Williamstown CARES
Final Report

TOWN OF
WILLIAMSTOWN

A Town of Williamstown report
September 2023

Table of Contents

Section 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Overview of the CARES Project

The Williamstown CARES (Community Assessment Research) Project was initiated in late 2020 by the Williamstown Town Manager. Its purpose was to develop a thorough understanding of perceptions of community safety and wellbeing in the Town of Williamstown, Massachusetts, in order to provide recommendations to the Town for aligning policies and practices with community needs. While the project developed in response to national and local discussions on the scope and nature of policing, it focused broadly on topics of safety and wellbeing - rather than narrowly on policing - to establish a deeper understanding of how safety, wellbeing, policing, and other services intersect in Williamstown.

Using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach and interpretive research methodology, the project sought answers to the following questions:

1. How do community members define and experience safety and wellbeing in Williamstown?
2. How do members of the Williamstown Police Department (WPD) perceive their role in providing for safety and wellbeing in the community?
3. How do current policies and practices of the Town of Williamstown - including the Williamstown Police Department - conceptualize and shape safety and wellbeing in the community, and how do these align with resident and WPD perceptions?

Between June 2021 and September 2022, trained social workers conducted in-depth interviews with 163 community residents and five members of the WPD.

1.2 Key Findings

- Interviewees think of safety in three major ways:
  - Physical safety, including safety from crime and other physical harm;
  - Emotional/social safety, including safety from negative judgement or shame AND safety from the psychological trauma experienced by historically marginalized populations;
  - And financial safety, which comes with economic stability.
- Interviewees perceive themselves to be safe or unsafe in Williamstown based on:
  - Comparisons to other communities (locally, nationally, and internationally);
  - Feelings of connection, belonging, and trust (or the lack of these);
  - And perceptions of and experiences with policing (locally and as a broader system).
- Interviewees think of wellbeing in two major ways:
  - The ability to meet tangible human needs, such as health, housing, and food security;
  - And the less tangible sense of community and belonging.
- Interviewees describe the following factors as supporting their wellbeing in Williamstown:
  - Community events and opportunities to connect with others;
  - The area's natural beauty and access to recreation;
  - Access to the arts in Williamstown and the surrounding region;
  - The quality of local schools and education;
  - And resources provided by the town's largest employer: Williams College.

- Interviewees describe the following factors as detracting from their wellbeing in Williamstown:
  - A sense of insularity;
  - A lack of intentional community-building;
  - The so-called "town-gown" divide;
  - A lack of healthcare resources;
  - And the existence of racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination and bigotry.
- Interviewees place great value on community members' collective responsibility for safety and wellbeing, with recognition that town government has a special role to play representing the community's interests.
- Interviewees view the current role of the WPD in varying ways, including:
  - Law enforcement, with a focus on traffic safety;
  - Protection from harm, especially related to crime and violence;
  - Default first responders to crime/violence *and* to problems community members do not feel equipped to handle on their own;
  - Meeting the safety and wellbeing needs of some, but not all, community members;
  - And agents of social control, often through intimidation.
- Interviewees express a desire for the role of the WPD to be:
  - Responding to crime (but not necessarily other safety and wellbeing needs);
  - Community-oriented and more focused on relationships than enforcement;
  - Community-directed and accountable, with an emphasis on partnering with the community;
  - And smaller with more partner organizations.
- Interviewees are interested in exploring alternative systems for meeting safety and wellbeing needs.

1.3 Major Recommendations

- Focus on communication.
  - Work with government-community communications specialists to develop a comprehensive and dynamic communication network. The emphasis should be on identifying communications needs *before* identifying technology solutions.
  - Provide inclusive facilitation training for town leaders to improve and increase communication in public meetings.
- Commit to intentional community-building.
  - Establish a community center – a physical space where community members can gather and interact across generations, professions, neighborhoods, and other demographic differences.
  - Create a mechanism for welcoming new community members – owners and renters alike.
  - Provide opportunities for education and dialogue across difference. Building relationships and learning from one another are critical steps toward ending discrimination in the local community.
- Develop support systems for individual and collective wellbeing.
  - Examine and invest in new ways to enhance access to health care, affordable housing, and other basic services. This should include working with local and regional partners.
  - Create a detailed account of mental health and wellbeing calls received by the WPD.
  - Pilot a parallel response program for mental health and wellbeing calls, following the community responder model.
- Create a community safety review committee to review the role of policing in Williamstown. This should be an exploratory committee charged with examining evidence-based possibilities for innovation that align with residents' desires for safety and wellbeing. The committee's work is intended as a review of the *system and structure* of policing in Williamstown, not as a review of individual members of the WPD.

Section 2. BACKGROUND & PURPOSE OF THE CARES PROJECT

2.1 Purpose Statement

The purpose of the Williamstown CARES Project was to develop a thorough understanding of perceptions of community safety and wellbeing in the Town of Williamstown, Massachusetts, in order to provide recommendations to the Town for aligning Town policies and practices with community needs.

2.2 Project Impetus

The CARES Project developed in response to both national and local discussions on the scope and nature of policing. In collaboration with a group of social workers in the community, the Williamstown Town Manager began exploring alternative approaches to policing and community safety during summer 2020. Because most research on these topics has been conducted in larger cities (for examples, see Abella, et al, 2022; Bailey et al, 2018; Davidson, 2014; Helfgott et al, 2016; Lombardo & Donner, 2018), the Town Manager and the Social Work Advisory Group elected to conduct an in-depth safety and wellbeing assessment in Williamstown before implementing any changes. It was determined that the assessment should focus broadly on topics of safety and wellbeing, rather than narrowly on policing, in order to establish a deeper understanding of where and how safety, wellbeing, policing, and other community services intersect. The goal of the assessment was to produce actionable recommendations tailored to Williamstown's particular needs and resources.

2.3 Project Timeline

AUGUST 2020	Town Manager began meeting with Social Work Advisory Group.
AUGUST–OCTOBER 2020	Social Work Advisory Group researched local and national models for community safety and wellbeing and met with Police Chief.
OCTOBER 2020	Town Manager and Advisory Group elected to conduct Williamstown needs assessment as a necessary step toward designing and implementing plans to meet existing (rather than assumed) needs.
NOVEMBER 2020-JANUARY 2021	RFQ for needs assessment developed and posted. Town Manager and Advisory Group interviewed candidates.
JANUARY 2021	Advisory Group members presented plans to Select Board and public.
FEBRUARY 2021	Town Manager hired full-time Research Director for Community Assessment and Engagement to complete needs assessment and work with Town officials to implement its recommendations.
MARCH 2021	Town Manager hired part-time Outreach Specialist to assist Director.
MARCH-MAY 2021	Research team developed research design and infrastructure.
MAY 2021	Town Manager resigned. Interim Town Manager met with Advisory Group and expressed support for continuing project. CARES mailing sent to every town residence and business.
JUNE 2021-SEPTEMBER 2022	Interviews conducted with 163 community members and 5 members of the Williamstown Police Department.

DECEMBER 2021	Research Director resigned. Advisory Group offered to complete project without paid director, recognizing that this would extend the originally estimated timeline.
MAY 2022-MAY 2023	Interview analysis conducted. Alternative models of policing, safety, and mental health assessed.
MAY-AUGUST 2023	CARES Project report prepared.
SEPTEMBER 2023	CARES Project report submitted to Town Manager for distribution.

Section 3. HOW THE CARES PROJECT WAS CONDUCTED

3.1 Research Design and Rationale

The Williamstown CARES Project was designed and implemented using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach (Wallingford, 2008). CBPR grounds itself in the needs and interests of a particular community, inviting community members to partner with researchers to identify issues impacting the community, design and implement research to analyze those issues, and develop potential solutions (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

The CARES Project grew out of both national and local conversations about policing and public safety but is centered on issues raised within the Williamstown community itself. In response to community members' comments – on social media, in Select Board and other Town meetings, and in conversations with their neighbors – about how safe (or unsafe) and well (or unwell) they felt in town, the Social Work Advisory Group (itself made up of Williamstown community members) worked with the Research Director for Community Assessment and Engagement to design a research protocol to capture the unique concerns and needs of Williamstown residents.

3.1.1 Research Questions and Methodology

The CARES Project sought answers to the following research questions:

1. How do community members define and experience safety and wellbeing in Williamstown?
2. How do members of the Williamstown Police Department (WPD) perceive their role in providing for safety and wellbeing in the community?
3. How do current policies and practices of the Town of Williamstown - including the Williamstown Police Department - conceptualize and shape safety and wellbeing in the community, and how do these align with resident and WPD perceptions?

Based on these questions, the research team selected an interpretive research methodology for the project (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Yanow, 2014). Interpretive research aims to understand how people make sense of the world around them, both individually and collectively (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Schaffer, 2016). While other methodologies emphasize the generalizability of knowledge, interpretive research emphasizes the context and use of knowledge (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). In other words, the researchers aim to understand how particular people in a particular place and time (context) make sense of their world and to use that knowledge to promote change in that place and time.

More specifically, the CARES Project sought to understand how Williamstown residents think about safety and wellbeing in the community. Safety and wellbeing are broad terms, and it is nearly impossible to develop solutions to enhance residents' feelings of each without knowing what residents mean when they talk about these concepts. An interpretive research methodology allowed the CARES Project team to explore exactly that: how do people interpret "safety" and "wellbeing" as concepts? What do people mean when they say they feel safe or unsafe or when they talk about having a strong or weak sense of wellbeing in the Williamstown community? Understanding the meaning of these concepts in the particular context of 21st century Williamstown is the first step toward addressing related issues in the community.

3.1.2 Research Methods

The CARES Project used a combination of in-depth interview and textual analysis methods, along with a literature review of research and reports on alternative models of policing, community safety, and wellbeing (including, but not limited to, mental health).

Interviews were conducted using active interview methods (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Active interviewing begins with the assumption that interviews are acts of *knowledge construction* that take place between the interviewer and the interviewee, rather than simply *reports of facts* made by the interviewee. This assumption is in keeping with the broader aim of interpretive research, which is "to elucidate shared meanings" rather than to "faithfully represent a reality taken to be independently pre-existing" (Schaffer, 2016, 10).

In active interviews, the interviewer asks questions that encourage the interviewee to share their own experiences and knowledge in ways that reveal how they are making sense of particular concepts – in this case, safety and wellbeing. This means that CARES Project interviewers did not provide definitions of terms but rather asked interviewees to develop those definitions through conversation. While a consistent list of interview questions was asked of every interviewee (see Appendices 7.1 *Community Interview Guide* and 7.2 *WPD Interview Guide*), the interviewers allowed the conversation to unfold somewhat organically, ensuring that relevant issues were addressed but also that each interviewee was able to address these in their own way, from their own perspective, and in their own voice (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

It is critical to note here that while active interviewing is inherently less structured than other interview methods, this does not equate with a lack of validity or trustworthiness. In contrast, allowing research participants to respond to questions from their own, often complex and multifaceted, perspectives provides researchers with the opportunity to examine the range of meanings that concepts like safety and wellbeing have in the particular context of 21st century Williamstown (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

With the permission of participants, interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes or "codes," with special attention to interviewees' use of language and how this language use mapped across interviews. This process is iterative, as the researchers move from transcript to transcript and back again in order to discern similarities and differences in perceptions of safety and wellbeing (Yanow, 2014).

3.2 Project Outreach and Implementation

In late May 2021, every household and business in Williamstown received a mailing describing the CARES Project and inviting them to participate. The mailing included a link to the study's website where community members could register to be interviewed. The Social Work Advisory Group also promoted the study at the 2021 Annual Town Meeting and at public meetings of the Select Board and the Diversity, Inclusion, and Racial Equity (DIRE) Committee. Employees of the WPD were individually invited to participate in the project.

The CARES Project's commitment to understanding the diversity of perspectives that exist within the community required that researchers continue interviewing as long as community interest existed, keeping track of various demographic characteristics of participants. Outreach and interviewing therefore continued for more than a year.

All interviews were conducted by trained social workers, the majority of whom were members of the Social Work Advisory Group. Interviewers individually contacted those registered for the project and scheduled interviews for times and locations convenient to participants. Interviews were offered by phone, on Zoom, and in-person to be as accessible as possible for all interested residents.

In order to maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned a unique identification number, and their interview recording, transcript, and all demographic information were filed under this number. All identifying information has been removed from quotes and other insights used in this report.

3.3 Project Limitations

Like all research, the CARES Project has limitations. As a community-based participatory research project designed to understand residents' perceptions of safety and wellbeing in Williamstown, the project and its results are particular to this community. While the findings may shed light on broader conceptions of safety, wellbeing, and policing, they will not be immediately generalizable to other towns or cities.

In addition, the open call for participation and the Town's commitment to including any resident who expressed interest mean that the sample is neither random nor statistically representative. Interpretive research does not require random sampling to produce meaningful results. Instead, it requires transparency, including acknowledgement of sample demographics (see Section 4. *CARES Project Participants*).

Information about participant demographics confirm that, while there is diversity in the CARES Project sample, there are certain populations that are underrepresented. For example, while U.S. census data reports that nearly 20% of Williamstown residents are people of color (Black/African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Latinx, or multiracial), only 11% of the CARES Project sample identifies as belonging to these racial/ethnic groups. Black or African American residents are especially underrepresented in the sample. Some interview participants who identify as white are members of multiracial families, such that they spoke about the experiences of family members of color in their interviews, but this does not make up for a lack of representation among interview participants themselves.

Similarly, younger residents (ages 18-30), lower-income residents, and those with less educational capital are also underrepresented in the sample. This is (and must be) taken into account in interpreting findings and offering recommendations. Clearly, the Town has work to do to ensure that residents of color, younger residents, and those with fewer financial and educational resources feel included and welcomed in community projects.

Finally, the CARES Project was designed to include the important perspectives of members of the Williamstown Police Department (WPD). Despite significant efforts by the research team to engage members of the WPD, fewer than one-third of the full-time employees of the department participated in the project. This is likely due to the divisive nature of public discourse at the time of the project, which may have led to heightened concerns about confidentiality and judgement on the part of WPD employees. The findings reported here take this into account and are written with every effort to protect the identities and confidentiality of those who did participate.

Section 4. CARES PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Between June 2021 and September 2022, the CARES Project team interviewed 163 Williamstown residents and five members of the Williamstown Police Department (WPD). An additional 34 residents registered for the project but either did not respond to interviewers' invitations to schedule an interview (despite numerous attempts by both phone and email) or declined to be interviewed when contacted.

Participants' demographic information is presented in the table below as it was reported to interviewers. Demographic information for WPD participants is not included in this report, because the small number of participants makes it impossible to report demographics without violating the confidentiality of those interviewed.

Williamstown CARES Sample Demographics[1]								
AGE	**18-30**	**31-50**	**51-70**	**70+**	**Declined**			
	3	37	76	46	1			
GENDER	**Female**	**Male**	**Transgender/Nonbinary**					
	87	73	3					
RACE/ ETHNICITY/ CULTURE	**Asian/ Asian Am.**	**Biracial/ Multiracial/ Multiethnic**	**Black/ African Am.**	**Hispanic/ Latinx**	**Jewish**	**Middle Eastern**	**White/ Caucasian/ Anglo**	**Specific European**	**American/ Human**
	4	7	2	4	11	1	125	5	4
LGBTQIA+	**No**	**Yes**	**Declined**					
	148	14	1					
Disability Status	**None**	**Yes**						
	134	29						
Highest Education	**High School**	**Some College**	**Bachelors**	**Masters**	**Doctorate**	**Unspecified Graduate**	**No Response**	
	1	4	39	54	45	15	5	
Annual Income	**< $30,000**	**$30,000-80,000**	**$80,000-160,000**	**$160,000+**	**Declined**			
	8	32	59	61	3			

---

[1] N = 163 individual participants (two couples were interviewed together such that 163 individuals participated in 161 interviews)

Section 5. CARES PROJECT FINDINGS

Multiple rounds of transcript analysis, over the course of several months, resulted in the findings reported here. The broad themes of safety, wellbeing, and responsibility for each were built into the interview guides (see Appendices 7.1 *Community Interview Guide* and 7.2 *WPD Interview Guide*), and these served as initial codes at the onset of analysis. Coding continued to develop from the language of interviews themselves, with an emphasis on conceptions of safety and wellbeing, factors contributing to feelings of each, and interviewees' sense of both current efforts to provide for safety and wellbeing in Williamstown *and* what they desire for the future of their community.

Findings are reported through both description and direct quotations from interviews in hopes of capturing the complexity and nuance of interviewees' ideas while also highlighting similarities and differences across interviews. Every effort has been made to ensure the confidentiality of those quoted.

