

—Slug:.....COMM-0858.opin.view.sparrow  
—Contributor.....Rev. Lise Sparrow  
—Contributor email.....lisemsparrow@gmail.com  
—For section.....Voices/Viewpoint  
—Format.....Opinions  
—Dateline.....Brattleboro  
—Article Number:.....43381



**Notes from editor (not for publication):**



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Goodbye to Chief Hardy

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 'She is forthright about the struggle she has asserting she  
3 is "both black and blue," and yet she smiles as she looks up and  
4 down Main Street where few are strangers and so many express  
5 how sorry they are to see her go'

####END SUBHED####

6 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

7 THIS WEEK, Brattleboro will bid farewell to Chief of Police  
8 Norma Hardy.

9 When she interviewed for the job in 2021, she spent the  
10 night at the Latchis Hotel and took some time to walk up and  
11 down Main Street, getting a feel for the town.

12 Hardy had been assistant chief of police for the Port  
13 Authority of New York and New Jersey and was off duty when, on  
14 Sept. 11, 2001, the Twin Towers sent New York and the Port of  
15 New York and New Jersey into trauma and tragedy.

16 So she was not daunted when she saw “ACAB” (“all cops  
17 are bastards”) scribbled on wall after wall around town.

18 Having grown up in Brooklyn in the '60s, Chief Hardy  
19 knows personally how unjust police could be. Seared into her  
20 mind is the memory of her mother being dragged to jail for  
21 peaceful protests during civil rights protests.

22 Such experiences forged the foundations of a life  
23 committed to public service. Working at the Port Authority also  
24 exposed her to drugs, guns, and violence, so she predicted that  
25 whatever drugs were present in Brattleboro, she'd be able to  
26 handle.

27 Beyond their lives in Brooklyn, Hardy and her family  
28 grew up loving the outdoors and fishing, so she came to Vermont,  
29 imagining forested places near Brattleboro where she could come  
30 and go peacefully from what would be a stressful job. Requiring  
31 a high energy person, focused and committed to excellence, this  
32 job seemed a good match.

33 \* \* \*

34 BRATTLEBORO WAS, indeed, looking for strong leadership.  
35 The Community Equity Collaborative in town had been pushing  
36 for better training for the officers who serve the increasingly  
37 diverse town. With homelessness and fentanyl addiction on the  
38 rise, and after George Floyd's death and the “defund the police”  
39 movement, the department was depleted and demoralized. The  
40 previous chief warned it could wear you down.

41 In July 2021, Hardy was sworn in as the new police  
42 chief, and she got right to work.

43 From the start, she became a visible presence in town,  
44 happy to chat on the street and welcoming to those who stopped  
45 by her office. As importantly, she began to build a new team of

46 officers and hired social workers to deal with the mental health  
47 issues that often present themselves as officers respond to crises.

48 Now, almost five years later, the police department is  
49 almost fully staffed, with 27 of 30 officers in place and one in the  
50 pipeline.

51 \* \* \*

52 THE DEPARTMENT IS proudly one of the few in the state to  
53 be a member of Police Assisted Addiction & Recovery Initiative  
54 ([PARRI](#)), an organization that provides support and resources to  
55 help law enforcement by creating non-arrest pathways to  
56 treatment and recovery.

57 In Brattleboro, officers work actively with Project CARE  
58 (Community Approach to Recovery and Engagement), a  
59 partnership that was formed in response to the opioid crisis and  
60 championed by the previous chief.

61 The mission is to reduce the impact that substance use is  
62 having on the community and connect people living with  
63 addiction to treatment.

64 “We identify the problem, determine the barriers in  
65 place, and come up with solutions,” Hardy says.

66 Current partners include HCRS (Health Care &  
67 Rehabilitation Services), Turning Point of Windham County  
68 (which offers a day program for people in recovery),  
69 Groundworks Collaborative, the state Department of Correction  
70 Probation and Parole office, Brattleboro Consolidated Treatment  
71 Center (methadone clinic), and the Brattleboro Fire  
72 Department/EMS.

73 BRAT (the Brattleboro Resource Assistance Team),  
74 created under Hardy’s leadership, is also dedicated to providing  
75 assistance to the homeless population and downtown businesses  
76 alike. Dressed in their distinctive uniforms, these officers do  
77 everything from walking people to their cars after a movie to  
78 finding rehab opportunities to those who are seeking help.

