CRC, Police Department on verge of new relationship?

By Bill Rhoden

Last month, July 12, to be exact, John Ferron, acting director of the Community Relations Commission and Police Commissioner Donald Pomerleau met for an hour to touch upon various police/community problems of mutual concern.

That meeting may have been the start of a new and meaningful relationship between the here-to-fore alienated agencies.

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"At least, I hope it is," added Mr. Ferron.

"I hope that meeting was the genisis of a positive relationship between our agencies."

JOHN FERRON

Although the relationship between the two agencies has been strained, to say the least, during the past few years, Mr. Ferron feels that the implications of last month's hour long meeting with the commissioner were positive and far reaching.

"You can only talk about so much in one hour," he stated "but that meeting was the initial stage in establishing a relationship where we can sit down and discuss real gut issues."

One of the more pressing "gut" issues discussed dealt with the fact that Baltimore City, with its black population of almost 60 percent is being policed by a department which has less than 12 percent blacks in its employ.

"I know there is a need to increase the number of black officers in a city which is more than 50 percent black," Ferron stated, adding that Commissioner Pomerleau "readily admitted that he would like to have more blacks in the department."

"He agreed that the department needs to hire more black officers," continued Ferron, "but he also said that it was rather difficult in recruiting them."

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If there is a reluctance on the part of blacks to join the police department, it could be a direct result of poor rapport between the community and the department which has existed in Baltimore for years.

That image will probably change, says Ferron, if his agency, along with Commissioner Pomerleau, continue to meet and have "serious and candid discussions of the issues.

"If we pursue this, our commission may be of assistance in helping the department get black recruits," he stated.

"The average person in the street is aware of the clevage between our two agencies," Ferron continued, "and I think it would help if this commission would take public and positive approach to the department."

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"We don't want to coexist with the department, he continued, "we've been doing that for years!

"Our efforts, and I hope it's a joint effort, is to set up a dynamic and viable relationship where both agencies will benefit the citizenry.

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The police evaluation board was another major issue touched upon in the July conference, according to Mr. Perron.

The board is composed of a representative from the City Solicitor's office, (George Russell), the State's Attorney's office, (Milton Allen) and the police department.

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As a functional unit, it is responsible for investigating complaints of all police related incidents.

"I suggested to the commissioner," stated Ferron, "that he take a fresh and positive look at the board."

Mr. Ferron added that both he and Mr. Pomerleau agreed that a study of the board was in order and that such a study would attempt to show how it could become, "a viable and credible organization of the government."

"I woulc hope for the creation of a board that is representative of the Baltimore Community, and is responsible to the Baltimore community, thus gaining a vote of confidence from all citizens in Baltimore."

To be sure, a number of things were not touched upon during the hour long meeting, such as who should or shouldn't be placed in Western District, the feasibility of restructing certain time in grade requirements, etc.

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On the other hand (a hand which so often is overlooked) Mr. Ferron offered the services of his commission to help build a meaningful relationship according to the BCRC acting director. Commissioner Pomerleau "indicated a willingness to accept those services and work along with the commission.

Exactly what affirmative actions will be taken as the result of subsequent meetings between Mr. Ferron and Commissioner Pomerleau is questionable at this point.

But if the BCRC and the Baltimore Police Department are to regain any of their lost credibility within the community, both black and white, positive action in the area of recruitment and promotion must be taken rather than spoken.

Like Mr. Ferron, most of the citizens in Baltimore city, black and white (but especially black), are "sick and tired of rhetoric!"

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