5.1 Safety in Williamstown

One of the major impetuses for the CARES Project was the desire of Williamstown community members to better understand conceptions of safety in the community. On social media, in public meetings, and in conversations with friends, neighbors, and acquaintances over the course of several months, a number of Williamstown residents expressed feeling unsafe in the community while many others expressed feeling entirely safe in town. Of the latter group, some acknowledged that their own sense of safety might not be shared by all, while others expressed significant surprise that anyone would feel unsafe in Williamstown.

What was unclear in all of these discussions was what each resident meant by "safe" (i.e. their conception of safety). It is difficult to address an issue that is not clearly defined, and thus the first section of this report examines Williamstown residents' conceptions of safety, beginning with how people tend to define safety and then exploring what contributes to people's feelings of being safe or unsafe in the community.

5.1.1 What is Safety?

Analysis of CARES Project interviews indicates three broad categories of safety to which residents refer: physical safety (including safety from crime, as well as safety from other forms of physical injury or harm), emotional or social safety (which is connected to physical safety in nuanced ways), and financial safety. Because physical safety was mentioned by the vast majority (approximately 90%) of residents interviewed, it is considered first. This does not indicate any hierarchy of categories, as a community interested in enhancing its residents' safety must consider this concept in all of its interpretations.

5.1.1.1 Physical Safety

The vast majority of residents interviewed talked about safety in relation to physical harm against people or property at some point in their interviews. Physical safety was discussed primarily as safety from crime, although some interviewees also spoke of physical safety in broader terms as well.

5.1.1.1.1 Safety from Crime. When asked to comment on their own sense of safety in Williamstown, many people noted minimal reports of crime in the town, as well their own decisions to leave the doors of their homes and

vehicles unlocked and their lack of concern about being physically accosted in the community. Examples of these ideas about safety include:

> "Safety for me is primarily physical safety in terms of am I going to get beaten up or robbed, is my house going to get broken into."

> "I've left the door unlocked or even the back porch door completely open and forgotten about it and not been particularly worried about it, knowing that there isn't a whole lot of crime in the area."

> "I leave my apartment for hours and days at a time without having windows locked, sometimes with doors wide open, and I have no fear of somebody coming in here. I leave my bicycle, not chained up, and I have no fear of anybody taking it."

> "I've never had any instance where I feel like there's anybody lurking. It's not like crime is in the newspapers. I don't lock my doors at night."

In each of these instances (as well as many, many others in this study), the interviewee described safety as the absence of crime or any threat of crime. Other interviewees did acknowledge that crime exists in Williamstown – mainly in the form of theft but also instances of physical violence - but, in doing so, these interviewees still expressed a conception of safety as crime's opposite.

5.1.1.1.2 Safety from Other Physical Harm. A smaller number of interviewees echoed the sense that safety is the lack of physical harm but equated this harm less (or at least less explicitly) with crime. They spoke instead about feeling safe walking or hiking alone or allowing children to walk or ride bikes around town without fear of harm (whether intentional or accidental):

> "I feel safe walking around the streets, and I feel safe walking around the woods at any time of day."

> "We always felt safe with our children, we let them ride their bikes around town with no problems."

> "I feel totally safe letting the kids run around outside. There's a park a block away. Now that they're a little older, I'll let them go down there by themselves."

> "I have the luxury of having my kids grow up and letting them walk down to Spring Street and knowing that if something happened, if they fell off their bicycle or something, somebody there would know them and help them and get a hold of me and get them home."

Some of these references to safety may be about safety from crime (child abduction, for example), but they are also about physical safety more broadly and the sense that help would be available if someone experienced an accident or other physical harm in the community.

5.1.1.2 Social/Emotional Safety
Some of the same interviewees who spoke about safety as a physical concept also talked about emotional or social safety – defined as not experiencing (or being at risk of experiencing) negative judgement, shame, or psychological trauma.

5.1.1.2.1 Safety from Negative Judgement or Shame. A number of interviewees discussed emotional or social safety as the feeling that one can express their views openly without fear of judgement or public shaming. Many of these individuals described themselves (or others) as feeling unsafe in Williamstown based on this conception of emotional/social safety:

> "I feel safe unless I start talking about political and social issues, where a lot of times there is tremendous pressure in this town to conform and to discourage anybody from having a diverse opinion."

> "I feel it is unsafe actually to speak up and to say things for fear of offending somebody. And I think the code of what is offensive and what isn't offensive is not clear."

> "I think in the last year and a half, we've lost our ability to disagree reasonably. And so I feel less safe doing that now. I'm not afraid I'm going to be killed or hurt or maimed, but I am afraid of being shamed. I'm afraid of being yelled at, shamed, bullied."

> "A safety issue for me that comes up is the lack of safety I sometimes feel - and others feel - in terms of having public conversations. It doesn't take much of a negative comment, or an insult or jab, to make people feel like, 'I'm not sure I want to be here.' So to me, the public conversation is not as safe as it should be."

Safety, in these examples, is about feeling secure in one's ability to engage in public conversation without fear of social shaming or judgement.

5.1.1.2.2 Safety from Emotional/Psychological Trauma. Other interviewees spoke of emotional/social safety more in terms of potential trauma experienced by individuals belonging to particular social identity groups.[1] This safety (or lack of safety) is more related to the historical marginalization and psychological trauma experienced by members of a social identity group than to concerns about social judgement based on ideological viewpoints, and it is connected to both relationships with other community members and interactions with police. Examples include:

> "I've had some moments where I've really seen or felt a difference in my level of safety, not physical safety, but emotional safety. For example, my son is very much a boy and plays lots of sports and has always been comfortable just doing whatever he feels like. When we lived [elsewhere], he would paint his fingernails and he would sometimes wear dresses, and no one would bat an eye. And he just thought this was a normal, like, 'I can do whatever I want.' He dressed as a female superhero for Halloween [a couple years ago here in Williamstown], and all the other kids pointed it out and were laughing hysterically. And it was so weird. And it was just this like, 'Whoa, we're from somewhere where this would not have raised a single eyebrow.' And for him, I didn't feel like he was unsafe, because I don't think he's in any meaningful way

---

[1] Social identity groups are groups to which individuals are "assigned" by society based on their perceived or actual connection to socially constructed categories, such as race, ethnicity, sex, gender, age, religion, nationality, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, ability/disability status, and first language (Bell, 2016). For example, an individual is a member of the social identity group "white" if their race is socially perceived or identified as white.

questioning his gender identity. He just enjoys doing what he wants to. But if I did think he was questioning his gender identity, I would have been like, 'Oh, my God, this isn't safe.'"

"Mostly I have been fearful for my daughter. She's now grown and moved away. But there was an exoticism that clung to her very much, and strangers in Stop and Shop would say things like, 'Oh, she's just like a China doll.' And there was a lot of, I felt, objectification of her and not going any deeper than how she looked."

"I don't [feel safe], because I think I stand out [as a person of color]. I just find I don't feel comfortable walking down on Spring Street. I just don't feel comfortable to stand out on the road alone because I feel like, if a cop car passes by, they will be watching me closely to see what I'm up to."

"There are a few members of my community who have felt terribly threatened by the police because of the Hitler poster in the locker room for all those years and the culture of racism at the police department. They feel unsafe, and they feel like they can't trust the police and that sense of, there's actually a sense of trauma in the families that have Jewish family members and people of color in those families."

"I think there are scenarios where [having children of color] feels less safe in this community. And it's at times at school, it's not in the classroom, it's always things that are not seen or as controlled by teachers, like recess and lunch line and those sorts of things, where they just get the other kids calling them things because they're brown and you know, just the incidents that we're getting emails about and that we know about other families of color. So I wouldn't say like it feels unsafe, it feels less safe."

It is more difficult to pinpoint exactly how these interviewees are defining safety, as it may be that their concerns are about both emotional trauma *and* the threat of physical danger (or potentially that the former could escalate into the latter). What is clear is that they are linking safety (or the lack of safety) to the historical marginalization and traumatization of particular social identity groups.

5.1.1.3 Financial Safety

A small group of interviewees talked about safety as a financial issue, describing the feeling of being unsafe in relation to economic stability. While only a handful of residents mentioned this type of safety, it is important to remember that lower-income residents are underrepresented in the study's sample. Examples of describing safety as financial include:

"I mean, the first basis for safety has to do with people being able to earn a living and pay their rent or be in safe spaces."

"I could imagine that people feel unsafe when they don't have food, or they don't have enough money to feed their family, or they're going to get kicked out of their home because they can't pay the rent, like I can appreciate there are people that have safety issues, and I'm just very lucky that I don't."

13

"It's been a real struggle to create a stable life here not being a homeowner until really recently. So that, to me, is a sort of lack of safety, that sort of financial instability of trying to remain in the town."

In sum, most residents who participated in CARES Project interviews talked about safety as a physical phenomenon. Many also conceive of safety as an emotional or social phenomenon, and a small number conceive of safety as a financial phenomenon. In the following section, more detail is provided about what contributes to feelings of safety (or lack of safety) in Williamstown.

5.1.2 Perceptions of Safety in Williamstown

Knowing that community members are working with multiple *conceptions* of safety (i.e. safety means different things to different people) allows for a more nuanced exploration of what contributes to community members' different *perceptions* of safety in Williamstown. It is not simply that some individuals feel safe and others do not but that people are drawing on different definitions, knowledge bases, and experiences in interpreting their own and others' senses of safety. There are some major themes within these different interpretations, however, including comparisons to other places; feelings of connection, belonging, and trust (or the lack of these); and perceptions of police and policing.

5.1.2.1 Comparison to Other Communities

Many of those who expressed feeling safe in Williamstown explained their sense of safety by comparing Williamstown to other communities. These comparisons were consistently about physical safety and specifically related to the perception that Williamstown has less crime than other communities. Interviewees tended to attribute this physical safety to Williamstown's smaller population, perceived lack of poverty, and higher levels of education. Examples include:

"Williamstown and the surrounding communities, more or less, are free from the kind of safety challenges you'd find in a more densely populated area and an area probably with greater needs in terms of underserved communities, even in our greater Williamstown area."

"I do feel safe in Williamstown. I think that for me the size of it is one that kind of promotes a good feeling for me in terms of safety. There doesn't seem to be much at all of the type of risks that I encountered, say, in other places that I've lived. And I attribute that to simply size and number of people."

"My sense of safety: we are a town that is fairly upper class and highly educated because of the college. Now we are surrounded by Pownal and North Adams, which isn't safe. And actually, if you go to, one time I went to that McDonalds in North Adams early in the morning with my kid, and the number of drug addicts I saw was like crazy."

"I think neighbors here would speak up if they noticed something was happening that was out of the norm, whereas maybe in a town like Pittsfield, people wouldn't feel safe speaking up about something that they were observing in their neighborhood, because maybe there's gangs involved and stuff like that. I just don't think we're dealing with that here."

5.1.2.2 Connection and Belonging

For both interviewees who expressed feeling safe in town and many who did not, a major contributing factor was a sense (or lack of sense) of connection or belonging. Many people shared that having trusting relationships and connections in town contributed to their feelings of physical and emotional safety:

> "I feel like my family has been able to build kind of a network of support around us that allows us to feel like we have what we need. So I feel safe. But I have such awareness that that's not true for everybody."

> "I feel safe also, in part, because I know my neighbors. And they watch out for me. I watch out for them."

> "I feel very loved and supported in this community, and I feel that I love and support many people in this community. So a lot of my personal sense of safety comes from that."

On the other hand, those who expressed feeling disconnected or who had experiences that made them feel less accepted or welcome in the community tended to describe feeling physically and/or emotionally unsafe in Williamstown. For example:

> "I think there are different kinds of feeling a sense of safety, right? It's like, do you feel at home here? And I think this is a question that needs to be answered. I tried to make this my home, right? This is my house. And this is my town. My daughter was born and raised here. But the thing is, I have lived here since 2005, but I don't think people accept me as like, 'Oh, you are from here, or you belong here.' So I think it's very different. Do you feel like you are an outsider to this community? I think it's good in a way because it gives me this third person perspective to look at this community, like as an anthropologist or as an ethnographer. Like how this community treats people who might look different from the majority of the people. But then also, it gets tiring, right?"

Like the interviewee quoted here, many who expressed a lack of connection and belonging – and, along with that, less sense of safety – attributed this to aspects of their identity like race, ethnicity, or sexuality, that placed them in the minority in Williamstown. Quite a few interviewees whose identities placed them in the majority also perceived this to be the case, as is indicated by the first quote in this section, ending with "I have such an awareness that that's not true for everybody." This individual (who self-identified as white) went on to share what they knew about the experiences of friends and neighbors of color who felt much less welcome (and therefore much less safe) in the community.

The importance of connection and belonging was also discussed in portions of the CARES Project interviews related to wellbeing. More details are shared in Section 5.2.2 *Perceptions of Wellbeing in Williamstown* below.

5.1.2.3 Perceptions of Police and Policing

An additional factor contributing to interviewees' expressed sense of safety was their perception of police and policing in the community. For some, a police presence contributed to their sense of safety. Again, these individuals tended to talk about safety as the lack of physical harm or crime:

> "I feel like at the elementary school, in particular - and I don't know when this started - but it's like, so many people drive their kids to school today. So the police made our town safer by being

there at pickup and drop off. Even if they're not directing traffic, they're a presence, which causes people who might have just darted in and out of traffic to think like, 'Wait a minute, maybe I shouldn't do that.' So I think that their presence helps to make things safer."

"I was thrilled to see that [the police] had a presence, because to me, that means the out-of-towner who's coming into town thinking they're going to break into something, they see boots on the ground, feet in the street, that's part of policing too. And that's a deterrent. And I love the fact that that's going on and we're able to staff those shifts and be out there and have a presence. That's what keeps us safe."

For others, the presence of police detracted from their sense of safety. These individuals also tended to talk about safety in physical terms, but they attributed their lack of safety not to the presence or threat of crime but to the nature of policing in the United States and how this plays out in Williamstown specifically. Those for whom the presence of police detracted from safety often commented on the weapons police carry, as well as on the desire for a community that actively participates in keeping one another safe (physically, emotionally, socially, and financially) rather than relying on armed officers.

"I feel nervous when I see them in the school parking lots. I don't know why they're there. And I think it's a little weird. So that actually makes me feel less safe. I don't like the idea of having armed police officers directing traffic in the school parking lot."

"It's sort of like, I don't trust police with guns any more than I would trust anybody else with a gun. Police don't make me feel safe."

"[Police] make me feel less safe. And especially what we've done as a town to edify their place and role, just even by where we put our money. I moved here because I feel safer here. This is 100% true. I also feel somewhat less safe now than I did when I [lived here before], because in the meantime, we built a multi-million-dollar structure and gave more cars and more drones to the police. So having nothing to do with any of the human resources debacles in the past years, having nothing to do with that, just the edifice and the structural changes that we have done as a community makes me feel less safe moving back."

Again, it is important to note that the lack of safety these interviewees express feeling is not related to individual members of the local police department but to the system of policing in U.S. society and the way that system is enacted locally. These individuals would feel safer in Williamstown if the role of police were perceived and embodied differently. This idea was repeated much more frequently, and by a larger and broader swath of interviewees, in discussions of wellbeing. This is reported in more detail in Section 5.2 *Wellbeing in Williamstown* and Section 5.3 *Who Is (or Should Be) Responsible for Safety and Wellbeing in Williamstown* below.

5.2 Wellbeing in Williamstown

The Social Work Advisory Group selected "wellbeing" as one of the core concepts to be explored by the CARES Project not in spite of but because of its breadth of meaning. Many of the issues raised by community members in the lead up to the project were less explicitly about safety – particularly in its physical sense – and more about inclusion, belonging, and overall wellness, both on individual and communal levels. Using the term "wellbeing" allowed for more in-depth examination of all of these concepts, as well as of the perceived role(s) of the

community, public officials, and members of the police department in creating and maintaining a sense of community and wellness in Williamstown.

As is evident from the findings detailed below, interviewees had a variety of ideas about the meaning of wellbeing, as well as about the relationship between wellbeing and safety. Recognizing this variety is critical to understanding why some community members feel more "at home" in Williamstown than others and, more importantly, to imagining changes that will improve the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

5.2.1 What is Wellbeing?

When asked to describe their sense of wellbeing in Williamstown, interviewees tended to focus on two general themes: 1) basic human needs and 2) sense of community and belonging. In some ways, these themes overlap with the categories of safety described above, with basic human needs (like physical safety) mainly capturing the more tangible aspects of wellbeing and sense of community and belonging (similar to emotional/social safety) capturing the less tangible or subtler aspects. As with safety, these should not be thought of as hierarchical but rather as separate but interrelated interpretations of a single concept.

It is also important to note that within the two general themes, interviewees talked about both their own individual wellbeing and their perceptions of the wellbeing of friends, neighbors, loved ones, and the broader Williamstown community. Again, recognizing the breadth of ideas interviewees considered when speaking about wellbeing allows for a more nuanced understanding of why some community members expressed feeling more at ease and welcome in Williamstown than others.

