

Police Study Group (PSG) – September 9, 2021 5:30 pm In person @ Town Hall and Zoom Hybrid meeting

Attending members: Select Board members: Melissa Makepeace-O’Neil, Chair, Rita Farrell
Town Administrator, ex-officio member: Becky Torres,
Officer In Charge (OIC) of the 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
General Public: Brighid Murphy, Kate McConnell, Jeff Lacy, Leslie Luchonok, Steve Sullivan, and Tim Logan

After some technical difficulties the meeting started at 5:40

Mike had to leave for another meeting that started at 6 pm. He will report on the history of Shutesbury’s consideration of merging police departments with Leverett at the next meeting. He volunteered to look into the Wendell – Leverett agreement that has enabled a shared chief for those two towns. He expressed his opinion that the committee will need more expertise than we have on our committee to conduct a survey of the citizens regarding our town police department.

Jeff Lacy spoke during the public comment period. He said there is a public meeting concerning the Leverett-Wendell Police Chief agreement on October 5, 2021 that people might be interested in attending. He asked if there was consideration of joining departments with New Salem [see New Salem Select Board minutes 8/9/21]. He recommended reading Paul Vlach’s report. Jeff suggested we interview Dan Fernandes and Tom Harding, the two former police chiefs in Shutesbury. He also warned that there would be a push from Town Hall to maintain the status quo in the SPD.

Tim Logan asked for information concerning Community Policing. That is part of tonight’s agenda. Kristin Burgess will present that information and Becky will make it available to the public.

We reviewed the minutes and approved them as amended.

Susie described the sampling of surveys she sent to committee members. The Montague, MA and Franklin TN surveys represent a very short form, the US DOJ and Fairfax County surveys are longer. The type of demographic information varied. Susie included these forms only to spark a discussion about what surveys might do; she was not indicating a preference. She reported that the Montague Town Administrator said the committee’s process of drawing up and analyzing the survey was as meaningful as the survey itself.

Cheryl said surveys often get the information they are predisposed to finding. Questions should be written to get a broad, more open-ended response. She also noted that many surveys are “satisfaction” oriented, not information gathering tools. Due to the significant turnover in staffing, satisfaction surveys would not be helpful. Mary Jo said that in-person interviews would produce fuller, more open responses.

Rita suggested a 2 or 3-person sub-committee be formed to wrestle with survey format and information gathering. Cheryl, Mary Jo, and Melody volunteered and will post sub-committee meetings to work on this.

Susie will check in with the three towns that were the subject of the 2014 Novak Consulting Group study that was commissioned by Sunderland, Deerfield, and Whately. Now that seven years has passed, she’ll see how the three towns responded to the concept of merging or modifying their police departments.

Our Officer in Charge, Kristin Burgess presented information on the history, goals and practices of Community Policing (CP). The concept of CP reaches back to England in 1830 with a listing of basic tenets that are still in use today. Viewing the public as an essential partner with the police as guardians of public safety, building on transparency, accountability, and discretion are core values. Programs in San Diego, CA, Flint, MI, and Newark NJ all demonstrate these principals were rediscovered and have developed into CP. In 2014 President Obama gave an executive order appointing a task force on 21st century policing. The committee developed a guide based on the principles of CP that would increase community and officer safety, outlining 6 pillars of CP. The new state laws in Massachusetts are building toward these goals.

Kristin says the good news is that CP is the way Shutesbury's police department has operated for a long time. The chiefs have held the standard of positive, respectful public interaction. She has made it a task for the officers:

1. to interact, not just observe, the public three times per shift.
2. Officers will learn resident's names, hear their expectations concerning policing,
3. do well being check-ins or check-ons for people,
4. follow-up on interactions and incidents
5. Be outside the patrol car as much as possible
6. attend town events, hold informal chat session with the public
7. Use social media, with discretion, to connect to the community
8. Participate in joint efforts with other service agencies and police departments
9. Offer citizen academies for information concerning laws, radar
10. Make fingerprinting services available
11. Hold the attitude of peace officer, guardians, not warriors

CP is an immersive concept for the police and the community.

