

The January 19, 2022 meeting of the Worman's Mill Civic Association was an interesting one. Our speaker was police Chief Jason Lando, of the Frederick Police Department. He was appointed chief on March 8, 2021 after more than 20 years of policing experience in Pittsburgh PA. He says he was drawn to Frederick. "This is a place that has made me feel at home very quickly. I love the city."

When he became Chief he said he was doing a lot of listening before considering any changes. "I think if I were to come in here and say ... 'We're going to make this change, we're going to make this change, we're going to do this' ... How can I say that coming from another state not knowing this city, not knowing the people and not knowing the officers?" he said. With roughly 150 sworn officers and 50 civilian staff, it took some time to get acquainted with everyone. "One of the biggest challenges is getting to know a whole entire police department that's wearing masks," he said. Lando said he spent much of his first two weeks behind a desk out of necessity, then started gradually meeting members of the community.

He believes one of the biggest challenges facing law enforcement is ensuring police work collaboratively with the community. Too often, he's found, police are policing a neighborhood the way they think it should be policed, without getting local input. It's important to recognize, Lando said, that criminalizing issues like addiction, mental health struggles and homelessness do not make them go away. "That's not something we can arrest our way out of," he said. "We have to have the backing of the community on whatever policies we roll out."

He said, "While we recognize the need for our officers to use force in certain situations, we will constantly look for new methods and tools that allow us to resolve incidents in a way that minimizes risk of injury to suspects and to our police officers."

Mayor O'Connor called Lando a "catalyst" behind community programs in Pittsburgh, including a program that connected youth with officers. This and other initiatives led to increased community cooperation and decreased crime and complaints, O'Connor said.

Lando also led programs involving body-worn cameras, the opioid overdose medication Narcan and less-lethal weapons. He has said police could benefit from working with trained civilian partners.

Chief Lando says he will use a concept called CEPTED—Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design— where we bring in professionals to take a look at some of the physical structures in the community, and give some ideas and tips on what we can do to make them less appealing to the criminal element.