5.2.1.1 Basic Human Needs

The number of interviewees who touched on basic human needs in their discussions of wellbeing (about 1/3 of all interviewees) indicates that the ability to meet such needs, including physical and mental health, housing, and food, is a fairly common interpretation of wellbeing.

5.2.1.1.1 Access to Physical and Mental Health Care. One of the most frequently mentioned interpretations of wellbeing had to do with individual health/wellness and the ability of community members to access the care needed to maintain it. While many interviewees expressed having a fairly strong sense of individual wellness, this often seemed to be in spite of, rather than because of, their ability to access care locally. In other words, these interviewees considered their physical and mental health to be core components of their wellbeing but recognized that this individual wellness required a certain level of resources and was therefore not shared by all community members.

Some interviewees offered fairly general comments about access to care:

> "For the most part, I think [Williamstown has] been a healthy place for me and my family, except for health care. The lack of physicians and facilities is disturbing. So that's a problem."

> "I would say access to health care is a big problem in the region."

> "It's a frustration that we don't have enough doctors in this community so that you have to wait a long time, especially if you go to a new doctor or specialist."

Others spoke about the difficulties that particular population groups, such as lower income and LGBTQIA+ individuals, face in accessing care in Williamstown and the surrounding area:

"I think that our medical health access in our community is no different than other small towns, maybe a little better. But it reflects what I view as privilege, in that health care, depending on your status, your economic status determines the quality of medical health and that many people in our community do not have access to medical health."

"[My needs are] met but just not as locally as I would like them to be. And I don't mean just doctors. I'm talking like there's no dental care for kids who are on MassHealth, for adults who are on MassHealth, there is none around here. You end up having to really travel for dental care. You have to travel for just about everything."

"We do travel further for medical care for certain things. As a queer person, the community is definitely less here, and I travel further for queer-specific medical care."

Still others discussed the challenges of accessing mental health care specifically:

"Sometimes navigating even finding a doctor, let alone a mental health professional, is very hard as a newcomer. There aren't openings."

"Access to mental health care here is very hard to find, which I find a little disconcerting."

"I had a family member with mental health issues, and I felt that it was evident that our services out here were nowhere near even sort of baseline helpful. And I was more concerned that out here there would be more labeling and more ostracizing than sort of skilled inclusivity awareness."

"I don't think we have enough wellbeing around mental health at all. I think we are hugely lacking in services, and we're lacking in good services."

"There's definitely a huge lack in mental health services."

It is worth noting that members of the Williamstown Police Department were among those who interpreted wellbeing as impacted by access to care, specifically mental health care, and commented on the lack of resources available in the local community. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5.3 *Who Is (or Should Be) Responsible for Safety and Wellbeing in Williamstown*.

5.2.1.1.2 Housing. In addition to health care, a number of interviewees discussed other basic needs that must be met in order to maintain a sense of wellbeing. These included access to housing, particularly for those with fewer financial resources.

Like access to health care, access to housing was mentioned by some interviewees as a way of acknowledging that their own wellbeing needs were met but that this was not true for everyone in the community:

"I really feel like I have so much privilege, you know, I have a roof over my head, I'm never hungry."

"I think it's a hard place for lower income people to move into, because I worry about affordable housing. But in general, I think it's really a pretty high class and high quality-of-life place to live."

Others spoke from the personal experience of struggling to afford housing in Williamstown and therefore feeling a lower sense of wellbeing in the community:

> "The thing that compromises [my wellbeing] the most is the cost of living here…I'm making a decent salary, and if I wasn't making a decent salary, I don't know where or how I could afford to live here. And even with the respectable salary that I'm making, I am living month to month, and I can't afford to go without a paycheck, and that is in large part due to the cost of housing and other expenses here."

> "If you're a single mother with a child, and you get that one bedroom, and you're working 35 hours a week, half of your monthly salary goes to rent. That doesn't make sense…The neighborhoods that have these low-income apartments are not really affordable, so people have to struggle to live here, but they want to live near family, they want to go to a decent school, they want to feel that they're in a safe community. There's a lot of reasons people move to this town or want to raise their kids or whatever. But it's not accessible."

5.2.1.1.3 Food Security. Similarly, several interviewees spoke about food security, again highlighting that the ability to meet basic needs is a core component of wellbeing.

As with housing, a small number of people commented on their privilege or fortune in having the resources to meet their own needs and recognized that there are supports in town for those who do not share this privilege:

> "I don't have any food insecurity."

> "Food insecurity was one thing that I became aware of, because we do Meals on Wheels on weekends, so I was aware that there were Meals on Wheels and that connected with that was a serious food insecurity."

Others spoke from more personal experience about the impact of food insecurity on one's sense of wellbeing:

> "To wake up in the morning and spend your day on what are you going to make for dinner? How creative can you be and fill everybody up? It shouldn't have to be that way. We know what that way is…You do the best that you can just to try to make ends meet. In that regard, Williamstown doesn't give us peace of mind. It doesn't give us that feeling of wellbeing."

> "I take care of my kids and things like that all on my own. We eat healthy, we have plenty of food, plenty of everything to just be able to live, you know? So my wellbeing is really fine. But I have neighbors who you can clearly see are struggling a little more. I have neighbors who aren't eating properly, because we all know the proper food is more expensive than the processed stuff. And at the end of the day there's nobody really around to check. I mean, I haven't seen any nonprofits or anything really going around to see if everybody's okay."

All of these comments about basic needs point to an understanding of wellbeing as tangible and, perhaps more importantly for this report, as requiring a sufficient amount of resources to achieve in Williamstown.

5.2.1.2 Sense of Community and Belonging

While many community members interpreted wellbeing in very tangible ways, others spoke of it as less concrete, focusing on feelings of community and belonging as measures of both individual and collective wellbeing.

5.2.1.2.1 Feeling Connected. Individually, some community members expressed a strong sense of wellbeing, because they have established networks on whom they can rely for support and assistance:

> "Feelings of community contribute to my sense of wellbeing, so if I feel a community feeling, I feel connected, that affirms that sense of wellbeing."

> "I have a sense of wellbeing, because I feel like my neighbors look out for me, not just in a safety perspective, but that we bring each other food or we have block parties, and I can count on them. There's a sense of people knowing each other, and that makes me feel good about being in this community."

> "The group of friends that we have and the people that we associate with, we work together, we help each other. And I feel very healthy here from that perspective."

> "The fabric that is in Williamstown that we've woven ourselves into feels strong, feels resilient. If we needed something, I know of way more than one person I could call and say, 'We're having an issue.'"

For these interviewees, a large part of wellbeing has to do with relationships and feeling a sense of community, and they seem to have found this in Williamstown. Other interviewees who shared an interpretation of wellbeing as belonging found this lacking in their own lives:

> "I think the wellbeing question is really interesting. And that ties to people finding a place in town where they belong and feeling welcome. And maybe that's just where I go because I know there are so many of us who struggle with that. Coming back to town and being a mom, a little bit older and not feeling particularly welcome in places and feeling like, 'What the heck? I think I belong here, right? Like I should belong here, you know?' And I've had this conversation with a lot of people."

> "I think for me, wellbeing is very much tied to belonging. And I struggle with belonging in Williamstown, and I don't know that it's something, I don't know that I could point to like, 'This is what Williamstown is not doing about this.' I feel my identities in this town are quite underrepresented, and, as I've gotten older, I've found myself really seeking community with folks who share some aspects of my identities."

What contributes to some people feeling a sense of belonging while others do not is discussed in Section 5.2.2 *Perceptions of Wellbeing in Williamstown*. What is important here is to note the way interviewees are defining wellbeing itself – as connection and a sense of belonging.

5.2.1.2.2 Feeling Part of a Community that Cares. A related but distinct interpretation of wellbeing has to do with feeling like you are part of a community that cares about and values its members. This sense of wellbeing came up most often as interviewees talked about the level of division and tension that existed in town at the time when CARES Project interviews were being conducted. For those quoted below, wellbeing was not simply a feeling of

having individual connections in town but a sense that community members – as a whole – cared about one another, even if they did not agree on every issue that arose. Those who interpreted wellbeing in this way felt a strong lack of wellbeing or wellness in Williamstown (and beyond) at this particular time:

> "I guess the spark that really impacted me was the police union letter. And I think ever since I read that, I think I've had a very different relationship to the town, and I'm considering very seriously actually leaving, because I just, my sense of how that dialogue has gone and how my brief attempts to enter the conversation were dealt with. I feel so demoralized by the issue, and it affected me on a personal level so deeply that I think my sense of wellbeing is very low in the town right now."

> "I feel very off kilter, personally, in terms of my personal sense of wellbeing, and the events that have happened in our community and the toxic nature of the dissension and division in our community are certainly part of contributing to a sense of unease and feeling unwell. Things in our society feel very broken and toxic and dysfunctional, but it's much bigger than just Williamstown."

> "I also feel the tension in town, and conflict is not always handled very well. I think people are really trying, but some people don't want to hear it, and I'm disturbed by that. That undercuts a sense of wellbeing when you know that there are high emotional guards up."

This interpretation of wellbeing is personal, in that the interviewees expressed being individually impacted by the division and tension in the community, but it extends beyond their individual relationships and connections. Wellbeing, for these interviewees, has at least as much to do with how community members – writ large - treat one another.

5.2.1.2.3 *Feeling Part of a Community that Welcomes All.* A third interpretation of wellbeing related to community and belonging is more explicitly collective. A number of interviewees emphasized that the concept of wellbeing did not end with their individual feelings of connection or their own desire to be a member of a community that cares but also included how welcome *everyone* felt in the community. For these interviewees, their own wellness was intricately tied to the wellness of those around them:

> "I think that being in a community where you feel valued, and you know all your friends feel valued, being in a community where you know you're not going to be questioned for being in the wrong place just because of the color of your skin or whatever. Those things are really important parts of wellbeing."

> "I'm a privileged person. I would say that my needs are being met, except that I have a need for everybody to be taken care of."

> "Seeing some of the other things that are happening, like the Hitler photo in the police department, affects things a little bit, because that makes it feel a little bit less comfortable. And knowing a lot of the students that I work with, knowing that hits them hard as well, that affects, you know, I care about them a lot. I want them to feel comfortable in the community. I think that's really important to me as well, not just my own wellbeing but the wellbeing of the people around me. And I know that we all have different experiences in this community."

"I would just conclude by saying, as a white, 75-year-old, professional individual, I feel like I have been treated well. I've now come to understand much more clearly, that that has not been the case with many other people, and if one person in our community's not treated well, in my opinion, none of us are treated well. And that's what needs to be addressed."

Like safety, wellbeing is interpreted in a variety of ways by members of the Williamstown community. It is both a concrete, tangible concept (i.e. good health, a home to live in, food to eat) and a less tangible one. Understanding the complexity and nuance in interviewees' interpretations of this concept allows for a deeper exploration of the factors contributing to stronger and weaker senses of wellbeing in the community and to interviewees' ideas about what might be done to enhance wellbeing for themselves and others.

5.2.2 Perceptions of Wellbeing in Williamstown

However they interpret the concept, it is clear that some members of the Williamstown community feel a much stronger sense of wellbeing than others. Analysis of interview transcripts points to several factors that tend to support wellbeing, as well as many that detract from it. It is important to note that the vast majority of interviewees mentioned factors in each of these two categories, meaning that most people felt that their wellbeing was supported in some ways and not in others. There are also differing (and nuanced) opinions about who bears responsibility for the wellbeing of the community and its members, and these are articulated in Section 5.3 *Who Is (or Should Be) Responsible for Safety and Wellbeing in Williamstown*.

5.2.2.1 What Supports Wellbeing in Williamstown?

As a community interested in supporting the wellbeing (and safety) of all members, it is critical that Williamstown develop an understanding of both what supports wellbeing and what detracts from it. Recognizing the factors that already contribute to wellbeing in this community will allow the town to build on these strengths. For at least some community members, these factors include: community events and opportunities to connect with neighbors; the area's natural beauty and access to recreation; access to the arts; the quality of schools; and resources provided by Williams College.

5.2.2.1.1 Community Events and Opportunities to Connect. A number of interviewees mentioned community events and other opportunities to connect with neighbors as factors that enhance both individual and collective wellbeing in Williamstown. A few (of many) examples include:

"[The town tries] to provide a welcoming infrastructure, places to recreate, places to gather, Fourth of July celebrations and activities on the football field and things that allow people to come together…That small town stuff is just wonderful."

"There are moments where I feel like, 'Oh, this is why I live in a place like this.' And for me that happens on the Fourth of July, when tons of people are at the golf course watching fireworks. It happens during the holiday walk in December when everybody is out, and people are supporting small businesses, and kids in town are showing off their talents and things…In moments like that, I feel really good about things."

"I think the town does a lot of things that bring people together. They do Summer Sundays in summer, the Hay Day down with the Williamstown Historical Museum. We have Destination

Williamstown that publicizes events that are going on in town, the Chamber of Commerce does a lot with local businesses and tries to get the word out, so people shop local, and that to me is community building."

It is telling that when asked what more the town could do to support wellbeing, many people suggested more of these community events, as well as other ways of bringing community members together. This is discussed more Section 6 *Recommendations and Next Steps*.

5.2.2.1.2 Natural Beauty and Access to Recreation. When asked how they would describe Williamstown to someone who had never been there, more interviewees talked about the town's natural beauty than any other single descriptor. This theme reappeared as interviewees talked about their own wellbeing later in the interview. It is clear that many, many people in Williamstown feel that the area's natural beauty and access to outdoor recreation enhance their sense of wellbeing, and they credit the Town and local organizations with maintaining natural spaces, hiking trails, and the newly added bike trail:

> "We love the outdoors. We feel sort of nourished by being proximate to that."

> "Personally, my sense of wellbeing is good, because I have the resources I need to keep myself feeling good, which includes a lot of getting outdoors for activities, hiking, biking. All of that is great here."

> "I have ready access to the outdoors, which is a big part of how I manage my wellbeing to a certain extent. And so in many ways, Williamstown wins on that front, and I think the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation and the State and even the Town, they own a bunch of land, have all done a pretty good job of making land accessible."

> "I would just like to compliment Williamstown on the bicycle, walking trail. I think that's very important to wellbeing."

Overall, between 1/3 and 1/2 of interviewees mentioned access to the natural environment as a factor in maintaining their own wellbeing.

5.2.2.1.3 Access to the Arts. While mentioned by fewer interviewees than the natural beauty, Williamstown's access to arts and culture was also discussed as a factor that enhances wellbeing:

> "Culturally, in terms of the arts, which is really important to me, it's a wonderful place to be. I feel like we're in the woods, and we're in the middle of nowhere, with three wonderful museums and performing arts and people, because of the college in large part but not entirely…That's a big part of what keeps me here frankly."

> "We feel good about being able to walk to the Clark Museum and the Theater Festival, to concerts. All of these things give us a very good sense of wellbeing."

> "The artistic life is a great sense of wellbeing for us here."

5.2.2.1.4 Quality of Schools and Education. Like the arts, education was often mentioned as a priority in Williamstown, as well as a contributor to both individual and collective wellbeing. While there were interviewees

who reported negative experiences with the local school system – including racism, classism, and ablism – many spoke highly of the impact of Williamstown schools on their own and their children's wellbeing:

> "I think that the schools have historically been excellent here, so I think that's important for wellbeing."

> "The other sense of wellbeing is from the way our kids were raised here and how they grew up. They both had very positive experiences in the school systems. They went to Williamstown Elementary and Greylock. [There were a] few bumps in the road like every kid has, but for the most part, they had really good experiences. And they both love coming back here and seeing people, and they have friends from here. And so knowing that my kids were being well educated in a school system that cared and had friends meant a lot."

> "My kids went to Mount Greylock, and it was a very nice place for them to go to high school; they felt they were part of a community."

5.2.2.1.5 Williams College Resources. Interviewees who attributed their wellbeing to the availability of arts and culture and/or education often also commented on the resources provided to the community by its largest employer, Williams College. For these interviewees, the College was seen as contributing to the wellbeing of individuals and the entire community by allowing access to events and facilities and by contributing financially to local schools and other efforts.

> "Because of the College, there are a lot of advantages, cultural things or activities, you know, programs for kids, there's a lot."

> "[It's] a college town, and because of that, there is a vitality, a richness to life here, a diversity of opinions and lifestyles and ethnicities that wouldn't be here otherwise."

> "The College makes a big difference. The way Williams operates as a small college, it really opens itself to the community in ways that, for example, anybody in Williamstown can get a book at the Williams library, and you can't do that at other colleges. Williams is wide open to the community, not completely wide open, but they really make an effort to be accessible to the community."

