

Police Study Group (PSG) – Thursday March 24, 2022 5:45 pm Virtual Meeting

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

Town Administrator ex-officio member: Becky Torres

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

Finance Committee member: Susie Mosher

Community at large members: Cheryl Hayden,

Absent: Personnel Board member: Melody Chartier, Community Member: Mary Jo Johnson

General Public: Rachel Schwab Rehorka, Gary Rehorka, Tim Logan, Officers Nate Masse and Taylor Beaudry, Linda Newcomb, Mike Vinsky, Steve Sullivan, Susan Rice, and Grace Bannasch

The meeting convened at 5:53 pm

We reviewed our charge.

Charge 1: What are the town of Shutesbury’s public safety and policing needs? What are the expectations of our residents? To answer this the committee will research how we define “public safety and policing” in a small new England town. A listing of issues the community reaches out to the police department will be compiled. The committee may develop a survey to get community input.

The survey we conducted answers this charge. Community policing in Shutesbury has been detailed. Data from police logs were examined.

Charge 2: Are the current functions of the police department working for Shutesbury? The Committee will identify the police functions. Do the current functions meet the needs and expectations of the full community?

Similar to charge 2. Survey results show current structure meets a majority of respondents expectations.

Charge 3: Our current department structure is police chief, full and part-time officers. Does this current structure – work provide the level of services needed and expected for Shutesbury?

Survey results indicate yes.

Charge 4: Should we explore alternative structures such as a shared chief or contracting for police services? What are the benefits and detriments of a shared chief? What are the benefits and detriments to contracting police services?

A pros/cons chart was compiled and the research did not point to recommending a change. The Leverett/Wendell agreement is not comparable to a possible New Salem/Shutesbury situation. Using survey results as guidance, the Select Board can do further research if an opportunity comes up.

Charge 5: If an alternative structure (s) are recommended, what are they? What are the legal, administrative, or other actions needed for implementation? What is the financial impact of any proposed alternative structure (s)?

We don’t have a recommendation for alternative structure. The process of the Police Study Group and the uncertainty concerning the direction of the Shutesbury Police department has obstructed any further negotiation with New Salem. The Select Board will discuss these possibilities if they arise.

Charge 6: What have we learned from previous attempts to explore working with other towns using a shared police chief model?

Report on this history was included in minutes from 9/23/21.

Charge 7: If no alternative structures make sense for our community, are there different approaches to public safety and policing that make sense for the full community? Could any current police services be safely delivered by someone other than police officers? What services? What additional costs are associated with the non-police delivery of police services?

The survey included some comments about services/delivery. Since Shutesbury is a small town, it is unlikely it can afford to provide additional services on their own. There is currently some discussion about collaborating with other towns to get a grant for services such as mental health on a regional basis. The SPD and Select Board will have on-going conversations about these opportunities.

Public Comment:

Rachel Schwab Rehorka: This process has taken too long. Recommends the acting chief be hired.

Susan Rice: Thanks to the volunteers for their time and effort. She requested the survey results [already posted on the PSG web page]. She raised concerns about addressing accountability from the police department and from the public, and asked about evaluations. Acting Chief Kristin Burgess offered to make an appointment with Susan. These concerns are not in the PSG charge.

Officer Linda Newcomb: Our acting chief has proven that she can do the job well. Linda urged the committee to wrap up its work and appoint Acting Chief Burgess as the new chief.

Tim Logan: The survey clearly shows what the town wants. The Select Board has the information it needs and the competence to make a decision without a report from the PSG. Acting Chief Burgess has shown professionalism and skill throughout this difficult process. He recommends hiring her right away.

Drafting the Report

Although the PSG is not recommending any new structures, a report is needed to provide information for the archives. The history of this effort will be useful for any future efforts to examine the police department structure. Sections of the charge were then assigned.

*Cheryl will work on Charges 1, 2 and 3. The survey provides much information for those sections.

*Susie will work on Charge 4.

*No recommendations need to be addressed in Charge 5.

*Charge 6 is answered in Mike's September report.

*Officer Burgess will fill in the information for Charge 7.

Members may provide any insights on what they learned while working on the PSG. The deadline for our drafts is Thursday, April 7. The Select Board will receive the final report @ their April 26 meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 7:06 p.m. Minutes submitted by Susie Mosher.