

Police Study Group (PSG) – August 26, 2021 5:30 pm In person @ Town Hall and Zoom Hybrid meeting

Attending members: Select Board members: Melissa Makepeace-O'Neil, Chair

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: Brigid Murphy, Susan Rice, and Randy Gordon and Hugh MacKay, New Salem Select Board members

After some technical difficulties the meeting started at 5:40

Susie Mosher agreed to take minutes for this meeting. The town is purchasing transcription software and others can share the task of drafting minutes at future meetings. Minutes from July 22, 2021 meeting approved as amended.

Kristin Burgess, the Shutesbury Police Department (SPD) Office in Charge (OIC) gave a summary of the department's activities and duties. The meeting scheduled for 8/12 was postponed to a serious accident in town on August 11. The debriefing process involving other responders and personnel that follows a serious event necessitated our 8/12 meeting be rescheduled. Officer Burgess thanked us for our understanding.

The duties of the Shutesbury police department are wide ranging with officers taking on multiple responsibilities. Officer Burgess gave us examples that show, "People are our business."

Currently the department is staffed with two full time officers: Kristin Burgess, Sergeant and OIC and Marcus Johansson, plus three part time officers: Taylor Beaudry, Meghan Gallo and Linda Newcomb. The department has been short one full time officer for quite a while. The OIC arranges for coverage when an officer is ill, has to attend court, etc.

The department covers 7am – 11 pm Monday - Fridays. Weekend coverage is the same. The State Police are on call for the 11 – 7 am incidents. The network of police departments from surrounding towns and the State Police responds with assistance when needed. Sergeant Burgess feels the response time in Shutesbury is good for stationary incident calls.

Officers start their shift by notifying the regional dispatch service in Shelburne Falls that they are on duty. Using the Institute of Management Consultants (IMC), they review the log of all calls that have come in for Shutesbury and surrounding towns. After checking email, phone messages, the cruiser and equipment, the officers head out on patrol unless some other task needs attention.

Patrols include:

1. following up on previous contacts and cases,
2. responding to new civil calls that come in while on duty, which require reports to be written
3. Animal control issues, in coordination with the Shutesbury Dog Officer, Nancy Long
4. Speed enforcement (Officers must be certified in radar use)
5. Serious Incidents

The bulk of the incidents the officers deal with are:

a. Domestic calls involving family or close relationships. Usually these happen in the home with people in heightened emotional states and lots of unknowns for the responding officers. The potential for weapons is a concern. Officers de-escalate the situation and sort out next steps, inform people of the

legal processes involved, refer parties to services and make an arrest if needed. Officers assist with contacting witness advocates on behalf of the victim. Many communication skills and follow-up contacts are needed. An incident can take up to four to five hours to write the report and much more time to follow-up.

b. Disturbance calls such as loud noise, barking dogs, arguments, fights. These situations can morph into other incidents.

c. Response to accidents. Because they are already uniformed and on the road when calls come in, officers are often first on the scene. As certified first responders, they can treat the victim until an EMT arrives. They provide some medical assessment, traffic control, and an evaluation of people involved. They coordinate services at the scene of the accident with the Fire Department and other responders and ensure the ongoing safety of all those involved in the accident and response. The officers write a report that includes the condition of the weather, roads, the parties involved, etc.

d. Officers handle investigations for situations such as vandalism, robberies, etc. They are the detectives, investigators and community contact all rolled into one for these events. They collect evidence, and interview witnesses. The department keeps in mind that exonerating an innocent person is as important as convicting a guilty one. The SPD communicates back to the community, although these situations may remain unsolved.

e. The SPD acts as peace officers. They de-escalate situations in neighborhoods and do follow up patrolling in the area to keep an eye on the situation.

f. Serving, following up on, and explaining warrants and other court related procedures. Most people are unfamiliar these systems and the officers are trained and well versed in many of the legal procedures. They provide necessary information referrals for services, and guidance on the next steps and obligations. They have facilitated Zoom conferencing with the courts for people who do not have the means or expertise.

g. The reports the officers write provide documentation for courts, insurance companies, lawyers, etc. Reports have to be thorough and accurate. This is time consuming. Reports can vary in length from four paragraphs to five pages, depending on the complexity of an incident.

h. Officers are called about road conditions – everything from weather, objects on the roads such as tree limbs, erratic drivers, speeder complaints, etc.