> "A lot of [wellbeing] for me is provided for by the College. I find for both my physical health and that walking - walking 18 holes is like five miles, with a 20-pound bag over your shoulder - but it was also obviously with my mental health to get outside and just forget about what's going on in the world. And I have that because the College has this fabulous golf course. Likewise, I enjoy watching sporting events. The College provides that to me: competitions that I get to go and watch and be with other people, go with my friends to a game."

It is clear that, for some residents, the resources of Williams College are a large part of what makes Williamstown a healthy and attractive place to live. As will be seen in the sections below, however, others feel that aspects of the College's relationship with the community detract from wellbeing.

5.2.2.2 What Detracts from Wellbeing in Williamstown?

While there are many factors that contribute to feelings of wellbeing among Williamstown community members, there are also factors that detract from such feelings. Very few interviewees expressed entirely positive or

entirely negative views about their own and others' wellbeing in the town, such that some of the same people who talked about benefiting from the factors described above also talked about the factors discussed below.

Again, if the Town is interested in promoting a sense of wellbeing among all residents, it is critical to attend to both what supports and what detracts from this sense. Factors mentioned as detracting from wellbeing include: a sense of insularity; a perceived lack of intentional community-building (including access to information); the so-called "town-gown" divide; lack of health care (particularly mental health care) resources; and various forms of overt and more subtle discrimination and bigotry, including racism, classism, ablism, and homophobia.

5.2.2.2.1 Sense of Insularity. When interviewees were asked to describe Williamstown, one of the most common responses was to talk about the community's insularity. For some, this was the negative flipside of what they perceived as the benefits of living in a small town. For others, it was a major deterrent to feeling welcomed and included in the community. The town's insularity was also perceived by some as a sign of arrogance and intentional separation from the surrounding region and people viewed as "different." Examples of this include:

> "[Williamstown] has a sense of its own self that isolates itself…And that's too bad. We can be our best and worst enemies, and we can have a sense of hubris that is overwhelming at times. And that affects my mental wellness sometimes."

> "I think there's just a real commitment here to 'things are fine.' And 'the bad things are happening over there.' And there's a dividing line."

> "It's like Williamstown is a gated community without the gates."

> "I do think that it's a somewhat insular place, and perhaps in the way that I see it, not as interested in becoming more open to a lot of people who have entirely different experiences that are also valid and that have things to contribute."

5.2.2.2.2 Lack of Intentional Community-Building. A number of interviewees connected the sense of insularity to a perceived lack of community-building efforts in town. The perception here was that if people are not connected to pre-existing social circles, they are not viewed (by others or themselves) as belonging to the Williamstown community and that, furthermore, the town does not take a proactive approach to changing this. Comments about the lack of intentional community-building tended to focus on communication, the availability of information, and the presence (or lack of presence) of a physical hub for community gatherings and events.

> "It's easy to feel isolated here, because there's not a lot of communication. Unless you've been here for a long time and have a network, it's hard to know exactly what's going on in the town."

> "The town is not very good about letting people know what services and facilities are around."

> "It took me probably four and a half of the five and a half years I've been up here to figure out how to contact the Harper Center. My way of doing things is to go online and find the resources and then contact them, and it's very hard to find those resources."

> "I think of wellbeing in terms of providing opportunities to connect with others in this kind of community, and I don't think Williamstown is very good at that."

"I think we could be a richer, emotionally richer, culturally richer, creatively richer, spiritually richer community, if we invested in a community center where it would have recreational needs met for families, for old, for youth, could have a pool, could have fields, could have organized classes, as well as some sort of art center in the same building that would offer classes, an outlet, and that would see intergenerational activities in a neutral place. That would make my mental wellbeing much better."

5.2.2.2.3 Town-Gown Divide. As mentioned above, some interviewees drew direct connections between the community's insularity and lack of community-building efforts on the one hand and the presence and role of Williams College within the broader community on the other. Many interviewees described Williamstown as "a college town," and while some (see above) described this as contributing to their wellbeing, many others talked about it in negative terms. This came across in general comments about the college's economic, physical, and social dominance, as well as in more specific comments about the town-gown divide preventing a true sense of community in Williamstown. Interestingly, these comments came from both individuals affiliated with Williams College and those without College connections.

General comments about the College's dominant presence in Williamstown included:

"[Williamstown is] very much based around the College. That's what makes Williamstown Williamstown. If the College wasn't here, there would be no Williamstown. I think there's some people that don't like that fact, but it's a fact all the same."

"[Williamstown is] very much a college town, a company town."

"I always am aware that Williamstown seems overly dominated by Williams College, and even though a member of my family taught there, and my son is a student there, I'm nevertheless wary of that. I never want to feel like I'm just a Williams person. And I don't really like the fact that Williamstown is, in some ways, overly dominated by one institution."

"I feel almost like I live in a college."

Longtime residents talked about the College's dominance as a more recent phenomenon rather than one that has always existed, implying that the town-gown divide is not inevitable and could be changed if the College and the Town government worked together:

"It used to be a town with a college in it. And now I feel like it's a college with a town in it."

"It used to be like a nice small town feel before the college really took way over."

"It was a college within Williamstown, and now at least it feels sort of, again, I can only speak from my perspective, it feels like the college is Williamstown."

Some interviewees commented specifically on the way the town-gown divide impacts interpersonal relationships within the community, highlighting their sense that those who are not affiliated with the College are less welcome and included:

"We create a distinct town-gown line, and so [people affiliated with the college] stay with themselves. And some of that is because their preschool is self-contained for most of the kids.

Some go elsewhere….[When my kids were in school], you could look at how they divided up the kids in the schools for what levels of math or English or whatever, and it was right down the line. The faculty kids vs the non-faculty kids. I don't know that it's as horrible as it once was, but there are still things that exist that way."

"Because the first question you ever get asked here in this town is, 'Where'd you go to school? Are you from Williams?' And I've had people, when I said no, just walk away from me. You feel like you're a tier down."

"It's hard being in Williamstown and not being associated with the College. We do feel very isolated and not like, not left out, but there's a lot of things that are only available to those at the College."

Finally, several interviewees expressed a desire for the town to take more responsibility for building community rather than relying on the College to provide community resources. While these interviewees recognized the benefits of Williams College's contributions to the town, they felt that there would be less division in the community if the town itself provided more for communal wellbeing. Again, these comments came from College-affiliated and non-College-affiliated community members alike:

"The community that the College makes available to the spouses of College members, it's like, how can you compete with that as a town in a certain sense, in that there's all these resources, and it's insular. And so, in some ways, I sort of resent the College being so wealthy and so powerful."

"So much of what's here is provided by the College, but it really belongs to the College, even though they do many things for the community. I think that there's some kind of weird balkanization and isolation that exists in this town…It seems like we should be able to get past [these divisions] in more ways, and that just doesn't really seem to happen. There don't seem to be as many opportunities for that to happen as I would like to see."

"My sense of participating in certain aspects of Williamstown [is that we] have relied on the College to fill certain gaps that the community probably should have taken on themselves…So we don't have like a communal swimming pool. We don't have a recreation center where we have a pool and basketball courts and things for everybody in the community. And I only know this through visiting other communities. Dalton, for example, has a wonderful community center that helps their community, and I don't necessarily feel that way about [Williamstown]."

"I think that our town needs its own mechanism of welcome that's not just, 'Let the College be there.' I think the town could do a better job of that."

Overall, there were a number of Williamstown residents who would like to see change in the relationship between Williams College and the broader community. The sense is that the more the College dominates the town economically (and physically, through property ownership), the more divided the community becomes, reducing the overall sense of communal wellbeing.

5.2.2.2.4 Lack of Health-Care Resources. As mentioned above, many interviewees talked about wellbeing in terms of physical and mental health and their ability to access resources for health maintenance. For most of these

interviewees, the lack of access to health-care resources in Williamstown detracts from their sense of wellbeing. While physical and mental health may seem to be more focused on individual wellbeing than some of the factors discussed above (insularity, lack of community-building, and the town-gown divide), interviewees – including members of the Williamstown Police Department – also discussed this as a communal issue, impacting the overall sense of wellness in town.

Examples of the lack of healthcare access – both physical and mental - detracting from individual and collective wellbeing include:

> "The lack of medical services in the area do not help my feeling of wellbeing. There's always an x-month wait for any sort of services, be it dentistry, or mental health, or neurology or whatever it is. That is a little bit nerve wracking."

> "I can't find a good doctor that helps or supports me, and just finding quality healthcare is really hard. And that does affect your mental health or your wellbeing, just getting the support you need on a medical level."

> "I feel like we don't have an adequate mental health safety net basically, for children and adolescents specifically."

> "Mental health counseling is very difficult to get. There's not a lot of cultural awareness. There's not a lot of awareness of comorbidities…And you just wait forever."

Challenges with accessing mental health care specifically extend well beyond individual hardship to impact the broader community, as is evident from comments made by members of the Williamstown Police Department. These law enforcement professionals highlighted the need for increased mental health services in the community by sharing their own challenges with meeting community needs:

> "Specific to mental health issues, I think a lot of that gets dumped in our lap because we don't have the proper clinicians or mental health professionals to deal with an obvious rising concern of people's mental wellbeing."

> "And really, we're not doctors. Our only tool in the tool belt is, if there is any danger to themselves or others because of their mental wellbeing, we send them to the hospital in an ambulance to get checked out by a doctor. That's our only tool, because we are not trained clinicians or doctors…So there's definitely a huge lack in mental health services that we would welcome a change in the way that works. And being on the front lines and in the field, I think I have a good handle on what we need. It's just a matter of getting the resources. I don't think it's the fact that people won't give them to us, I think we literally don't have them, we lack clinicians…Having more clinicians available 24-7 would be a phenomenal resource."

> "I have certainly seen an increase in my time here of us dealing with people that really the only option we have is to send them for a mental health eval, because we don't have other options…We have no other options to offer to them, except to send them [to the hospital] and hope that they can somehow get hooked up with the right programs or the right resources that we don't have here in North County."

From the perspective of both town residents and members of the WPD, the lack of access to healthcare – specifically mental healthcare – is a major factor detracting from individual and collective wellbeing in Williamstown.

5.2.2.2.5 Racism. Yet another factor detracting from individual and collective wellbeing in Williamstown is the existence of discrimination and bigotry in the community. Interviewees from every demographic group represented in the CARES Project mentioned instances of racism, classism, ablism, homophobia, and/or transphobia in town. It is clear that these instances – whether experienced personally or by loved ones or acquaintances – have significant impact on community members' sense of wellbeing, both individually and collectively.

Many of the stories about racism shared by interviewees were about the harmful impacts of racist comments and behavior on children of color in the community. These stories and comments highlighted that racism in Williamstown is not a thing of the past but continues to impact the wellbeing of children and their families today. Numerous quotes are included here to highlight the extent of this issue and its impact in the community:

> "[My kids] have experienced some things with the schools. You still have some teachers and staff with their biases. Like one common one that I thought people would know by now, don't touch a person of color's hair without asking permission, and that happened to my son. And there are other things too, like, he was making peace signs with his friends, his white friends, but the teacher zoomed in on him and was like, 'What kind of signs are those?', basically accusing him of making gang signs. And his friend was like, 'That is racist.'"

> "[My son] really, really struggled through high school. He was one of very few people of color, and it was awful, awful, awful. His experience through high school at Mount Greylock was terrible…His friends would use the N-word, just like it was normal, and [they'd say], 'Not you' or whatever, right?... Through my son, I feel like my wellbeing needs are not met here, because, as a community, we're not acknowledging the racism that is here, and that's a hinderance, for all of us as a community and for me, to feel comfortable, truly comfortable as a community member."

> "The reality is that the world does not look at a teenage black kid the same way they look at a teenage white kid, they just don't. Yeah, I know, people insist that they do. But that's just not the reality. And I've lived it…[When my son is old enough to drive,] we're gonna have to have some serious talks about how a black kid drives a car. Even in Williamstown, where, in my opinion, people erroneously say racism doesn't exist. It's like saying lead doesn't exist in our environment. It does. We grew up in America. Lead is around. It's in your system. It's in my system. It's in everybody's system. It's the same thing with racism. It's just, it's part of us. All of us. It just is."

> "[I heard] last night about a heart wrenching story of someone whose young child said he wanted to scrape off his blackness, because his friends didn't like it. That makes me think that things are not well in town."

> "It was really bad [when my daughter was] in the second grade, and I realized there was a problem here, right? My daughter was being minoritized right in front of my eyes…And a lot of times, when I brought up issues, people became defensive immediately…[Other parents would say], 'We always try to teach our children to be nice.' But this is not about being nice or not nice.

This is about, you need to let your children know that you can't treat people who you think have narrow eyes, who have small eyes, right? That's the term they used to call her. You need to have a good talk with your children instead of being defensive in front of me. So that's the problem. That's the problem. People think they are nice, right? 'We are good people.' Of course, everybody is nice. Everybody wants to believe they're good people. And all the teachers, too. They are good teachers. But we need to find a way to talk about race in a non-defensive way, in a constructive way."

These stories point not only to the existence of racism in Williamstown and its impact on children and families of color but also to the harmful effects on the community as a whole when this impact is dismissed or ignored. In other words, racism detracts from both individual and collective wellbeing in town.

School-aged children are certainly not the only community members to experience racism. Multiple interviewees commented on harm experienced by Williams College students of color and by adults of color in the community. Examples include:

"Williams students of color have for years told me they do not feel welcome in town. They're not comfortable with the police. They're not comfortable with townspeople."

"One time, I saw someone scream a racial epithet at a Williams student out of her car. And the kid just, like, didn't even bat an eye. And then I realized, Oh, he's probably lived with this. But I was horrified."

"I had a colleague, a black guy, and he was a big exerciser. I saw him in the rec center all the time. He ran a lot in town, too. And he told me he would never run without Williams gear on. Never."

White community members who have tried to express support for their friends and neighbors of color also noted negative experiences:

"I'll tell, for whatever it's worth, a quick story: this summer, I was trying to have some work done at my house, and I asked somebody for some recommendations, and I called the person, and they offered to come out to give an estimate. I met them outside my house, and they pulled into my driveway and quickly pulled away. And so I called and said, 'Oh, you were at the right house.' And they said, 'I know, but I don't do work for people who have Black Lives Matter signs at their house.'"

"We do have a Black Lives Matter sign on our lawn. And we do oftentimes have people driving past yelling really offensive comments at myself and the children."

Finally, one community member of color summarized the connection between individual and collective wellbeing thus:

"Just simply because of my physical appearance, I know I'm having a different experience within Williamstown than some of my fellow community members. And I've really been discouraged at the inability, kind of the closed nature of folks to say, 'Well, because that has never happened to me, I don't believe it.' And I really don't, I don't get that."

While this community member spoke specifically about race in their desire for community members to hear and empathize with each other's experiences, racism was not the only form of discrimination or bigotry reported as detracting from wellbeing in Williamstown.

5.2.2.2.6 Classism. Like racism, classism was mentioned by interviewees from many different demographic groups as a factor detracting from both individual and communal wellbeing.

Some interviewees shared personal stories about the impact of classism on their own wellbeing and sense of belonging in the community:

> "What Williamstown fails me in and has my whole life is the classism. It affects us personally...And I don't know how to break that barrier, to feel welcome, to feel like I have a voice."

> "You hear a mom saying, 'Well, I only let my kids play with other faculty's kids.' Really? Wow, really? Okay, so my kid's excluded because we don't look wealthy enough. I mean, I grew up with that divide. Yeah, I know that divide. I felt that divide."

> "It's sort of like, you know, the people who have the money are the people who call the shots, and they're the people whose needs matter and they're the people whose preferences matter. And then, not only are you not the person with the same wealth, but you're also not worthy of the same consideration. And then there's like this element of shame or identification because you are falling into this category which is not as desirable."

Others spoke more generally about the existence of classism and/or its impact on the community as a whole:

> "I would say that our biggest issues in this community are class issues."

> "It's a hard place to build a life if you don't start with a lot of resources. It can be a very challenging place to live. There's a real striking class divide. And the longer I've been here the more I can see it."

> "My sense is that a lot of it depends on access to resources and economic stability. Having my children grow up in this town and my interfacing with various groups and organizations, it seems to me that people who have well-paying jobs and job security and health insurance are doing quite well. Then there's another group of people that are really struggling...I think there's classism."

> "I think the socioeconomic stratification and segregation in town, while people act welcoming, and there's this wonderful politeness, I think there's a little bit of judginess going on."

> "It feels like for the most part it's quote unquote, good neighborhoods. But then there's also these little pockets where there's socio economic differences, but it's rarely, it's like Williamstown wants to cover those up. We don't talk about those things in Williamstown. That's how I would describe it."

Whether they spoke of classism as affecting individual or collective wellbeing, interviewees expressed concern about what they perceived as the growing wealth of Williamstown, as well as the seeming inability of the town's residents and leaders to engage in dialogue around this subject in order to create potential remedies for the

31

socioeconomic divide. This is quite similar to the concerns expressed about racism in town in that both topics are seen as neglected in community conversations. For many interviewees, the failure to acknowledge that discrimination and bigotry exist in the Williamstown community only exacerbates the negative effects on wellbeing.

