

Police Study Group (PSG) – Thursday February 17, 2022 5:30 pm Virtual Meeting

Attending members: Select Board (SB) members: Melissa Makepeace-O’Neil, Chair, Rita Farrell

Town Administrator ex-officio member: Becky Torres

Acting Chief, Shutesbury Police Dept (SPD): Kristin Burgess

Finance Committee member: Susie Mosher

Personnel Board member: Melody Chartier

Community at large members: Cheryl Hayden, Mary Jo Johnson

Absent: Community member Mike Vinskey

General Public: Rachel Schwab Rehorka, Gary Rehorka, Tim Logan, Jeff Lacy, Justin Vezina, Paul DeMarco, Mark Foster, Roo Trimble, Walter Tibbetts, Lee Elder, Officer Nate Masse, Officer Taylor Beaudry, Officer Linda Newcomb, Officer Zach Warner, Ria Windcaller, April Stein

The meeting convened at 5:35 pm

Public Comments

Jeff Lacy: In light of open Meeting law and meeting posting requirements he questioned the presence of two Select Board members, representing a SB quorum on the PSG. He also questioned whether there is a conflict of interest for the Acting Chief to participate on the PSG in light of her financial interest in being appointed to the position of police chief.

Officer Linda Newcomb: Supports our current acting chief. The SPD has had 5 chiefs since 1990’s. The response times and having a stable department is valuable to the community. It is alarming to have a dragged-out process, creating uncertainty for the SPD. She urges the process to wrap up quickly.

Gary Rehorka: expressed support for our current acting chief. He objected to the social media posting by a PSG committee member that described only two option. This was a misrepresentation of the survey that the community has to complete.

Tim Logan: Added his concerns about how much time and effort the acting chief has had to devote to this committee. He admires her stamina and professionalism dealing with negative comments and the uncertainty. He recommended the committee end its work once the survey results are compiled and not spend more time and effort on a report to the Select Board. He sees other town employees badly treated and links this to the attrition rate in town government and staffing.

Paul DeMarco: agreed with Linda Newcomb. The fire department works jointly with the SPD on many calls. They appreciate the SPD cooperation and skill, and he recommends hiring the acting chief.

Police Chief Job Description

We received the job description for the position of police chief, initially written in 1997 and amended or reviewed eight times, often in conjunction with a change of chief. The job description describes what is expected in the structure of the job now. Different chief structure models will encompass different expectations. The Personnel Committee writes all job descriptions and the SB approves them.

Community policing is not part of the job description; that is a SB policy. Members of the PSG should review the job description and send any comments or questions to our town administrator who will compile them and bring them to our next meeting.

Interviewing Members of the SPD

Three issues were discussed concerning interviewing members of the SPD. How to do it, who should do it, and what questions to use.

- a. Motion for How: two PSG members use a set of standard questions to interview each member of the SPD individually and then compile the anonymous comments to share with the whole PSG. The fire department and the committee studying the future of the SFD found this to be a very informative, inclusive process. An objection was raised that this uses a sub-committee instead of allowing the whole committee to participate. Motion passed: 6 yes, one abstention.
- b. Motion for Who: Susie and Melissa were nominated to conduct the interviews. An objection to having people who are already in town hall conduct the interviews was raised. Motion passed: 4 yes, 1 no, and two abstentions.
- c. How to draw up the list of questions was discussed. Should this be done by just two members or should the whole committee review and respond to a list of possible questions contributed by all members? Will this be a committee process if only two people generate the list of questions to use from the suggestions made by all committee members? A concern to streamline the process of creating the questions and getting the interviews done was expressed. The SFD interview questions were shared. A motion was made to use the same questions. Motion passed 6 yes and 1

Community Survey

- a. At least 300 surveys have come in. They are being kept in two piles: those received before the NDS posting and those received afterwards. Thursday, February 24 at 4:00 was set to open the surveys and tally the responses. Tim Logan, April Stein, Cheryl, Susie, Mary Jo, and Melissa have volunteered to work in pairs to record the data on their laptops. All volunteers are fully vaccinated and will wear masks.
- b. Not all members of the community received a copy or had enough time to send it in. There were also requests for multiple additional copies, which were not fulfilled. While it is unfortunate that not everyone got a survey, in an effort to be consistent we will work with responses we have.

The next meeting is scheduled for 5:45 on Thursday, March 3. The projected agenda items are:

Survey results

Approve minutes from 1/17, 2/3 and 2/17

Discuss Leverett/Wendell agreement

Review SPD interview results

Protocol for using Social Media as a committee member

Choose parts of report outline to write up

The Police job description will be on the agenda of a later meeting. The meeting adjourned at 6:52
Minutes taken by Susie Mosher