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WI city discussed excluding veterans from police dept. over ‘militaristic approach’

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A police reform report in Racine, Wis., included a suggestion to exclude veterans due to a possible “militaristic approach,” but city officials are now saying the report was informal and not a policy document.

Under the heading “Hiring Practices,” the report said, “Exclude ex-military due to a possible militaristic approach.” Also, included under the heading was “hire more minorities,” “screen for bias and PTSD” and “recruit youth.”

Presented to the city council Tuesday, the report included the note on ex-military personnel in order to be representative of public comments and was not the city’s plan of action, The Journal Times reported.

City communications director Shannon Powell said the report included months of police reforms reviews and public input, facilitated by the recently-established Mayor’s Task Force on Police Reform.

Powell said including the comments about veterans in the report was acceptable, explaining that citizens who are concerned about police force militarization have the right to express their opinions.

According to Jim Palmer, executive director of the Wisconsin Professional Police Association and board member of the National Association of Police Organizations, several local law enforcement officers expressed concerns that the City of Racine was entertaining the suggestion.

Palmer said he doesn’t believe any military exclusion will be implemented.

“There is no research, that I’m aware of at least, that former members of our armed forces are more likely to use force ... they would have arguably more training, more ways to avoid using lethal force,” Palmer said. “I’m not concerned that this is something the city would pursue ... I think there’s no quantitative basis for it.”

This year has been marked with widespread calls to defund and reform the police following the death of George Floyd while in custody of the Minneapolis Police Department. Militarization of police forces has been one aspect of the concerns.

A 2018 Cato Institute study titled “Militarization fails to enhance police safety or reduce crime but may harm police reputation” asserted that militarizing law enforcement heightened tensions and failed to decrease crime.

The study said, “Given the concentration of deployments in communities of color, where trust in law enforcement and government at large is already depressed, the routine use of militarized police tactics by local agencies threatens to increase the historic tensions between marginalized groups and the state with no detectable public safety benefit. While SWAT teams arguably remain a necessary tool for violent emergency situations, restricting their use to those rare events may improve perceptions of police with little or no safety loss.”