5.2.2.2.7 Other Forms of Discrimination and Bigotry. While not discussed as frequently as racism and classism, other forms of discrimination and bigotry were also mentioned as detracting from the wellbeing of community members individually and collectively. Because these stories are difficult to share without revealing identifiable information about interviewees, only the general themes are reported.

Instances of ablism were shared by multiple parents of children with disabilities, several of whom expressed concerns about their children's wellbeing in the community and, in two instances, with police in particular. These parents discussed instances in which their children were treated as perpetrators of wrongs by others (community members, WPD employees, and Williams College Campus Safety staff) who failed to recognize their disabilities, negatively impacting individual and family wellbeing.

Similarly, a small number of interviewees described instances of homophobia or transphobia experienced by themselves or loved ones that made them feel unwelcome in the Williamstown community.

While these stories were not numerous (perhaps due to the demographics of the project sample), they do highlight ways in which individuals from marginalized identity groups experience less sense of wellness and belonging in Williamstown than their white, wealthy, neurotypical, straight, cisgender counterparts.

Understanding what Williamstown residents mean when they talk about safety and wellbeing, as well as what contributes to and detracts from feelings of safety and wellbeing in the community, is necessary but not sufficient for moving toward change as a town. The next step in this process is to explore interviewees' perceptions of responsibility for safety and wellbeing. In other words, whose roles, actions, or attitudes need to change in order for Williamstown to feel safer and more welcoming for all residents?

5.3 Who Is (or Should Be) Responsible for Safety and Wellbeing in Williamstown?

When asked who they thought was responsible for ensuring safety and wellbeing in a community, the vast majority (approximately 80%) of CARES Project interviewees began by saying something like, "We all are." While many people went on to say that certain aspects of safety and wellbeing are delegated by the community to particular leaders - including members of the Town government and the Williamstown Police Department - they first emphasized the collective responsibility that community members have to one another to support each other's safety and wellbeing.

A much smaller number of interviewees talked about safety and wellbeing as primarily individual or family responsibilities. Most of these individuals also agreed that certain aspects of safety and wellbeing require the involvement of professionals, but a handful of people expressed very strong views that no one but the individual holds responsibility for their own safety and wellbeing and that those who feel less safe or less welcome in the community bear the burden of either providing for themselves or proving that their lack of safety and/or wellbeing is the result of someone else's actions and therefore requires outside intervention.

This section shares more details of the CARES Project's findings related to the perceived roles of community members, Town government, and the WPD in providing for safety and wellbeing.

5.3.1 The Role of Community Members

As mentioned above, the vast majority of interviewees talked about safety and wellbeing as collective responsibilities, borne by all members of the community. A much smaller number spoke of the role of community members as individual rather than collective, with each person bearing responsibility for their own (and in some cases their family's) safety and wellbeing.

5.3.1.1 Collective Responsibility

Analysis of CARES Project interviews revealed more than 300 direct quotes about the collective responsibility of community members for safety and wellbeing. For the sake of brevity, a few representative examples are offered here:

> "I think safety is first, it's everybody's responsibility."

> "I think we're all responsible for [safety]. I think there's collective responsibility."

> "I believe we are all collectively responsible for the wellbeing of Williamstown. I believe that if we don't work together to resolve it, we can talk ourselves out of being a great place to live."

> "The members of the community are responsible for ensuring the safety of themselves and each other. I feel like there's no better safety system than a group of people that have each other's best interest in mind."

> "I think that the wellbeing responsibility is something we owe to each other."

> "I think that all of the residents of an area should feel responsible for making a safe community. I live in a small town, because I want to have neighbors that care about me, and I want to know that if my neighbor needs my help, I can do it…In my mind, all of the community makes choices that support the safety of everyone. And more than just physical safety. I think the entire community is responsible for people feeling included, for people feeling accepted and equal."

> "I think it's the community's responsibility to say, 'Are the people who live here feeling safe?' and, 'What are the resources we need to bring to bear to create that safety for people?'"

> "I really believe in collective responsibility. And what that really means to me is investment in the safety of others…That can show up in a lot of different ways, like checking in on one another, caring for one another, advocating for each other's safety, understanding that not everyone feels safe in a community and understanding the reasons why, and advocating for things that would address that."

These – and many more – comments about community members' collective responsibility for safety and wellbeing demonstrate that, across a variety of differences (demographic, ideological, etc.), Williamstown residents agree that being a community means caring about one another's safety and wellbeing. The interviewees quoted above expressed a wide range of views about the role of police, the current climate within the Williamstown community, and contemporary U.S. politics generally, but they were united in their belief that

members of a community owe each other safety and wellbeing and that they can and should provide that for one another. The recommendations included later in this report attempt to capitalize on this common perception of community.

5.3.1.2 Individual Responsibility

While only a small number of interviewees expressed the view that individuals are solely responsible for their own safety and wellbeing, those who did stated this very strongly and unequivocally. Because this report is intended to present the views of all interviewees, examples are included here:

> "I don't believe that full safety and security resides outside of ourselves…Safety and security resides from inside, on how we perceive it and also how comfortable we are."

> "What this survey is about is a feelings kind of issue, which is, well, that's not the town's job. That's a personal mental health issue, not a town issue. If a person has a perception [about safety or wellbeing] that is not real, I don't know what this survey or what a town can do."

> "I'm not prepared to surrender my sense of wellbeing to the public, to the government of the town of Williamstown. It's not their business. They have a limited set of functions: public safety, public education, public works, public space protections, etc. But not wellbeing. Goodness gracious, anybody who claims that for the public space would find an argument with me. I think that's wrongheaded. I think it asks way too much. I frankly think it's an intellectual embarrassment, and I've heard that being floated around in these conversations: 'My wellbeing is threatened.' Whoa…[The town doesn't] get to decide my wellbeing at all. I think it's a false question."

It should be noted that those who expressed these views about individual responsibility tended to also express feeling very safe and well in Williamstown.

5.3.2 The Role of Town Government[2]

Many of those who expressed a collectivist sense of responsibility for safety and wellbeing also shared that the Town government holds a special role in ensuring that community needs are met. In statements to this effect, the Town government was not talked about as separate from the community but as an integral part of how the community takes care of itself. General examples of this sentiment include:

> "I believe government has a responsibility for the health of its citizens."

> "I think the entire government structure is responsible for safety because every department has some relationship to safety."

---

[2] For the purposes of clarity and specificity, this report explores the role of town government and the role of police separately, recognizing that the Williamstown Police Department is part of town government but that interviewees spoke of the WPD, and of policing in general, in distinct ways. Section 5.3.3 *The Role of Police* covers – among many other topics - the relationship between the Williamstown Police Department and other government entities, such as the Select Board and the Town Manager. For this reason, references to that relationship are not included in the comments shared here.

"Town government is the main organization that we, the citizens, said, 'You're in charge of our safety,' whether that's water safety, road safety, traffic, or fire safety, so we've got an infrastructure in place."

Elected officials, as well as the Town Manager hired by elected Select Board members, were often specifically mentioned as being entrusted with responsibility for community safety and wellbeing:

"I think that the Selectors and Town Manager have a huge responsibility for setting the tone for it to be a safe community."

"For the elected leadership, they swear an oath of office, which usually includes the US Constitution and the state constitution. And they are there to protect the people in the town. That is their primary duty, and it includes fiscal and economic and social fabric of life and so forth. It's not just keeping the trains running. It's to assure a certain quality-of-life for people and safety."

"There are ways in which communities delegate to people in Town to help protect and preserve aspects of safety. I think the police department is certainly responsible for one aspect of safety. I think the Select Board, by the tone they set and the leadership example that they and the Town Manager exhibit, also is responsible for safety and people's sense of wellbeing."

Some interviewees explicitly acknowledged that, because members of the Select Board are elected representatives, it is ultimately up to the broader community to hold them accountable:

"It is the Select Board. We vote for them, they're our representatives, and we're voting these people in management to manage the police department, the Town Manager. To me, we vote these people in to pick the right person to manage our town, our taxes, and our safety. And when you can't trust the people that you vote in, then I think in the end, we all have agency in the safety of our community, because we have the power of our voice and our vote."

"I think it's ultimately the community. Whether the government represents the community is our responsibility. We make choices about how much we think we need and how much we think we want. Williamstown is not doing that. I think that those choices are not being made consciously. And I'm glad they're becoming more conscious."

Finally, many interviewees talked about the role of the Select Board, Town Manager, and other Town officials as including not only the logistical or political responsibility for community safety and wellbeing but also the *moral* responsibility to represent ALL members of the community, not just those who are easiest or most convenient to hear. Aspects of this moral responsibility mentioned by interviewees include modeling the community's values, making a concerted effort to understand community members' needs, proactively seeking input from diverse constituents, and sharing information openly and transparently:

"Going forward, there's no solution [to community problems] that doesn't involve the town leadership understanding that they have a moral role in what happens in this town. Whether they use it or not, it will be used on their behalf. If they do nothing, then into that vacuum, into that breach, will step nasty Facebook voices who want to scapegoat people. If you don't show

leadership and help direct the conversation, then you can expect that the most toxic voices will be the loudest. The town leadership needs to do a much better job of using its moral voice."

"All of us have some responsibility, but I think there's people who are entrusted with leadership positions who can set an example or speak to certain values and aspirations of how people should be treated and welcomed and heard, all that kind of thing. Because if you've been entrusted with leadership, it should be for the whole community, not just people who look like you or elected you or agree with you."

"I think it's on town officials to help encourage a sense of wellness and to make it available to people equally. I think that is an issue in this town that there are those of us who are affluent or reasonably well off who can enjoy a lot of the amenities of living here. And then there are a lot of other people who can't afford to even live in town and don't enjoy things, don't feel safe enjoying them, or don't feel welcome. So, that part, I think, is a matter of town management. And that includes town government, town meeting, and then joined by all of us being more sensitive to the diversity of voices and needs in the community."

"I do feel the town government is responsible for [wellbeing]. But I do feel like the town government is not broad based enough in getting the information about what the needs are and what the responses are. Because I know a lot of people who are really struggling. And it's just not really fair that they have to struggle that hard. They need to figure out something to do to help people differently."

"If the leadership - the Selectors and Town Manager - were more proactive about building community, I think that you could break what I think is an unfortunate pattern of maybe 50 people in town being on every committee. And it seems like very little attempt to bring other people in, and that's again, I think, a town responsibility."

"I think there's ways that leaders in town should be more responsible for that feeling of wellbeing, just in terms of trust and leaders, in terms of elected officials, or government, town officials. I think when there's a sense of trust, that ripples out to a sense of wellbeing…I think there could be much more in terms of communication, for people to find access to [information], because again, a lot of the things that feel inadequate or sort of broken right now are along the lines of trust issues. And I think a lot of that could be better through better communication."

While discussion of the role of government in meeting safety and wellbeing needs was not as widespread across interviews as discussion of community members' collective responsibility to one another, it was mentioned frequently enough that these ideas also factor strongly into the recommendations that follow.

5.3.3 The Role of Police

Perhaps the most complicated and nuanced aspect of CARES Project interviews was discussion of the role of policing in general, and of the Williamstown Police Department in particular, in relation to community members' safety and wellbeing.

As covered in the independent sections related to safety and wellbeing above, some interviewees talked about the police as directly impacting their sense of safety and/or wellbeing in town (either positively or negatively)

while others either did not mention the police at all or said explicitly that the police did not play a role in their feelings of safety or wellbeing. The range of reported perceptions of and experiences with policing (and specifically with the WPD) makes it imperative that this report give ample attention to the many ways in which interviewees talked about not only what role the police currently play in the Williamstown community but also what role they think the police ideally ought to play.

The interpretations examined here include those of diverse community members as well as employees of the WPD.

5.3.3.1 What Role do Police Currently Play in Safety and Wellbeing in Williamstown?

Perhaps not surprisingly, interviewees' perceptions of the current role of police in Williamstown tended to be connected to their own individual experiences with policing in general and with the Williamstown Police Department specifically.

Those who expressed having little interaction with police, including the WPD, tended to describe the current role of police as enforcing the law, particularly around traffic. Those who have had direct interaction with the WPD, on the other hand, interpreted the role of the local police department to be one or more of the following: protection from harm by responding to instances of crime or violence; first response when community members themselves feel ill-equipped to handle a situation related to safety and/or wellbeing; meeting the safety and wellbeing needs of some (but not all) community members; and social control.

5.3.3.1.1 Law enforcement. The small number of interviewees who expressed having little if any interaction with the WPD or other police tended to describe the current work of the local police as "law enforcement," most frequently connected to traffic safety:

> "[The primary role of the] Williamstown police department is carrying out the laws of the Commonwealth and serving public order as best they can."

> "I would consider [the WPD's role] to be a limited role in terms of ensuring law compliance. I'm not sure that they have a larger role than basic police work, in terms of responding to calls and ensuring compliance with traffic regulations."

> "It seems like [the WPD's] principal function is traffic safety. As far as I can tell, they do a good job in that."

> "Keeping people following the rules, parking on Spring Street, not speeding, responding to things like accidents and things like that."

> "I never see the police. They used to sometimes park at the top of the street to catch people who were speeding on Main Street, but it does feel like sometimes that they didn't have other things to do than watch for traffic violations."

5.3.3.1.2 Protection from Harm. Many interviewees considered the major role of the Williamstown Police Department to be that of protecting community members from harm by responding to crime and/or violence. There was fairly broad consensus that when a crime had been committed or protection was needed, the WPD would respond. This sense of the WPD's current role in the community tended to be expressed through personal stories such as those shared here:

"When [our house was broken into], we had the police do drive-bys for a couple weeks, which, in that situation, I did feel safer knowing that they were there. I did call them, and I did get help from them. I called the police because I felt unsafe, and I didn't know who else to call. I needed protection…They were willing to walk through the house and do a house sweep. I was not going to do that. So, in that sense, I do feel like they provided me safety in that way."

"[A few years ago] I was running in the evening, and I was followed by a high school student on a bike. And, you know, my heart started to race, and I was like, 'Okay, what do I do?' And I made a turn when I was running, just to see if he was actually following me. And he did, and he slapped me on my behind, like huge handprint mark, and then biked into the woods. I stopped, and I called Williamstown Police, and they responded really well. I got in the police cruiser, they found the kiddo, and I was able to decide what the next step was…If I could write a book about how that would happen, it was perfect."

"I don't really go to them very often, but when I have, they have been really great. We got burgled one year. We came home at like one in the morning, and people were moving stuff out of our house. We caught them in the act…They ended up taking nothing, because we came home, and we called the police, they came out immediately. They were really good. They did all those things you expect, they fingerprinted things. Yeah, they were really great."

These stories, among others shared by interviewees, demonstrate that community members consider responding to harm, crime, and violence to be important roles of the WPD that its employees fulfill appropriately.

5.3.3.1.3 Default First Responders. Many interviewees also talked about the Williamstown Police Department's role as being primarily one of first response. This was presented as distinct from protection from harm in that these interviewees, including members of the WPD themselves, perceived the WPD to be the default first responders not only to cases of crime or violence but to any problem that community members did not feel equipped to handle on their own.

For some, this was seen as an appropriate and positive role for the WPD, as evidenced by the stories shared here:

"My car did catch on fire on Route Seven, not far from Mezze, and the police came very quickly, and they brought in the fire department, and they put it out very quickly. So that was a good impact on wellbeing."

"[I witnessed] a gentleman who looked like he had some disabilities - he was obviously in a wheelchair but also there were some mental health issues going on. And he was wheeling himself down North Hoosac, on the opposite side of the road from where the sidewalk was. So I pulled over and parked and came over and was talking to the gentleman. I tried to find out if there was anybody I could call, and there wasn't, so I ended up calling the police. And they came, and they were really very, very good with him. I didn't pick up that he was intoxicated, but the police were like, 'Hey, buddy, how you doing? Have you been drinking?' And then he pulled out a pint from the back of his wheelchair. And that never occurred to me, but obviously, that is something that they have encountered. But they were really good. And they called the ambulance, and the ambulance came, and they were very good. I just don't think they could have been any better

with how they handled it. They were very empathetic and thanked me and talked to him like he was an equal. So that was a very positive experience I had with the town police department."

Other interviewees, including some members of the WPD, expressed a sense of apprehension or concern about the police's role as first responders in some situations – not necessarily because the police acted inappropriately in those situations but because the interviewee could imagine an alternative structure or system that might have better met the safety and/or wellbeing needs of the community members involved. The following stories highlight the recognition that first response is currently a role of the WPD and that, in most cases, WPD members fulfill this role well, while also expressing some desire for alternatives:

"[The police] have no choice…They're the first line…They don't really know what they're coming into. I am an advocate for having a mental health clinician be near or with them, I am for that, but what are you going to do if you don't have that? They have to go. The burden falls on them by default."

