

Police Study Group (PSG) – October 28, 2021 5:30 pm Virtual / Hybrid meeting

Attending members: Select Board member: Melissa Makepeace-O’Neil, Chair
Town Administrator, ex-officio member: Becky Torres,
Acting Chief, Shutesbury Police Dept, (SPD): Kristin Burgess,
Personnel Board member: Melody Chartier,
Finance Committee member: Susie Mosher,
Community at large members: Cheryl Hayden, Mike Vinskey, Mary Jo Johnson
Absent: Rita Farrell - Select Board member
General Public: Rachel Schwab-Rehorka, Tim Logan, Herb Hoyack, Steve Sullivan
The meeting convened at 5:36 pm

Tim Logan and Rachel Schwab-Rehorka each had public comments.

TL: 1. The fact that “nothing happens” in town can show that the local police department and our Acting Chief have a positive effect on our community.

2. The benefits of having a good, local police department are not all measurable in dollars and cents.

3. Our good relationship with the police department produces a positive community image.

4. Talk of possible elimination of our current chief, who is on the committee, may be difficult and unfair to her. Prolonging the debate is not positive.

RSR: 1. She worked in a school where a local police officer made visits to the school lunchroom which made a very positive impression on the students.

2. The savings that could be made revamping the SPD are probably negligible. For people on fixed incomes, the town has a tax abatement for citizens over 65 who qualify.

3. The links to the Police Study Group recordings are not working.

4. There are many citizens who are not aware that there are discussions about police services in town. There should be more publicity about this topic.

We reviewed the glossary of terms that Melissa drafted. Full time trained and fulltime hours and part time trained and parttime hours need to be clarified. The new state statues will require all officers to be fully trained and is providing the Bridge Academy opportunity so towns can reach this goal by 2025.

MJ – Have other options such as shared officers or administration been considered?

KB - The arrangement for officers to work for other towns must be formalized through being sworn in and hired for part-time hours in other towns. Shutesbury responds to and receives help from other towns via the mutual aid agreement.

Currently Linda Newcomb is our fully trained officer that works part time hours. The rest of the department are part time trained. They require additional on the job hours to become fully trained. A discussion of how many hours each officer works will be part of a future agenda.

Edits were made and other terms will be added to the glossary – Mutual Aid and Employment Hours. The glossary will clarify the terms we use in future discussions.

Pros and Cons for the different options for Police Chief staffing:

Contracted services

Defined -Town A contracts out their police coverage and services calls from Town B. Town A pays Town B on a pay-for-service basis either through a contract or invoicing options.

Leverett and Wendell are working with an interim arrangement with Leverett providing contracted services to Wendell.

CH – This may generate income and reduce the budget for Town A.

TL: Officers working in a town they are less familiar with the citizens may lead to problems, especially with young people or people in distress. This would be problematic in a state police model, too.

Accountability and response time might be compromised

KB – Increase in square miles to cover could delay response time

MV – This exercise of Pros / Cons is problematic because it lacks specifics such as the details worked out in the Leverett/Wendell agreement

SM – There likely would be more staff to cover two towns, therefore more administration for payroll, scheduling, records, etc. This would take the Chief off of patrol hours, making less contact with the public. Alternatively, administrative support could be hired, the Chief can be in the community more, but this would cost money.

RSR – Worked with a shared principal in a regional school system and it was disastrous. The principal was in and out of the buildings as needed for meetings, etc. This model lacks connection and caused a loss of leadership. Not a way to develop community. This led to high turnover rate in staff.

SM – The very different roles of service provider and service contractor means that Town B would decide what services they want – response calls only, patrolling certain roads, community policing or not. Town A would continue to have the autonomy to decide the goals and services they want in their own town, and then staffing would have to be sufficient to meet both town's required services.

MV – (See his list of Pros and Cons for contracted services at the end of these minutes)

KB – More miles on the cruiser would use them up faster.

SM – If Town A believes it can stretch its current staff to cover another town's need without needing all the patrol hours from Town B, and the towns are near enough to not greatly increase the mileage, and the additional administrative costs were considered, then perhaps the new total budget would be less than the sum of both towns police budgets, thereby saving money. How to apportion the savings would have to be agreed upon.

Independent/Autonomous Police Department

Defined -The town maintains its own fully staffed police department with a chief and officers.