Discussion and questions

CH – Shutesbury officers cannot “walk the beat” as they do in cities. Where are the opportunities for the Shutesbury PD to mingle with the public while on duty?

KB – The SPD is on “foot patrol” with the public at the Lake, school, Town Hall, and town events. They work to form a personal connection.

CH – Why isn't the state responsible for CP at the state beach?

KB: the DCR park is part of Shutesbury, the visitors are visiting our town; the town department is responsible for police services and people's public safety at the beach.

Tim Logan (TL) – The positive effects of our current SPD actions has created community connections and is common sense. What do you think the impact of a shared chief would be?

KB – Having autonomy and known department leadership with consistent expectations are essential components of CP. She has seen first hand situations where a shared chief creates a sense of disconnection. She wants to work in a small town because of the opportunity for CP.

CH – Is hybrid approach possible something that provides back-up?

KB – We have mutual aid agreements with surrounding towns. SPD frequently responds to other towns calling for back-up – three calls to Wendell, one or two to Pelham this week.

MMO – What are your CP interactions with the elementary school?

KB – The SPD monitors the bus situation – traffic following red warning lights law, traffic speeds along bus routes, and bus stop behaviors. At the school the SPD monitors the parking lot safety, interacts with

parents, kids and staff, answering questions as they arise. They attend school events when possible. Marcus Johansson is a big hit with the kids, helping form a positive, personal relationship with police. MJ – Community Policing is based on the community's participation. What is the community's role?

KB – Get to know the officers individually. Know their names, understand that they are human beings. Develop some reciprocity in the relationships. Understand the laws that the officers are implementing, learning the purpose of the laws. A Citizen's Academy would be a good tool for public education.

CH – How can the SPD reach out to the more vulnerable members of Shutesbury? How can the department identify these citizens?

KB – The SPD works in collaboration with the Shutesbury Fire Department and is made aware of people who might be in need by word of mouth.

BT – Due to HIPPA laws, this information cannot be obtained directly from Council on Aging, TRIAD, or Village Neighbors. Information can flow the other way, in making sure the whole community is aware of the SPD's ability to give information about services and their CP role.

Steve Sullivan (SS) – Like the highway dept., the police are aware of the daily routines of its citizens and follow up on concerns when a usual pattern is disrupted.

RF – Articles for the fall edition of Our Town are due 9/17. Susie volunteered to draft an article about the work of the Police Study Group.

SM – Citizens can see the video interview with Dan Fernandes on the SPD web page that confirms the concepts of CP as used by the SPD. The video and minutes of these meetings are available.

MJ – It can be hard to measure the success of CP

KB: Changes in the number and type of citations, arrests, complaints, positive comments are some ways to measure success. KB is going to include all communications of positive comments to the SB and note them in each officer's file. Video clips can be used from the body cameras if given specific permission.

CH – Clinical trials also have to employ techniques to measure success. A decrease in negative activities and lack of complaints are two.

TL – Decisions are made based on financial concerns as well as measuring the less tangible costs/benefits. Community support and satisfaction goes a long way in building interactions that benefit members of the police department and the public. Police can improve their work if they are feeling supported. And the value of a long-lasting impression on children is hard to quantify.

Agenda items next meeting are:

Update from Survey Sub Committee {Mary Jo, Melody, Cheryl}

Data on Calls 2015-2021 {Cheryl, Kristin}

Data on Patrol/Mutual Aid {Kristin}

Report on history of merger/shared chief proposals {Mike}

Information on the steps to merge police departments that Whately, Sunderland, and Deerfield took after 2014 study {Susie}

Next meeting is a hybrid meeting at 5:30 on Thursday, 9/23.

Meeting adjourned 7:35 pm. Minutes submitted by Susie Mosher