"I wish that the police were able to utilize crisis services better. For example, when my [family member] was arrested, she was in crisis. And rather than saying, 'Hey, we're calling crisis to make sure that we can address the situation,' the officer was really physical, really authoritative and intimidating…We were like, 'Wait a minute, this is a huge overreaction. We needed a little de-escalation.'…I think that the police need to be that initial response, because they can literally bring you outside or wherever, to a separate space, and then crisis services can respond. The catch is, crisis will respond and say, 'We can't get there for four or five hours,' right? And that's not fair to the police officers, because that is not their hat."

"We have one person that calls [the WPD] to complain about a variety of things, and it's the same things every time, every phone call. And some days, she's fine, and you can get to the root of whatever she's calling for that day. And other days, it becomes a rant, where you feel like you need to intervene and say, 'I understand your concerns, but that's not something that I can address. I've told you that several times.' And sometimes I think they're just calling for help, because they have no one else to call to discuss the concerns, and [we need] a resource for that."

"Well, we have a lot of interactions with people with mental health issues. I think police have to play a role initially, but ultimately we need more mental health providers, because we [the WPD] play psychologists, we play mental health professionals, we play that role constantly. We can only do so much with what we have for training, that's the problem. It's tough. Those are the harder calls because sometimes it's hard, you just don't know how to take people sometimes, because we don't have the doctorate, you know, we don't specialize in that. We have minimal academy training you know, you get a week block on mental health, and that's a decent amount compared to having nothing at all, but even in-service, if we do a mental health training, it's an eight-hour block. We need more training, but we need more help."

It seems clear that while community members and police themselves appreciate the first response role of the WPD, they also think there is a need for additional supports for safety and wellbeing in the community.

5.3.3.1.4 Meeting the Safety and Wellbeing Needs of Some. In several instances, interviewees shared stories about members of the Williamstown Police Department protecting the safety, wellbeing, and/or property of

community members, while highlighting that this happens for some, but perhaps not all, residents of Williamstown. These stories demonstrate a perception in the community that protecting safety and wellbeing is an important role of the WPD but that it does not seem to be a role they fulfill impartially:

"The only direct interaction I've had [with the WPD] was an incident involving the vandalism of a campaign sign. And it became a public incident, the police commented on it publicly. And it was the theft of the sign of someone who I would have to say represented more of a 'keep things as they are' view. And on that same day that that incident became public, and the police publicly commented on that, I actually witnessed the theft of a sign of the other person's [in the same political race], who was, I guess you could say, identified with supporting reform in the town. I saw someone in a pickup stop, pick it up, put it in their car and drive off. I told the homeowner, and the incident was reported to the police...And then I had interactions through email with the police over the next few days about the incident. And the best I know, it was never brought up publicly. There were never any charges brought. And they wouldn't tell me the disposition of the case. I just thought it was odd that on the same day, they are publicly commenting on one case, I witnessed the very same type of theft, and yet nothing ever happened. It was one of those things that again, because of my lack of trust, it made me think whether there was a double standard here. I don't know."

"[A family member] was working one summer on the Hudson River, and she had a weekend off or something, and she came home and then realized that she had left her driver's license on board the ship. So she thought the best thing to do was to get in her car without a license and drive down to Hudson. She was on her way down Route 43, and I guess she was a little over-anxious to get her license back so to speak, so she drove down 43, she saw the [police] lights behind her, and she pulled over. The officer was very polite, treated her very well and said, 'Did you know that you were going over the speed limit?' And she was profuse in her apologies, and then he said, 'Show me your license.' And so she had to offer another round of apology. So he called her by name and said, 'Well, since I just had lunch with your father, I guess we'll let this go this time.'"

"My son [who is black] was renting in Williamstown, him and his girlfriend who's white...He had a dirt bike, and he was riding his dirt bike around the property, just kind of taking a few spins around. Well, one of the neighbors called the police, police come...I had been on my way over, so I show up there, and it was like they were attacking, and I was like, 'Whoa, what is going on here?' And they were like, 'We can have you arrested for driving without a license.' And so I go over there and I'm like, 'Hold up, what is going on here?' And the police officer was like, 'Who do you think you are? Shut up, sit down.' He was pointing to me like I was a dog, telling me to shut up. 'You don't talk unless I tell you.' I mean, never in my life had I been treated like that...And to see like three police officers for a 22-year-old riding a dirt bike, because he went across property lines, outside of his property, that they could arrest him. If he was white, what would they have done?"

"I've been stopped by police while driving in Williamstown, and one was because I didn't stop at the crosswalk. I didn't have my license on me at the moment, and I said to the police officer, 'I don't have my license. I live a mile right there.' And he said, 'Well, you didn't stop at the crosswalk.' And then I said, 'Don't you know who I am?' And he looked at me and he said, 'Are

you [name's] sister?' It was that kind of connection that we were able to make, and I was like, 'Yeah, did you graduate with my brother?' I sort of talked my way out of it…As I've said, the white privilege that I wear makes my experience with police officers different than others."

It is important to note that both individuals who have benefitted from the WPD's protection and those who have not reported a perception of what one interviewee described as "special networks" in Williamstown – groups who seem to receive preferential treatment from the police. The majority of these interviewees expressed a desire for the WPD to provide the same type of protection to all community members, a topic explored further in Section 5.3.3.2 *What Role Should Police Play in Safety and Wellbeing in Williamstown?*.

5.3.3.1.5 Social Control. The final role that some interviewees view police as fulfilling in Williamstown is one of social control, often through intimidation, whether intentional or not. For these interviewees, both police in general and the Williamstown Police Department in particular come across as overly aggressive and intrusive, not simply enforcing the law in order to "protect and serve" but doing so in unnecessarily intimidating ways. This interpretation of the role of police was shared both in terms of personal experiences/stories and a more general sense of how the WPD operates in the community. Examples of both are provided here:

"One interaction I had with the police was shortly after I moved here. It was about nine o'clock at night, and I was dropping off books at the library into the slot, and a police officer pulled up next to me with his lights on. And it was a really disconcerting interaction. I guess he thought I was doing something at the library. I don't know. But it was upsetting to me, because I remember it was one of the only times that I had time to run errands, and after that interaction, I was like, I can't go back to the library again at night because I could have a police officer pulling up on me. And he was really aggressive. It was really bizarre. He wouldn't tell me like, I didn't even know what I was doing. 'Did I do something? Am I not allowed to be here at night?'"

"Some years ago, one police officer did harass my brother when he was on Spring Street, waiting for my elderly parents to get into the car. [The officer] said, 'Move on.' My brother explained, 'I've got people in their 80s who are coming out, and I'm waiting for them,' and he was really hassled at that point."

"I got pulled over one time when I first moved here. I'm a business owner, I work my ass off for my sons, for what we have and everything else. I got pulled over. I have a decent car, and they asked, 'Is this even your car?' The police officer who pulled me over, as I was on my way to a parent-teacher conference for my son, I have both sons in my car, and he asked me is this my car. 'You saw it. When you ran my plates, you saw that it was in my name. So why is there even a question of whose car it is? You see whose car it is.' Just that mentality of trying to figure out who I am but not introducing yourself is what makes me uncomfortable."

"Whenever I see the police, I almost feel like it's an us versus them thing. The police are clearly driving distinct cars, when they get out and walk around, they are wearing a distinct uniform, and they're carrying a whole host of things on their belts, and they have guns. And I think there's a manner of professionalism that some police try to carry with them that doesn't come off as particularly friendly. And I don't think any of that is particularly helpful to their cause of helping people, theoretically, helping people feel safe in the community."

"There's a definite kind of machismo kind of culture and, truth be told, it's always kind of bugged me. You know, they walk around with their guns and their badges and everything else on, and me personally, even as a white guy, I don't always feel safe when I see that. I mean, mostly I do because cops are gonna mostly be on my side in this country, but still, there's something to be said. It's almost like they're going for the intimidation."

"I feel like right now [the role of the WPD is] to be essentially a rock, like a hard wall or a rock in the community. Like when the police arrive that there is no more messing around, people are in trouble and things could get out of hand. I think of the police as like calling in the army in a certain sense, and ideally, it would be a lot softer than that."

Again, those who shared this interpretation of the role of the WPD expressed a desire for the police to operate differently in relation to the community, and this will be explored in more detail below.

5.3.3.2 What Role Should Police Play in Safety and Wellbeing in Williamstown?

In discussing the role that the Williamstown Police Department currently plays in the safety and wellbeing of community members, interviewees (both community residents and employees of the WPD) also shared their interpretations of what the role of the WPD *ought* to be or what they would like to see from the WPD in the future. These ideas clustered around four major themes: responding to crime; being community-oriented and more focused on relationships than enforcement; being community-directed and accountable; and being smaller with more partner organizations.

5.3.3.2.1 Responding to Crime. As was true of their perception of the WPD's current role in the community, many interviewees also perceived their preferred role for the police to be responding to crime. This seemed to be viewed as a fairly straightforward role to be fulfilled by trained law enforcement officers, as demonstrated by the following statements:

"If there is a crime or an act of violence committed, I think [the WPD] should be the calm presence that gets things back in order and sees that justice, not vigilantism, is what takes place."

"I think the police should only be involved when there's really a crime, and that the rest of us need to look out for each other."

"I think the police role really is about keeping us safe from criminal element and instilling that feeling that we're safe and we're able to live our lives. That's their role."

"Police to me are responsible for our safety from criminal types of behavior. Somebody's breaking into your house, you know, who are you going to call?"

Interviewees who expressed this view tended to convey a desire for police to respond to crime (or potential crime) but not to other situations related to safety and wellbeing, at least with their current training and expertise.

5.3.3.2.2 Community Oriented. In addition to responding to crime, a large number of interviewees expressed the desire for the WPD to be more community-oriented, with a stronger focus on relationship-building and support and less emphasis on enforcement. In many interviews, this came across in comments about the increased

militarization of police in the U.S. more broadly and about the impact of this in a small community like Williamstown.

General comments about the desire for a more community- or relationship-oriented police force included:

> "I wonder if there's a role that the police could play that would give them more opportunities for face-to-face contact with people outside a situation where there's an emergency or a crime or something. Because if the police don't have the opportunity to get to know the people and give the people a chance to get to know them outside those stressful situations, you don't have that level of trust. And that's really necessary. I don't know, some way of allowing the police to just meet people and chat with them during their shift. And let people see that the police are human and let the police see that the people are human."

> "I think that the police department needs to shift its direction from being adversarial to supportive and community-oriented. Because of substance use disorders and the rise of opioids and all of that, we definitely need police officers to not go in with a gun, but go in with some real skills: communication skills and health skills. It's a much bigger job than it was in the '80s, and I would say it has to be different."

> "I'd love to see them present at more things. I think that would help build up the sense of trust and like, 'Oh this person is from my community,' but [right now] their role in the community is exclusively as a police person."

Members of the police department also expressed a desire to be more known and trusted by the community:

> "It would be great to see and know that the community as a whole knows that we are people too and that we care about our residents. We want them to feel safe. We want them to know that the officers are there for them and want to help them. And I think that there is a large part of the population that knows that, but we don't know that they know that. And I'm not sure what the best way to see that change happen is, but that's probably I think, the biggest change that I'd like to see."

More specific ideas about the presentation of police as armed enforcers and a desire to "soften" this presentation in order to signify a more relationship-oriented approach included:

> "They look armored, and they look very aggressive. Their uniforms are very, very clearly military, weaponry on their body…This doesn't resonate with me here in Williamstown."

> "There's just a hammer for now, somebody with a weapon…Is there another option that could help soften some of this stuff up? A trained officer that's not wearing military gear or is less military about it?…And yes, I get it. You want to stay safe. I want you to stay safe, too, but you're also scaring the shit out of people. It's not really about them. It's about everybody."

> "They've got a gun. If the only tool you've got is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Unfortunately, that's the people that we generally attract to that profession."

"I often think that police could do a lot to reduce the anxiety by, do they really need to wear the uniform that they wear? If they want to carry a weapon, you know, that's fine, but I think they could lower the temperature a lot just by the way they dress….And partially, it strikes me that people who would be attracted to being police like wearing that uniform. Can you get people who are more interested in building community relations and ensuring safety than enforcement?"

"Take your guns off. You don't have to wear guns to create safety. I would feel safer around a police officer if they didn't have guns and they didn't have those baton things."

"The way that they project, it's forceful, it's pointy, it's sharp, and people just don't feel safe around that a lot of times."

"I'm disturbed by militarism. I'm disturbed when I see their weapons strapped onto their bodies, when I'm driving and they're often directing traffic…they're running around in these brutal looking cars that look sort of more like armored trucks. They don't feel part of the community."

For many, then, the physical appearance of police officers is viewed as signifying their role in the community. Currently, that role is perceived as one of enforcement, while the desired role is one more focused on building relationships within and acting as supporters of the community. While it may seem contradictory to say that the police should respond to crime *and* that they should be less focused on enforcement, what community members seem to be asking for is a relationship-based approach that encourages trust in police, so community members feel comfortable calling them when enforcement is needed. The recommendations provided below respond to this desire while also recognizing that police uniforms and weapons are in many ways regulated by authorities above the WPD and the Town of Williamstown.

5.3.3.2.3 Community-Directed and Accountable. In line with the expressed interest in "softening" the approach of the WPD, many interviewees expressed a desire for the police to be in more of a partnership with the community, determining its role based on the community's expressed needs and maintaining a relationship of accountability and openness to change.

Some of these comments were in direct response to public conversations in the community at the time of the CARES Project interviews and emphasized the desire for the WPD to express a commitment to partnership, accountability, and transparency:

"There should never be an us versus them mindset in your local police force. I've been so concerned by the expressions that I've heard from the Williamstown Police Department that articulates exactly that sense of us versus them. That police union letter [from October 5, 2020, regarding the DIRE committee] gave expression to that idea that the Williamstown Police Department does not view themselves as part of the public, they view themselves as separate and apart from, and as a result, any effort at promoting transparency or reform is interpreted as somehow an assault on them, as opposed to just the community giving expression to its highest ideals and wishing that its police department would instantiate and reflect those values."

"I'd like to see the new chief of police do something publicly to take cognizance of what's come out in the past and then make clear what the expectations are for people on the police force,

being committed to social equity and social justice and having some understanding about the history of racism and the history of inequality and what measures they're taking to make sure that they're hiring people and preparing [employees] to be on the side of the people and providing safety to vulnerable people and historically marginalized people. [I don't want] just a PR job. We need to hear some real sense of vision and accountability."

Other comments spoke more broadly about the perceived willingness (or unwillingness) of the WPD to engage in dialogue with and accept direction from the community it serves:

"I think [the police] need to be deeply listening to the community, much more than they do now, and respond to the community's felt needs around safety."

"[The WPD] should be a part of a larger conversation, back and forth, and evolve, like all other institutions in town. Like educators and health professionals, they evolve, they change the methods and so on and so forth, and so should the police. They seem like they're stuck in some different reality, and they're not very eager or willing to evolve. And that's what they should be."

"[The WPD] should be part of the leadership that develops a culture that allows people to feel safe, allows people to feel comfortable approaching each other with concerns they may have. And to hear about what's been taking place in the police department over many years, as a member of this community, I feel guilty in some ways that I did not make myself aware of what was taking place. I can't speak for other people, but I know it's really shattered my faith in the department."

"It just sort of annoys me at every town meeting that they're fighting over $500 for the Youth Center or Sand Springs Pool or things that have some sort of public utility, and for children in particular, and then the budget for the police is like never ending resources, like a Pentagon of Williamstown that is just like whatever they ask for, they get. And then you drive by the police station, and there are eight or nine cars sitting there…I just think the ratio of presence of the force in the budget, it's out of whack with what we need…I just feel uncomfortable with this, 'We are not beholden to anybody. We don't even need to engage with the public.' I just get very sort of agitated or annoyed by that, because there are so many things in this town that are not funded, that should be funded, like with senior citizens or children or other sort of basic services, and that money is sitting in an unused car in the police station."

Among all of these comments was a recognition that the type of relationship community members want to have with the police department will require time and effort to build. This idea is exemplified most directly in this comment, which – importantly – notes the need for humility from all parties as change is attempted:

"I think the message I'd want to send to Select Board, town management, and others is, as a community, we need to commit resources to prime professional guidance on how to reset going forward, and then having committed those resources, allowing that process the time it's going to take to get to some concrete steps. And then to do the whole thing grounded in humility, because none of us know the answers other than from our own narrow perspective. So how can we possibly think we're right? So patience, humility, thoughtfulness, those things I think can help us get to a completely different way to picture the questions you've asked me about safety,

wellness, access for all, so that you end up with a community that is inclusive and supportive, healthy, happy."

