

Inclusion group call for diversity in public safety

“We understand they have concerns, and we are willing to work with them,” township Supervisor Phil LaJoy said. “We are going to work extremely hard with them. We’re looking forward to cooperating with this group.”

Incoming Public Safety Director Patrick Nemecek, who officially assumes his new post in January, agreed.

“We’re absolutely open to the ideas that they have as far as our recruiting,” Nemecek said, adding that a recruiting team has been formed and the administration will seek input from the inclusion group on where to place job brochures and focus recruitment efforts.

“We’re absolutely not shutting anybody out,” Nemecek said.

Still, township officials may face some hurdles:

- Other than one police officer job currently waiting to be filled, local positions across the township are expected to be scarce as officials grapple with declining revenues. Certain posts, including the deputy police chief job Nemecek is leaving to become public safety director, aren’t being filled to save money.
- Certain laws, such as a 2006 voter-approved ballot measure, prohibit government institutions from giving preferential treatment to – or discriminating against – any person or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin.

Plymouth-Canton Citizens for Diversity and Inclusion members have said they believe there are certain steps, such as broadening recruitment efforts that can be implemented without any legal snags.

“We are hopeful the township is committed to working with us in the recruiting process and are glad they acknowledge they have to do a better job of making the (public safety) force reflective of the diversity in the community,” said Jeff Shamberger, a retired business leader and vice chair of the inclusion group.

U.S. Census data from 2000 showed Canton with a population composed of roughly 84 percent whites, 9 percent Indian/Asian, 4.5 percent African American and 2 percent Hispanic, among others.

However, Graham-Hudak pointed to a Census-related American Community Survey that, for 2008 indicated the percentage of whites residents had fallen to 74 percent. Simultaneously, the survey estimated that the percentage of each minority group had increased – most significantly for the Indian/Asian group that had risen to about 16 percent.

Inclusion group members said they will continue to work with local officials to try to make the police ranks – and other departments – more reflective of the community.

“We will continue to provide resources for Canton, the city of Plymouth and Plymouth Township to reach out to minority applicants in order to see a safety department force more reflective of our community demographics,” Graham-Hudak said.

Loren Khogali, a vice chair of the group, said the committee will continue to monitor the situation.

“We expect a commitment to diversity in recruiting and hiring,” Khogali said. “It is vital that those responsible for hiring in our community recognize that a more diverse public safety department will be a strength in a community that is more diverse every year.”

Group members said anyone who has questions or who wants more information about the group may send an e-mail to plycanddi@gmail.com