Shutesbury is a small community, but we have many of the same problems and needs among our residents as in other towns. The SPD has to assess, respond, and refer resources for this broad range of issues. The department values collaboration, communication, transparency, and integrity in their work. The level of respect, cooperation, and communication within the department and with outside agencies, (State Police, other towns,) is important and improving as Shutesbury makes personal connections with others and shows its competence.

The SPD is not static and has gone through multiple leadership changes as is common in small towns. The state is also changing expectations of departments in light of the current societal issues. The new rules that shape our policing policies create ongoing changes, even in small towns. New requirements and new trainings are being put into place following new state regulations.

Some of the follow up discussion from committee members:

1. MJ – What happens when police are called during the time when Shutesbury police are off-duty?

KB: The calls are logged. Shutesbury police have the option to call the state police to get a report and do follow up. Officer Burgess does this and has developed a good rapport with state police officers.

2. SM – Do the State Police automatically share any incident reports they write that concern Shutesbury?

KB: Not at this time. Our OIC reaches out to the state police for information.

3. MJ – Social movements are calling for action on issues such as homelessness, food and money insecurity, domestic violence – ideas that relate to public safety. How does the SPD respond?

KB: The SPD evaluates every situation and works to provide referrals to resources. They have a large notebook full of agencies to refer to. More crisis training has been made available in the last year and a half and officers are participating in these trainings. At times officers respond with their personal resources because the job is a person-based field.

4. MV – Sounds like there are Law Enforcement tasks and Social Needs. Are there ways for the town to better meet social needs that don't overextend our department? His bottom line is that it comes down to cost.

KB: The SPD is in a public service business. They do not provide the needed social services, but they are first responders to incidents and they help people find resources to resolve problems. This is a fundamental process of Community Policing. Sergeant Burges will provide the committee with more information about the purpose and practices of Community Policing ahead of our next meeting. Police departments are changing from a warrior mode to a guardian role.

5. MMO - Shutesbury has had a Community Policing focus for years now. Utilizing other service providers in police work has concerns for safety and privacy.

The next agenda item was reviewing the spreadsheet Cheryl Hayden created; quite an undertaking. She sorted the calls from the 2015-2021 police logs, grouping and tallying the calls by topic. This showed the type and frequency of SPD calls over a seven-year period. On first review, Cheryl made the observation some activities may have shifted over time or may have been coded differently. There have been three different police chiefs during this period. Staffing level changes and the pandemic also influence the type of calls the department logged. This initial draft of the spreadsheet will be reviewed by Cheryl and Kristin in a posted subcommittee meeting to clarify some of the data.

This meeting ran long – the SPD activities are wide ranging and presenting the information takes time and is important. Discussion about surveys and the previous history of combining police departments with other towns was put on the next meeting's agenda. The committee will aim for not longer than two-hour meetings in the future. Before the next meeting members can:

1. Look over the data Cheryl gathered and make observations and list questions
2. Review the sampling of surveys Susie forwarded and note concerns and suggestions about the various formats
3. Consider the seven parts of our charge to offer what ideas they want to research
4. Kristin will send out information on the concepts of Community Policing

SM noted her preference to have in-person meetings because the technology adds a level of effort and time-consuming difficulty to the meeting. MC asked for respect for virtual meetings during COVID times.

Our next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 9 at 5:30 as a hybrid meeting. Our meeting adjourned at 8:05 pm.

Minutes submitted by S. Mosher