

Police Study Group (PSG) – September 29, 2021 5:50 pm Virtual 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: Rachel Schwab, Ria Windcaller

The meeting convened at 5:58 pm

Discussion started with the concern that assigned tasks did not appear on the agenda. This was due needing more time to research. Tasks that members take on will not be forgotten. We discussed how to prevent missing the posting deadline, which caused rescheduling a meeting. It was resolved that the agenda for the upcoming meeting will be discussed before ending the current meeting, thereby allowing the upcoming meeting to be posted asap.

Public Comments: Rachel Schwab asked how to access the Zoom recordings. The public can request these from the Town Clerk. Minutes are posted on the calendar page. A backlog of minutes will be up on the website soon. Rachel also wanted the study group to know she is a long-term resident, a supporter of the police department and feels that due to the isolation of residents in Shutesbury our town needs its own police chief.

The 9/9/21 minutes were approved as amended.

Mike reviewed some of the notes he sent out regarding the history of previous attempts to explore working with other towns using a shared police chief model. The bottom line is that both attempts were hit or miss, there were not objectives measures taken and there was a lack of follow through. He raised questions about:

3. Who were the members of the 2004-05 committee? What were their roles in town? Was this a more citizen-based committee compared to our committee that has town hall regulars? [see minutes from Aug. 31, 2004 for member names and roles]

#7, bullet 4 - Mike wants to change his use of the quote from the Novak Consulting Group, "South County Police Services Study" to separate the conclusion from the report.

11. Lack of follow up on Mass Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC) offer of input (2016-17)

16, bullet 4 - Melissa Makepeace-O'Neil is reviewing her files for a copy of this letter

MMO: I emailed the committee copies two articles from the Montague Reporter. The Nov. 2, 2017 included hostile remarks from the Leverett Select Board and as a result, Shutesbury never sent a letter to Leverett stating Shutesbury's position.

CH: What is the arrangement Leverett and Wendell are working on? What changed that Leverett is now interested in a shared chief?

KB: Wendell is considering a fee for service arrangement with Leverett.

MV: As the people involved in the decision making process change, there is a possibility for a different outcome.

SM: Mike's review of the history points to the problems highlighted in the Novak study on page 20. "The common threads are that merging police agencies is a popular subject for discussion and study; most studies recommend consolidation, but it is often not pursued; consolidation can be accomplished under the right conditions; and it is difficult to align elected officials, voters, administrative staff and employees to do so. One author stated that the failure rate with voters is about 85 percent."

"Generally, a consolidation proposal that is seen principally as an expedient way to save money is doomed to failure."

MV: Are you saying we should forget about this whole thing?

SM: The report points to why the process is/was difficult, "The primary goal should be improvement of the delivery of police services; secondary goals should include reduction in duplication of services, providing greater professional and growth opportunities for employees; and saving money."

I think the history of previous attempts were fraught with trouble because the voters, the officials and the police department were not on the same page in two towns, common stumbling blocks to this task.

MMO: During the 2004 process, our town had a visitor from Brownville, Maine to discuss their shared chief arrangement. The Shutesbury citizens that attended that meeting were very vocal about their opposition.

BT: Responding to Opening paragraph, third bulleted point - The requirement to give one year notice to is in the state statutes. [Ch 41 section 1080]

MV: He will edit his report and resubmit it to the Police Study Group

CH: We should complete the survey process before holding an open, informational meeting.

MJ: Survey questions might be, "Would you want to outsource police services?" We would have to preface this question with a list of benefits of doing so.

We'd want to survey what needs people think the department should meet, whether people support the community policing.

We'd want to know what the current cost of police services are and what % of the annual budget this represents.

SM: A comparison with other towns on total cost and % of their annual budget would be good to have.

KB: It is generally 3% of the annual town budget across the board for most towns.

CH: People will need to know what time is put in for different tasks; what it costs to keep us safe.

MC: This sounds like we're asking for a Cost/Benefit analysis; asking what is policing worth to our town. I have had only very positive experiences with the SPD, but for people with no interactions with the department, it would be hard to assess its value. Do we know what percentage of the town's population has had experiences with the department?

KB: The call log doesn't collect data by address. We can't analyze what percentage the population has been involved in calls.

SM: Shutesbury is not unique; its needs and budget are comparable to other towns. The Select Board determines the type of service (Community Policing) that the SPD will do.

MMO: At the 9/28/21 Select Board meeting, Sergeant Burgess was appointed as Acting Chief. Without that title, she was not allowed to participate in some important meetings and trainings that are only open to designated police chiefs.

Cheryl and Kristen's review of the call log data has not progressed due to scheduling difficulties. This will be on the 10/14 agenda.

The Survey sub-committee will meet on Oct. 4 and Oct. 7. We discussed issues about how to make this an effective survey. Members should send questions to the sub-committee for their consideration. Making information available is important. A summary of the SPD duties and community policing that Kristen provided would be helpful for citizens. A Police Study Group webpage will be created to have the charge, minutes and recordings and other information.

Susie pointed out that there will be other criteria besides the survey results that will part of the decision. The sub-committee will have to clarify what the role of the survey results will be.

We made an effort to project a timeline and the agendas needed to accomplish our task.

10/14

All: Bring pros/cons list for the options of Regional, shared chief for a fee, independent department and Mass State Police. Melissa will write up a glossary/definition of terms so we will all be using the same language.

MMO: Review table of budget history and comparison of police budgets from other similar towns

Survey Sub-committee: Rough draft of survey

CH and KB: Data captured from analysis of 7 years of logs

SM: Info from Sunderland, Whately, and South Deerfield concerning merger efforts

10/28.

Discuss final draft of survey

Effort to get survey out before November

11/10

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We discussed how to get a reasonably sized survey sample. Concerns included incentives, avoid creating biases, the role of information to the public, using town announcements and advertising, using survey monkey, the risks of on-line surveys, reaching citizens without computer access. How long should be given to get survey results in? What is a realistic time frame to get a representative sample? More discussion is needed.

We discussed how to respond to a citizen showed up after the public comment time.

From the 7/22 minutes: *The importance of community input was discussed. The Shutesbury survey would be one source of community input. It was voted to have our future meetings start with a public comment period in the same manner as the Select Board starts its meetings. The public can also email or write a letter with their input to the group.*

We are not in agreement on this.

Our meeting adjourned at 8:10. Minutes submitted by Susie Mosher