



# Montpelier Police Department After Action Report January 17 and January 20, 2021

January 27, 2021

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## Executive Summary

In the wake of the recent threats to the Vermont State Capitol Complex and all national capitols for January 17, 2021 and January 20, 2021, the Montpelier Police Department (MPD) has produced an After Action Report (AAR) so to assist its staff in developing future strategies that will increase department preparedness. An After Action Report<sup>1</sup> consolidates and summarizes perceptions and observations of those involved in process planning for the event and identifies promising practices, challenges and lessons learned that can be applied to enhance future responses to similar events. An AAR “focuses on an event and allow participants to discover and review WHAT happened, WHY it happened, and HOW to sustain strengths and improve on weaknesses<sup>2</sup>.” For purposes of this AAR, MPD used recommendations outlined in the National Police Foundation’s COPS 2020 publication as a base<sup>3</sup>.

MPD solicited feedback from the immediate stakeholders involved in operational planning which included its officers involved in operational planning and officers and staff assigned to both events, the City Manager, the Montpelier Fire Department, the Capitol Police, the Washington County Sheriff’s Office, the Vermont State Police (requested to facilitate responses from State Offices involved), Buildings and General Services, Vermont Judiciary Safety and Security, the Montpelier Fire Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, and the Washington County’s State Attorney’s Office. The Department also heavily weighed expressed concerns it has previously received from the City Council, City staff, individuals and business owners, and community representative groups such as Capitol Area Neighborhoods (CAN!) and Montpelier Alive.

In summarizing the report, MPD has highlighted several internal strategic goals it intends to maintain or meet in the coming months. Ultimately, the Department recommends establishing a robust citywide Security Program which will maintain communications within regional law enforcement agencies, and ensure information sharing between law enforcement and our community. It would also increase preparedness in responding to most-likely scenarios, pool community resources for security purposes, and provide enhanced reporting protocols.

Brian Peete  
Chief of Police, Montpelier VT

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes known as an after action review, after action assessment or critical incident review

<sup>2</sup> VCPI, *After Action Review and Reporting* via National Police Foundation. 2020. *How to Conduct an After Action Review*: Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

<sup>3</sup> <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/Publications/cops-w0878-pub.pdf>

## Scope

There are three levels of scope for an AAR: Small, medium and large. A small-scaled scope is primarily internal, narrow, and done reviewed with partners and co-responders. A large-scaled scope can be independent, formal, broader, and more comprehensive due to involvement with numerous agencies. A medium-scaled scope falls in-between.

AARs can also be categorized as informal (smaller incidents and responses where the promising practices and lessons learned are easier to identify and can quickly be addressed or are for individual aspects of a larger incident), or formal (typically for large-scaled events including those that had a significant impact on the community).

This AAR will be Informal and Small in scope as no significant events occurred on the activity dates, and MPD has not identified significant findings in the planning, preparation and execution in response to the potential threats for January 17 and 20, 2021.

## After Action Report Team

This AAR was facilitated by the MPD Chief of Police with input from MPD staff. Feedback was solicited from MPD Dispatchers and Officers, the Montpelier Fire Department, the Capitol Police, the Vermont State Police (VSP), Buildings and General Services (BGS), Vermont Judiciary Safety and Security, the Washington County Sheriff's Department, the Washington County State Attorney's Office and the FBI.

## Background of the Incident

On Wednesday January 6, 2021, America saw the U.S. Capitol overrun by individuals and members of several extremist groups. The FBI warned of nationwide calls (including calls from some elected officials in other states and jurisdictions) for armed protests in D.C. and/or in each State Capital in the U.S. on January 17, 2021 and January 20, 2021. The calls for armed protest included the State Capitol in Montpelier, VT. There were no known direct threats against Vermont's Capitol Complex, the City of Montpelier, or appointed and elected officials.

It is MPD's assessment that the proactive work done by the FBI, the US Capitol Police and various government agencies, paired with security planning and preparation, mitigated potential threats to State Capitols (including Montpelier), other critical infrastructures, and elected and appointed officials across the country.

## Stakeholder Feedback

### *Strengths*

1. The FBI, Vermont Intelligence Center (VIC) and Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) were instrumental partners in sharing information and facilitating equipment vital for OPS planning.