CH: Wouldn't the pros and cons just be the reverse of contracted?

SM: Depends on if you are Town A or B

MV: (See list at the end of minutes)

MC: An independent department lends itself to community policing.

SM: It is the Select Board that chooses community policing as the town's approach. Community Policing goals will be maintained no matter what department organization is chosen.

KB: The independent model allows the staff to be more known, getting them all qualified would be less difficult

MV: The chief on patrol at a higher rate of pay is not an advantage

CH: Having the chief on patrol is an advantage to knowing the town and having a more informed relationship with the community

TL: Not all advantages are measured by dollars/costs. A cost/benefit analysis would be needed. Decisions should not be pennywise and pound foolish. The chief needs to oversee and lead the Community Policing philosophy

MJ: The chief should be the most trained and qualified leader to respond to all situation that arise. Administrative duties take the chief away from this important role. Community policing is not new to small towns. It is not a program, but a quality of relationships found in rural towns. It is transparent, and based on a relationship of trust between the community and the police. She will work with Kristin to draft a clear, simple definition for the public.

SM: Small towns can and have in the past had a less than ideal relationship with the police – not one of community policing. In those times, officers have mostly sat or slept in their cars, responded to calls, did some patrolling. Boredom sets in and in some cases, officers created conflict. Community policing requires positive engagement, a preventive and problem-solving approach, not simply responding to events and calls.

Massachusetts State Police (MSP)

Defined - The town relies on Massachusetts State Police to provide police services and answer emergency calls.

SM – What is the extent of their services? Just calls? Can they be more heavily relied upon?

We would still need a police chief to handle SPD administration.

TL: Response time is a concern. A call from Shutesbury may be a low priority for MSP to respond. Who oversees accountability?

KB: There would still have to be a request made for their response through 911/dispatch. If the SPD want to know what happened on the call, the chief has to follow up to the MSP. There is a lack of communication

MC: The lack of local knowledge, unfamiliar with our citizens is a deficit

SM: We don't know if there are any costs with increase demand. We don't have control the staffing levels and therefore the response time.

KB: The MSP have assets. They can provide K-9, drones, personnel for big events. They rotate their officers into different areas so the staffing changes.

RSR: The state requires a local department at some level. Shutesbury is in the Belchertown catchment area that includes all of the Quabbin. There is not a lot of staff to cover this big area. Response time is typically one hour. We are looking at when a situation will arise; not if. We cannot rely on the MSP for police services.

TL: The MSP will not be aware of our citizens' daily routines, and will not be aware when something goes awry.

The meeting reached the two-hour mark. The options of Regionalization and Shared Chief will be discussed at our next meeting. First on next meeting's agenda will be the draft survey. In future meetings we will look at budget history and comparisons and the spreadsheet analysis of the call logs.

Due to holiday interruptions, the next two meetings are scheduled for Mondays - 11/8 and 11/15 at 5:30. We need to make up for lost time and not stretch out this process. Meeting adjourned at 7:50.

Susie Mosher, minute taker.

(Mike Vinskey addendums next page)

Leverett Wendell Model (Contracted)

Pros

flexible coverage to residents available
Easier to provide event manpower
easier to cover officer absence
More flexible scheduling of officers
larger pool of officers
Less need for part time coverage
shared equipment expenses
ability to acquire more up to date equipment
reduced cost
-one chief
-no need for full police station-use substation
-pooled assets-cruisers, radar,
ability for officers to gain supervisory
experience
ability for officers to advance (larger
department)
more activity for officer during shift (less boredom)
Fewer cruisers required
easier to schedule professional development
time
multiple officers on one shift provides ready backup
less costly to comply with State Reform Bill
enhances disaster resiliency
no duplication of efforts
one set of policies to understand, implement

Cons

Some loss of control over police
department
Ultimate decision making lies in one chief
additional miles on cruisers
larger area to patrol
more difficult to work out philosophical differences
coordinating with multiple select boards

One Chief, One Town

Pros

Chief always in town
Ability to closely supervise officers
one set of policies to understand,
implement
same officer same patrol area

Cons

Expensive to maintain
limited career advancement for officers
Difficulty scheduling with small number of
officers
necessary to use chief for routine patrols
limited budget for upgrading equipment
no ability to share equipment/resources
difficulty keeping new hires on force
need to use part time help to fulfill
schedule
difficult to comply with State Reform Bill