5.3.3.2.4 Smaller with Partners. In addition to the desired changes described above, a number of interviewees expressed an interest in the WPD playing a smaller role in the community. These interviewees would prefer to see the police partner with other service providers rather than serving as the first responders for every safety and wellbeing need in the community.

Some interviewees described a re-envisioned police department that would include both law-enforcement officers and other employees who might respond to needs that did not require weapons or force:

> "If we're gonna have two cars on the overnight shift, I'd rather one of them was a trained community liaison officer, whose job is to talk to people and call the other one if they need to arrest people…When dispatch gets the call of, "They're fighting again at 22 River Street,' they send the community engagement officer, liaison officer, whatever it is, and when there's like, 'Shots fired at 22 River Street,' they send the police officer on duty."

> "You could have people who worked in a central station, some of them could be officers who carried weapons that responded to a very specific kind of incident, and then you'd have other people who responded to like mental health or substance abuse instances. And then you could have people that showed up to help deal with neighborhood issues. And you could have your force focused across what everyone was best at, with an aim towards sort of problem solving and making everyone feel better at the end of the day."

> "Given the sort of militarization of police forces and their budgets and whatnot, I do think it makes sense for the responsibility that is currently assigned to the police to be separated into things that we might need armed people to do and things that we almost certainly don't need armed people to do."

Others spoke about a separation of services that would place supports for mental health and wellness outside of the police department but still partnering with officers when needed:

> "I do think that the people who are walking around with guns and that don't have, for example, mental health training, shouldn't be doing mental health interventions. [And] traffic policing, in other places in the world, is done by unarmed folks. So there could be a traffic monitoring unit. They wouldn't have to be called the police, wouldn't have to be armed."

> "We don't have mental health support for most people in this town in general, but if there was some way to have some first responders that could be the main responders, maybe even with police back up, even as a transition but that they're not the ones having to do the main interaction. They're just there to really protect the first responder who has the training in mental health support. If someone else could be the main responder, maybe with a police officer standing there, that would feel a lot safer."

Still other community members expressed a desire for wellbeing needs to be met in completely new and distinct ways, only connected to the police department when trained service providers determined the need for armed support. Because this idea is not explicitly about the role of police but rather about the development of an

alternative system for safety and wellbeing provision, comments to this effect are detailed in Section 5.3.4 *Alternatives to Current Safety and Wellbeing Structures* below.

5.3.4 Alternatives to Current Safety and Wellbeing Structures

Over and over again throughout CARES Project interviews, community members expressed a desire for someone other than armed police officers to respond to calls for assistance that were viewed as outside the training and expertise of law enforcement. The desire was not simply for a mental health practitioner to accompany police to relevant calls but for an entirely separate system supporting noncriminal safety and wellbeing matters in the community.

Some interviewees stated this broadly as a way of demonstrating community members' collective responsibility to support one another's basic needs:

> "I'm definitely more interested in building toward a community where the systems aren't putting people in as much risk or at jeopardy, so that there are fewer vulnerable community members and more stability in terms of those who are vulnerable and marginalized to have more of a situation of wellbeing in their life. The utopian idealistic me is toward abolition, towards, you know, we don't really need to police each other with police if we're taking care of each other and everyone has what they need."

> "We need to start building the community that we want, so that we no longer have a need for police. And in Williamstown, I believe that that is possible sooner rather than later. But it takes community building for us to get there."

Many others spoke of the possibility of developing a separate, organized system, funded by the community and staffed by paid practitioners specializing in mental health, domestic violence, and basic wellness. Representative examples are offered here:

> "I think that over time, we have abdicated or assigned to the police roles for which they are not trained and do not have the support. I'm thinking specifically about domestic violence and mental health issues…If don't want them to do that role, I don't agree with defund the police, but I agree with refund, rejigger, reallocate."

> "I can imagine having a phone number I could call where I wasn't calling the police department and say, 'Hey, I'm trying to figure out if this is a situation where maybe some help would be available.' When you call the police, that's going to go on their blotter, and it's incumbent on them to respond, and I guess it would be nice to feel like there's some kind of helpline or something that can help people navigate a situation, like someone's having a mental health crisis. I don't think police should respond, but what are the resources?"

> "I think that this model of community safety where it has trained professionals that are trained in most of the calls that the police now take, I think that would create a greater sense of safety. Not just sense, I think everyone would be more safe, whether it's someone who's having mental health challenges, or whether it's a domestic violence situation."

"I would much rather see somebody who's trained to deal with those issues. Whether it's a social worker for mental health issue or a conflict resolution person, something like that. It doesn't seem like the police are trained to do that. And plus, nobody likes to see a police car pull up into your house when it's not really a crime."

"I think, again, it doesn't have to be law enforcement, because social workers allow for the possibility of communication. I don't want to say restorative justice, but I'm thinking along those terms, where there can be some sort of communication between two people who are having a misunderstanding. Police officers put a hard stop on it, and you have to listen to them because of their authority, or they have to use some physical force to interrupt the cycle. And that doesn't fix anything. That just stops it for a moment. That doesn't get at a systemic solution. And so it's just gonna happen again. And so let's create, let's give people tools to stop the problem happening again. Maybe that's a fantasy world, but that's the world I want to live in."

One community member referenced conversations with WPD leadership in which they agreed that an alternative system would be beneficial to all:

"What I am hearing through my conversations with the chief is there is an agreement that many of the calls that the police respond to are really folks who need to be connected to other resources. Mental health calls, substance use disorder, down the line. And the police are not homeless shelters. They are not domestic violence shelters. They are not treatment centers. They are not mental health counselors. So to me, community safety is created by those other systems far more than they are created by policing systems. And I am interested in seeing us, when someone calls for help that the right person responds, rather than just having police officers who are often not appropriate and really can't help to solve the problem and often are aware of that."

There is broad recognition that, in a town the size of Williamstown, developing a distinct system for safety and wellbeing might not be practical, especially in the short-term. At the same time, the number of community members who expressed interest in exploring alternative systems does seem to indicate a willingness to consider reallocating safety and wellbeing resources in the long-term. This is discussed in more detail in the recommendations below.

Section 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow are drawn directly from the CARES Project Findings presented in Section 5 of this report. For purposes of clarity and action planning, the recommendations are categorized into four groups, although it is important to note that there is overlap between these groups and that the order in which they are listed is thematic rather than hierarchical.

6.1 Communication

Among the clearest and most strongly expressed sentiments in CARES Project interviews was the desire of community members for connection and belonging and the sense that community members themselves can and should provide this for one another. Along with this sentiment, interviewees also acknowledged that community members have entrusted Town officials – including Select Board members, the Town Manager, and other community leaders – with playing critical roles in leading this work. To that end, the recommendations around communication offered here begin – but certainly do not end – with the work of Town officials. An ad hoc communications committee may be helpful in moving these recommendations forward.

6.1.1 Long-term: Develop a Comprehensive and Dynamic Town Communication Network

A first step in increasing community members' feelings of connection and belonging is developing more comprehensive and dynamic systems for communication between town government and the broader community. While this might eventually include a redesigned town website and/or other technological solutions, this should not be the first step toward improving communication.

Instead, it is recommended that the town work with a professional government-community communications firm in order to assess what information needs to be communicated, in what directions (government to community, community members to government officials, community members to other community members, etc.), and finally, what tools are most appropriate for this particular community and its needs. In other words, it is recommended that Williamstown engage in a truly comprehensive assessment of communication led by professionally trained experts in this field.

These experts exist for a reason: government-community communication is difficult and complex. The Town should not cut corners on this or attempt to piece together short-term solutions. Communication is at the heart of community. Investment in doing it well is critical if Williamstown wants to be an inclusive, safe, and welcoming community for all.

6.1.2 Short-term: Engage Town Leaders in Facilitation Training

In recognition that it will take time and resources to develop a comprehensive and dynamic town communication network, it is also recommended that the town engage in shorter term efforts to support the safety and wellbeing of community members through communication, specifically in the government-community interactions that occur during public meetings.

Chairing a local government committee is incredibly challenging, requiring not only content knowledge (i.e. laws, policies, resources, etc.) but also – and perhaps more so – skills for engaging diverse community members in

contentious conversations while also making progress toward solutions. Serving on a local government committee, whether or not one is the chair, requires similar knowledge and skills.

Given the comments made by many CARES Project interviewees about the nature of discourse in community meetings and the sense that this discourse may be preventing some community members from engaging, it is strongly recommended that the Town provide committee members – including but certainly not limited to the Select Board – with support and training in inclusive meeting facilitation. Annual participation in such a training should be required for all committee chairs and invited for all committee members. It would be most beneficial for the community as a whole if this training included the development of shared norms for facilitating public comment periods in committee meetings and for gathering community input through additional, less public, mechanisms.

6.2 Building Community

While connection and belonging can and do develop organically, this generally happens when people spend time together, building relationships and trust through sustained interaction. CARES Project interviewees who talked about feeling a sense of connection and belonging in Williamstown typically spoke of this in terms of their geographic neighborhood or another small group of individuals and families with whom they shared space or interests. Facilitating this type of connection and belonging across an entire community requires intentionality, and there is strong sense among CARES Project interviewees that this intentionality is lacking in Williamstown as a whole.

The following recommendations are intended to address the expressed desire of Williamstown community members to provide for one another's safety and wellbeing, both individually and collectively, through more intentional community building.

6.2.1 Establish a Williamstown Community Center

One of the most straightforward ways to intentionally build community is to provide physical space for community members to gather and interact. CARES Project interviewees repeatedly cited the importance of the Williamstown Youth Center and the Harper Center for seniors in meeting the needs of particular populations in the community. They also repeatedly expressed a desire for a similar center that would bring community members together across generations, professions, neighborhoods, the "town-gown divide," and other demographic differences.

It is therefore recommended that Williamstown establish a community center that provides – at a minimum – space for community members to gather and programming to facilitate that gathering. This will require a significant investment on the part of the town, as it requires not only a large physical space but also staffing to support its operation. Individual programs can be run by volunteer community members and might include art workshops, book or other discussion groups, facilitated dialogue opportunities, and recreational programs, but dedicated staff members will be needed to manage the facility and its scheduling.

In addition to providing gathering space and programming, a dedicated community center might also house community resources and services. This could be in the form of direct service provision on-site or a central referral service to existing services in the town and region. In the long-term, a Williamstown Community Center might become the home of an alternative wellbeing response system such as the pilot program recommended

below. In the shorter-term, such a center can provide much-needed opportunities for community members to build relationships across a variety of differences. These relationships will serve as the foundation for more collective provision of safety and wellbeing.

As with communication, it may be helpful for the Town government to establish an ad hoc committee to work toward the opening of a Williamstown Community Center.

6.2.2 Create a Mechanism for Welcoming New Community Members

Another – and perhaps more easily implemented – way of intentionally building community is to create a mechanism for welcoming new residents. Many CARES Project interviewees commented on the way that Williams College welcomes its new employees and their families into an existing community structure and expressed the desire for the Town itself to do likewise. Some spoke more specifically about a "welcome wagon" system that existed in the past.

Whatever form it takes, it is strongly recommended that Williamstown create some standardized way of letting new residents know that they are welcome in the community. This might include:

- A packet of information mailed to new residents with information about Town resources and services, opportunities for community engagement, and contact information for Town leaders;
- A gift basket delivered to new residents with a sampling of local products and the information listed above;
- A committee of volunteers who personally reach out to new residents to learn about their interests and connect them with others;
- Or the establishment of "newcomers" groups/clubs that bring new residents together to introduce them to local sites, services, and activities while building relationships.[3]

These ideas require varying levels of investment by the Town and all require some way of identifying new residents soon after they move to the area. It is recommended that some mechanism be created and implemented in the near future, which can then be assessed in terms of effectiveness and continued feasibility and adjusted accordingly.

6.2.3 Provide Opportunities for Education and Dialogue Across Difference

Given the many experiences of racism, classism, and other forms of bigotry and discrimination shared in CARES Project interviews, an additional recommendation for intentional community building is the provision of opportunities for education and dialogue across difference. These opportunities might come in the form of trainings for public officials and other community leaders (business leaders, service providers, educators, etc.), as well as sustained dialogue models that bring community members together across differences to learn about one another's experiences and perspectives.

All of these opportunities could be provided in a community center setting, where people might combine more casual interpersonal interactions with structured educational experiences. It is well-documented that one-time

---

[3] Many communities in Massachusetts have newcomers clubs, either for individual towns/cities or for regions. Examples include the Longmeadow Newcomers Club, Westborough Newcomers Club, Lexington Neighbors & Newcomers, and Harwich-Chatham Newcomers Club. Many charge a small fee ($25-50) for an annual membership, although this may not be necessary depending on the scope of the group and its activities.

trainings in diversity, equity, and inclusion lead to less change in institutional or community culture than sustained models that allow for the development of genuine relationships across difference (see, for examples, Fitzgerald, et al 2019; Forscher, et al, 2019; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006; Onyeador, et al, 2021). Examples of such models include Intergroup Dialogue, Sustained Dialogue, and Dialogue Across Difference.

This type of educational and dialogue work takes time and expert facilitation. It is recommended that as the town develops a plan for establishing a community center, it considers the importance of providing these opportunities in making decisions about staffing and programming. The Williamstown DIRE Committee, as well as expert faculty and staff members at Williams College and Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), can serve as important local resources for this work.

6.3 Support Systems for Wellbeing

Again drawing on CARES Project interviewees' expressed interest in taking collective responsibility for community safety and wellbeing, it is recommended that the town take steps to develop new systems for safety and wellbeing provision. Few people, including members of the Williamstown Police Department themselves, expressed a desire to maintain the status quo, which relies heavily on the WPD to meet a broad spectrum of safety and wellbeing needs. Three major recommendations are offered here, with the common goal of shifting responsibility for wellbeing away from the WPD and toward other systems of care and support.

6.3.1 Examine and Invest in New Ways of Supporting Basic Needs

A large number of CARES Project interviewees interpreted wellbeing as relating – at least in part – to the fulfillment of basic needs, including health, housing, and food. The general consensus among interviewees was that the Town government cannot be held solely responsible for meeting these needs but that the community as a whole does bear collective responsibility for supporting its members in these areas. It is important that the Town acknowledge the challenges faced by community members in relation to health care, affordable housing, and food security and that efforts be made to address these challenges. First steps in this direction are recommended below.

6.3.1.1 Enhance Access to Health Care

While the Town government may not be able to expand the number of health care providers in the region on its own, it is recommended that models be explored for incentivizing new providers to come to the North Berkshires, collaborating with Berkshire Health Systems as it develops plans to reopen the North Adams Hospital, and encouraging primary care practices to develop connections with mental health providers (Northern Berkshire Pediatrics is an excellent example of how practices can do this).

Rural communities like the North Berkshires consistently struggle to attract and retain medical and mental health providers, and it is evident that this is not a problem that Williamstown can solve on its own. The Town should, however, prioritize researching the efforts of other rural communities and the opportunities for partnerships and collaborations across the region.

6.3.1.2 Continue to Prioritize Affordable Housing

It is also recommended that the Williamstown Planning Board, Affordable Housing Trust, and other committees and organizations continue efforts to expand affordable housing in the community. If Williamstown desires to be a community in which all residents feel safe and welcome, it must invest in supporting the housing needs of

individuals and families from a variety of income ranges. Affordable housing will not become more available in the community without intentional efforts on the part of the Town government. This must be prioritized if Williamstown is to be an inclusive and welcoming community.

6.3.1.3 Support and Partner with Local Service Providers

Many CARES Project interviewees noted the importance of local nonprofit service providers, such as the Williamstown Food Pantry, in meeting the basic needs of community members. As the Town considers the establishment of a community center, it is recommended that such providers be invited into early conversations about the mission and goals of the center. Those who already work to serve the basic needs of community members will have critical insight into whether and how to best incorporate these services into new Town structures.

6.3.2 Create a Detailed Account of Mental Health and Wellbeing Calls to the WPD

It is clear from interviews with community residents and members of the Williamstown Police Department that the WPD is called upon to respond to a variety of wellbeing-related calls in the community, ranging from requests to check-in on elderly family members to severe mental health crises. As research shows to be true in police departments across the country (see, for examples, Schulenberg, 2016; Wood, Watson, & Fulambarker, 2017), however, this range of calls is not always captured in WPD call data. Calls related to wellbeing and mental health are often categorized as medical assistance, Section 12, or wellbeing checks, although calls listed as annoying phone calls, disturbances, noise and parking complaints, among others, might also fall into the category of "wellbeing calls" depending on the specific circumstances.

To better understand the nature and quantity of these calls, it is important to create a more detailed account of their frequency and specific details. This will allow the Town to assess what type of alternative response system might be most appropriate based on Williamstown's particular needs. Possible alternative response systems are noted in the following recommendation.