2. Both the State and Montpelier coordinated a campaign asking the public to exercise caution and discretion when considering ways to express their voices during potentially dangerous events.
3. MPD, Capitol Police and VSP promoted a “See something, Say Something” campaign in which it provided contact information to the public to report tips or suspicious information to the Department, VSP and the FBI.
4. MPD maintained open lines of communications with key individuals and groups which could quickly facilitate the dissemination of information to include the DNC and RNC, Montpelier Alive, CAN!, and the Montpelier Roxbury School District.
5. The Washington County State Attorney’s Office coordinated with MPD and provided guidance and direction in establishing a contingency process for an emergency declaration for officers to lawfully respond to rioting and civil unrest.
6. The Vermont Association of Chiefs of Police facilitated volunteer efforts to provide MPD with additional resources. The following agencies were able to assist: Bennington, Burlington, Colchester, Newport, the Orleans County Sheriff’s Department, and Shelburne.
7. The City has coordinated a virtual community event where the City Manager, the Assistant City Manager, the Montpelier Community Justice Center, MPD’s embedded social worker and the Chief facilitated a discussion for community members who may have had anxiety or questions regarding the events which led to MPD’s increased security posture in the community.
8. MPD has met best practices in incorporating FEMA’s National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS) within its operation plan and department policies.
9. News media reported military members and law enforcement members in other jurisdictions are under investigation for potential administrative or criminal infractions relating to the events of January 6, 2021. MPD officers were not involved in the January 6 incidents, and the department has a standing duty-to-report/intervene policy for criminal or administrative violations to include leaving posts or facilitating unauthorized access to government buildings or controlled areas.

### *Challenges*

1. MPD should establish stronger relations within community networks to expedite information dissemination, solicit and receive concern and critical feedback from the public, and to strengthen trust and establish multiple relationships.
2. MPD should conduct an internal assessment/inventory to ensure it has the equipment and logistics necessary to meet any anticipated needs resulting from elevated threats to the City and Capitol complex from potentially hostile groups.
3. Expound initial communication and operational planning between LE agencies.

## Internal Analysis

1. MPD has noticed a trend of increases in escalation when opposing groups are demonstrating at the statehouse. National trends suggest Montpelier will see a higher probability of physical confrontations at future protest events.
2. Community trust: Develop stronger/personal relationships and improve communication and notification procedures with external stakeholders such as CAN!, churches and faith-based organizations, and Montpelier Alive.
3. MPDs ongoing partnership with Capitol Police, VSP units and the FBI was instrumental in information sharing, mutual trust and the facilitation of resources. As the State Capitol, Montpelier is a critical location and it highly recommended that MPD continues its involvement with task forces in these agencies.
4. A review of policies shows MPD's current policies and procedures (such as use of force, crowd control, and duty to intervene) as current and in line with state law, community values, and 21st Century policing practices.

## Findings and Recommendations

1. MPD must ensure fast, pointed messaging to the community. MPD should implement a communications policy which emphasizes transparency and information sharing based on *Maximum Information, Minimal Delay*. As previously identified as one of its strategic goals, MPD should also established a permanent presence within community groups to ensure information flow and communication to and from the community.
2. MPD should increase the frequency of tabletop exercises with all applicable stakeholders. This will help in identifying gaps in local, regional and state resources and training.
3. Ensure MPD officers are given the tools and training in techniques to maximize safety for those attending highly populated rallies or protest events (such as controlling/separating large-scaled fights, and extracting and transporting sick or injured people).
4. Should MPD need to continuously request additional outside support from state police departments, a recuperation of overtime (OT) costs may be requested from the volunteering municipalities. MPD and the City should be cognizant of the Department's OT budget should such requests become a norm.

## Communication of Findings

1. MPD will post its AAR on its website. The Department will also post the link to the AAR on its Facebook page.

## Implementing Recommendations and Lessons Learned

1. Common, repetitive challenges in critical incidents and large scale event planning are policy and training to potential incidents, crisis communication with other agencies, media relations during a critical incident, incident command, regular interagency planning, and development of relationships, protocol for reuniting survivors and family members<sup>4</sup>.
2. MPD should work with internal and external stakeholders, especially the Capitol Complex Security Working Group, to conduct tabletop and real world critical incident training exercises.
3. MPD should prioritize and incorporate the gaps identified in the AAR into its strategic plan and provide progress reports for these goals.
4. MPD should establish a Citywide Security Program and Plan. A Security Plan provides an analysis on potential threats to identified critical facilities/individuals based on national, regional and local trends and intelligence so to establish a robust proactive and reactive response system by security, law enforcement and all stakeholders. This plan can also assist in prioritizing any future purchases of equipment and updating or establishing processes and policies.

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<sup>4</sup> National Police Foundation. 2020. *How to Conduct an After Action Review*: Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.