more work to do. What is encouraging is that our Town Manager, Police Chief, Police Department, and Board of Trustees are all committed to continuing to redefine and improve community policing on an ongoing basis.

I am grateful to all those who led with curiosity and respect in understanding the circumstances of this incident. I am grateful for our judicial system and those that serve within it, who acted with integrity.

I am committed to seeing this work through to ensure that we as a Town learn from this experience so that we can continue to implement a vision of community policing through which everyone feels safe and respected.

Thank you,
Dan Richardson
Mayor of Carbondale