6.3.3 Pilot a Parallel Response Program for Wellbeing Calls

Over the past two decades, but increasingly over the past 3-5 years, communities across the U.S. have been exploring and implementing alternative systems for responding to wellbeing-related calls to police departments, including mental health calls. These alternative systems – some of which are run by police departments while others are not - can be broadly categorized as follows:

1. *Crisis Intervention Teams* (CITs or the so-called Memphis Model), which entail a 40-hour, weeklong training program designed to educate police officers on effective response to mental health crises, paired with the development of collaborative relationships between police and mental health providers (see Compton, et al, 2008; Kubiak, et al, 2017; The University of Memphis, n.d.; Wood & Watson, 2017);
2. *Co-responder models*, in which mental health professionals respond to mental health calls either with or immediately after police officers (see Puntis, et al, 2018; Watson, Compton, & Pope, 2019);
3. *Mobile Crisis Teams/Units*, which are typically separate from (but often collaborate with) police departments and send mental health and/or other medical professionals in response to mental health crisis calls (see Dyches, et al, 2002; Lord & Bjerregaard, 2014). These are most often run by a county, state, or specific hospital system;

4. *Officer notification/flagging systems*, which invite individuals receiving treatment for serious mental illnesses to include their mental health status in a specific database that will then inform officers of that status when responding to a call (see Compton, et al, 2017); and

5. *Community responder models*, which establish a standalone, non-law-enforcement, first responder system for a broad variety of wellbeing-related calls, including but not limited to mental health crises. Some community responder programs employ two-person teams of mental health clinicians and medics (see Eugene, Oregon's CAHOOTS and Denver, Colorado's STAR programs as examples), while others hire community members with lived experience and community connections who are then trained in first response (see the recently established CRESS program in Amherst, Massachusetts). The latter type of program recognizes the breadth of calls that community responders might handle - only a small fraction of which are mental health crises/emergencies - and train responders to call for assistance from police or mental health crisis systems when needed.

Given CARES Project findings about the particular needs of Williamstown, including the size of the community and the interest in alternative responses to not only mental health crises but other types of wellbeing calls as well, it is very strongly recommended that the town pilot a community responder model (#5 in the list above).

CITs and officer notification systems continue to place the onus on police officers to respond to mental health calls and require training and resources that are difficult to come by in small, rural communities (Bratina, et al, 2021). The Brien Center currently operates both a Mobile Crisis Team and a co-responder option serving Williamstown, but both are limited in their ability to respond quickly at all hours and in all locations, because they serve multiple communities with limited resources. Likewise, the co-responder model also continues to place the onus on police officers to respond to mental health calls.

A community responder model, similar to that designed and implemented in Amherst, MA, over the past three years, is more in line with the expressed interests of Williamstown community members and WPD employees and is more feasible for implementation in a community with the population and resources of Williamstown. Developing and piloting such a system will be time-consuming, particularly at the onset and during piloting and initial assessment, and it is recommended that the Town commit the necessary human resources to this process.

The development and piloting process will likely entail the following steps:

1. More in-depth research into the community responder model, including communication with Amherst's CRESS (Community Responders for Equity, Safety, and Service) team;
2. Exploration of funding opportunities for piloting alternative response systems for wellbeing calls;
3. Preparation of applications for pilot funding (the above-mentioned detailed account of mental health and wellbeing calls to the WPD will be particularly useful in demonstrating the need for such funding, and the CARES report will provide compelling evidence of the Town's commitment to this work);
4. Recruitment of paid employees and/or volunteers to implement the community responder model;
5. Implementation and continued assessment of the model throughout the pilot period.

Again, this will be an extensive process and should be entered into with the recognition that it will be both time- and labor-intensive but likely to produce significant long-term benefits in community safety and wellbeing.

6.4 Review of the Role of Policing in Williamstown

In addition to piloting a parallel response program for wellbeing calls in Williamstown, there is clear interest in reviewing the role of policing in the community more thoroughly. Many CARES Project interviewees expressed a lack of knowledge about what members of the WPD do on a day-to-day basis, while others expressed an interest in reconsidering the current duties of the department. This interest goes beyond mental health and wellbeing calls to include questions about who might be best equipped to direct traffic at construction sites, assist with animal control, and other non-crime-related duties currently fulfilled by the WPD.

6.4.1 Establish a Community Safety Review Committee

Given the number of CARES Project interviewees who expressed interest in better understanding and potentially reconsidering the role of the WPD in community safety, it is strongly recommended that the town establish a community safety review committee to further examine the alignment between current WPD practices and residents' desires for safety and wellbeing. This committee should include representatives from the WPD as well as other members of the community committed to examining CARES Project data, police practices in other Massachusetts communities, and broader research on police reform and reimagining community safety. At least some members of the committee should have experience in and expertise with reviewing research and gathering community feedback (i.e. survey design and implementation, community outreach, etc.).

It is recommended that the community safety review committee begin by identifying current WPD duties and/or practices that community members are interested in learning more about and/or reconsidering. CARES Project data offers a starting point on these topics, although the committee may also choose to engage in its own survey research to gather input from a larger percentage of the population. Possible areas of interest might include: police uniforms and weaponry, communication between the police department and the broader community, and duties currently fulfilled by the WPD that may not require the engagement of armed law enforcement officers.

Once the committee has identified areas of interest to explore, it is recommended that it conduct a review of existing research literature on each area to learn more about best practices and evidence-based alternatives. All alternatives should be explored and considered.

For this work to be done well and thoroughly, it must be given time and conducted without prejudice. Ideas should not be ruled out simply because they are new or different from what Williamstown has done in the past, and the committee should be respected and supported by Town government.

While it is possible that, once this initial work is completed, the community safety review committee might continue to work with the WPD and other town entities to implement and assess changes to Williamstown's community safety practices, this should not be its initial goal. Other Massachusetts communities have established police review boards or advisory committees with varying levels of responsibility and authority for overseeing the day-to-day work of current officers. It is recommended that Williamstown's community safety review committee *not* be perceived as the equivalent of such bodies but rather as an exploratory committee charged with examining evidence-based possibilities for innovation. This is intended as a review of the *system* of policing in Williamstown, not as a review of individual members of the department.

Section 7. Conclusion

The Williamstown CARES Project gathered a depth and complexity of interview data that provides the Town with fodder for significant change efforts. Understanding the nuanced conceptions of safety and wellbeing that community members bring to the table has the potential to change the way that community members and Town officials speak and listen to one another and to move the community past problem analysis to real conversations about solutions.

There will most certainly be disagreement about the precise ways to move forward, but it is the hope of the research team that Williamstown will see both the strengths of its community and the areas it has for growth reflected in the findings here and that it will engage in the necessary work to implement recommendations. As noted in other sections of this report, none of this work will be simple or quick, but working to become a more inclusive and equitable community never is. The Town's commitment to this project, as well as community members' expressed dedication to collective safety and wellbeing, signify that Williamstown is ready to face the challenges ahead.

Section 8. Works Cited

Abella, A.D., Landers, M., Ismajli, F., & Carmona, Y. (2022.) Stakeholder Perspectives on Implementing a Police-Mental Health Collaborative to Improve Pathways to Treatment. *Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research, 49*(3).

Bailey, K., Paquet, S.R., Ray, B.R., Grommon, E., Lowder, E.M., & Sightes, E. (2018). Barriers and facilitators to implementing an urban co-responding police-mental health team. *Health Justice, 6*(21).

Bell, L.A. (2016). Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education. In M. Adams & L.A. Bell (Eds.), *Teaching for Social Justice* (3rd edition). New York: Routledge.

Compton, M.T., Halpern, B., Broussard, B., Anderson, S., Smith, K., Ellis, S., Griffin, K., Pauselli, L., Myers, N. (2017). A Potential New Form of Jail Diversion and Reconnection to Mental Health Services: I. Stakeholders' Views on Acceptability. *Behavioral Science & Law, 35*.

Davidson, M.L. (2014). A Criminal Justice System-Wide Response to Mental Illness: Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Memphis Crisis Intervention Team Training Curriculum Among Law Enforcement and Correctional Officers. *Criminal Justice Policy Review, 27*(1).

Dyches, H., Brezel, D.E., Johnsen, J.A., Guo, S., & Min, N.O. (2002). Impact of Mobile Crisis Services in the Use of Community-based Mental Health Services. *Research in Social Work Practices, 12*.

FitzGerald, C., Martin, A., Berner, D. *et al.* Interventions designed to reduce implicit prejudices and implicit stereotypes in real world contexts: a systematic review. *BMC Psychology, 7*(29).

Forscher, Patrick & Lai, Calvin & Axt, Jordan & Ebersole, Charles & Herman, Michelle & Devine, Patricia & Nosek, Brian. (2019). A Meta-Analysis of Procedures to Change Implicit Measures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 10*.

Helfgott, J.B., Hickman, M.J., & Labossiere, A.P. (2016). A Descriptive Evaluation of the Seattle Police Department's Crisis Response Team Officer/Mental Health Professional Partnership Pilot Program. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry, 44*.

Holstein, J.A. & Gubrium, J.F. (1995). *The Active Interview*. Qualitative Research Methods Series, 37. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Kalev, A., Dobbin, F., & Kelly, E. (2006). Best Practices or Best Guesses? Assessing the Efficacy of Corporate Affirmative Action and Diversity Policies. *American Sociological Review*, *71*(4), 589–617.

Kubiak, S., Comartin, E., Milanovic, E., Bybee, D. Tillander, E., Rabaut, C., Bisson, H., Dunn, L.M., Bouchard, M.J., Hill, T., & Schneider, S. (2017). Countywide Implementation of Crisis Intervention Teams: Multiple Methods, Measures and Sustained Outcomes. *Behavioral Science & Law, 35*.

Lombardo, R.M. & Donner, C.M. (2018). Can community policing increase residents' informal social control? Testing the impact of the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy. *Police Practice & Research, 19*(5).

Lord, V.B. & Bjerregaard, B. (2014). Helping Persons with Mental Illness: Partnerships between Police and Mobile Crisis Units. *Victims and Offenders, 9*.

Minkler, M. & Wallerstein, N. (2008). Introduction to Community-Based Participatory Research: New Issues and Emphases. In M. Minkler & N. Wallerstein (Eds.), *Community-Based Participatory Research for Health: From Process to Outcomes* (2nd edition, 5-23). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Onyeador, I. N., Hudson, S. T. J., & Lewis, N. A. (2021). Moving Beyond Implicit Bias Training: Policy Insights for Increasing Organizational Diversity. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *8*(1).

Puntis, S., Perfect, D., Kirubarajan, A., Bolton, S., Davies, F., Hayes, A., Harriss, E., & Molodynski, A. (2018). A Systematic Review of Co-responder Models of Police Mental Health 'Street' Triage. *BMC Psychiatry, 18*.

Schaffer, F.C. (2016). *Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivist Guide*. New York: Routledge.

Schulenberg, J.L. (2016). Police Decision-Making in the Gray Zone: The Dynamics of Police-citizen Encounters with Mentally Ill Persons. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 43*(4).

Schwartz-Shea, P. & Yanow, D. (2012). *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. New York: Routledge.

University of Memphis. (n.d.). CIT Center. http://www.cit.memphis.edu/

Watson, A.C., Compton, M.T., & Pope, L.G. (2019). Crisis Response Services for People with Mental Illnesses or Intellectual and Development Disabilities. *Vera Institute of Justice*.

Wood, J.D., Watson, A.C., & Fulambarker, A. (2017). The "Gray Zone" of Police Work During Mental Health Encounters: Findings from an Observational Study in Chicago. *Police Quarterly, 20*(1).

Yanow, D. (2014). Thinking Interpretively: Philosophical Presuppositions and the Human Sciences. In D. Yanow & P. Schwartz-Shea (Eds.), *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* (2nd edition, pp. 5-26). New York: Routledge.

Section 9. APPENDICES

9.1 Community Member Interview Guide

Williamstown Community Safety & Wellbeing Assessment
Community Member Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me a bit about how long you've lived in Williamstown and what brought you here?

2. How would you describe Williamstown to someone who has never been here?

I have some specific questions now about safety in our community.

3. Would you say that you feel safe in Williamstown? Why or why not?

    a. Can you think of any examples that help to illustrate how you feel about safety in our community?

I'm going to ask you two questions about who is responsible for community safety. The first is about your view of community safety more broadly, and the second is specifically about safety in Williamstown.

4. In general, who do you think is responsible for ensuring safety in a community?

    a. What role do you think police should play in this?

5. Thinking specifically about Williamstown, what role do you think the Williamstown police play in *your* sense of safety?

    a. Have you had any direct interactions with the WPD?

        i. If so, how would you characterize the interaction(s)?

I have some questions now about wellbeing in our community.

6. How would you describe your sense of wellbeing or wellness in Williamstown?

    a. Do you feel that your needs - in relation to wellbeing - are met? Why or why not?

7. Who do you think is responsible for ensuring wellbeing or wellness in a community?

    a. What do you think Williamstown does to provide for community members' needs in relation to wellbeing?

    b. Do you feel like you are heard or have the opportunity to be heard when your needs are not being met?

8. What role do you think the police should play in ensuring community wellbeing?

    a. Do you think the police should play a role in situations related to mental health and/or substance use?

       b.   What about situations between family members, neighbors, or other community members?

I have just a few more questions about policing in relation to both safety and wellbeing.

9.   In general, what do you think is the primary role and goal of policing?

10. What do you think is the primary role of the WPD specifically?

       a.   Do you think the WPD fulfills this role fairly and impartially on behalf of all residents?

11. Can you think of any experiences that you (or someone you know) have had - related to wellbeing or safety - when you needed help but did not want to involve the police or didn't think the police were the right people to call?

       a.   Can you tell me what you did in that situation and how you felt about it then and now?

12. Finally, are there any changes you can imagine that would make you (and/or others) feel safer and more welcome in this community?

I just have a few basic questions about you before we finish up.

13. In which of these age ranges do you fall?

18-30   31-50   51-70   71+

14. How do you identify your gender?

15. How do you identify your race, ethnicity, and/or culture?

16. Are you LGBTQIA+? If yes, please feel free to share more if desired.

17. Do you consider yourself to have any disabilities?

18. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

19. Would you mind telling me in which of these annual income ranges your household falls?

Less than $30,000 $30,000-$80,000 $80,000-$160,000   more than $160,000

20. Is there anything else you would like to share about your own sense of safety and wellbeing in Williamstown or about policing in town specifically?

9.2 WPD Guide

1. Can you tell me a bit about when and how you first started working for the Williamstown Police Department?

2. How would you describe Williamstown to someone who has never been here?

I have some questions now about safety in Williamstown.

3. Do you consider Williamstown to be a safe community? Why or why not?

    a. Do you personally feel safe in Williamstown? Why or why not?

4. In general, who do you think is responsible for ensuring safety in a community?

    a. What role do you think police should play in this?

5. Thinking specifically about Williamstown, what role do you think the WPD plays in ensuring safety or helping people to feel safe?

I have some questions now about wellbeing or wellness in Williamstown.

6. When you think about broader issues of wellbeing or wellness among town residents, what role do you think the WPD plays or should play in these?

    a. Do you think the police should play a role in situations related to mental health or substance use?

    b. What about situations between family members, neighbors, or other community members?

7. How do you personally feel about intervening in situations involving mental health or mentally ill individuals?

    a. Can you think of any specific examples of times when you have responded to mental health related calls?

    b. Did you feel like you had the resources and skills you needed to respond in those situations?

8. When handling calls involving mental health crises, which interventions have you utilized?

    a. Arrest

    b. Section 12

    c. Informal resolution

    d. Do nothing (for example, responding to scene but allowing family members to handle the intervention)

I have just a few more questions about policing and your work in Williamstown.

9. Are there any types of calls that you do *not* feel the police should be responsible for?

10. In general, what do you think is the primary role and goal of policing?

11. How would you describe the primary role of the WPD specifically?

    a. Do you think the WPD fulfills this role fairly and impartially on behalf of all residents?

12. When you think about your ability - and the WPD's ability - to provide for safety and wellbeing in Williamstown, are there any additional resources you think could help you perform your job well?

13. Finally, are there any other changes you can imagine that would make you (and/or others) feel safer and more welcome in this community?

I just have a few basic questions about you before we finish up.

14. In which of these age ranges do you fall?

    18-30   31-50   51-70   71+

15. How do you identify your gender?

16. How do you identify your race, ethnicity, and/or culture?

17. Are you LGBTQIA+? If yes, please feel free to share more if desired.

18. Do you consider yourself to have any disabilities?

19. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

20. Would you mind telling me in which of these annual income ranges your household falls?

    Less than $30,000 $30,000-$80,000 $80,000-$160,000   more than $160,000

21. Is there anything else you would like to share about your own sense of safety and wellbeing in Williamstown or about policing in town specifically?