79 Hardy touts the trust that Justin Johnston, the community  
80 resource specialist, has built from his experience living in

81 recovery. He's there to help people access everything from getting  
82 proper identification to arranging rides to treatment.

83           Johnston works out of the town's new substation in the  
84 Transportation Center, which is designed to increase safety in the  
85 high-traffic area. The center hosts BRAT, a social worker, parking  
86 enforcement, and a public bathroom. Hardy fought hard along  
87 with other town leaders for the funding to get this in place.

88           \* \* \*

89           OFFICERS RESPOND to all kinds of domestic issues, to  
90 issues of homelessness and the mental illness, to violence and  
91 misunderstandings. Hardy's goal has been to encourage training  
92 and preparation so that incidents can be handled fairly and  
93 discretely, if not always peacefully.

94           Her daily responsibilities, and those of any good police  
95 chief, are not always obvious, as so much has to do with  
96 communication. She sees that constant communication with her  
97 staff, officers, citizens, and journalists as key to her work.

98           There is always a tension between transparency, public  
99 reporting and the discretion needed to protect individuals and  
100 families. Nonetheless, the police have faced intense public  
101 criticism for the way Hank Poitras, aka "Planet Hank," has  
102 covered incidents in town. Hardy has had to allow everyone's  
103 rights to the same information for the sake of transparency and  
104 the First Amendment.

105           Discretion and privacy have been Hardy's key to  
106 developing trust. She welcomes those who seek more  
107 information and has also felt it her duty to keep the town and  
108 Selectboard informed, even if the information she has to share is  
109 not as rosy as we would want it to be.

110           She has openly and regularly reported on the guns and  
111 drugs found in Brattleboro so that the public and town leadership  
112 understand the needs and challenges the police face. Her team  
113 has made clear to drug dealers they are not welcome.

114           \* \* \*

115           WHEN ASKED about the challenges she has faced and her  
116 reasons for leaving, Hardy is quick to respond that she is ready to  
117 have some time to relax and spend time with family and that the  
118 department is in a good place.

119           She has full confidence in the new chief, Jeremy Evans,  
120 and in Captain Adam Petlock, and she believes it is a good time  
121 for a transition. She also asserts proudly that she will miss the  
122 team (and they her) and she will miss Brattleboro.

123           Looking back, the chief struggles to look beyond the  
124 criticisms that have taken her time and energy and that have  
125 affected her own morale. She is forthright about the struggle she  
126 has asserting she is “both black and blue,” and yet she smiles as  
127 she looks up and down Main Street where few are strangers and  
128 so many express how sorry they are to see her go.

129           As I bid her farewell, I think of the words of Rudyard  
130 Kipling: “If you can keep your head when all about you / Are  
131 losing theirs and blaming it on you, / If you can trust yourself  
132 when all then doubt you, / But make allowance for their doubting  
133 too.”

134           It has not always been easy, but Hardy has travelled our  
135 streets and left us all safer for it.

136           I will not be alone in missing her hearty laugh and the  
137 way she brushes off worries. She leaves us with pride, celebrating  
138 the team she has forged to protect our town.

139           Farewell and be well, Chief Norma Hardy, and thank  
140 you.

141           \* \* \*

142           *A farewell party for Chief Norma Hardy takes place at*  
143 *the Brooks Memorial Library, 224 Main St., Brattleboro, on*  
144 *Saturday, March 28, from 2 to 4 p.m. Light refreshments will be*  
145 *served.*

146           *“This gathering mirrors the welcome event Brooks held*  
147 *for her when she first arrived in town, giving the community*  
148 *another opportunity to connect with the chief and wish her well*  
149 *in her future endeavors,” library staff said in the public invitation.*

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

150 **LISE SPARROW**, retired pastor of the Guilford  
151 Congregational Church, is a representative of the Justice and  
152 Witness Ministries of the Vermont United Church of Christ and of  
153 Vermont Interfaith Action.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

*LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:*

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

154 0

####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

155

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

####BEGIN VIDEO####

156

####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

157

####END LOGLINE####