

## **Police Study Group (PSG) – December 23, 2021 5:45 pm Virtual / Hybrid meeting**

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

Rita Farrell - Select Board member

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, Mike Vinskey, Mary Jo Johnson

Absent: Personnel Board member: Melody Chartier

General Public: Rachel Schwab-Rehorka, Gary Rehorka, Tim Logan, Brighid Murphy, Veronica Richter, Jeff Lacy and Linda Newcomb, Taylor Beaudry, and Denise ?, police officers

The meeting convened at 5:50 pm

### Public Comments:

Masked, in-person attendees are hard to hear on Zoom and on the recording.

Linda Newcomb: Why is the shared chief structure being considered again? It was considered in the past and discarded as not workable. The department has great leadership with our current acting Chief, Kristen Burgess, garnering compliments from citizens and the MA State Police.

Tim Logan: Keep the department as it is.

Brighid Murphy: More than selecting the next chief, the committee is addressing systemic issues that are seen across the country.

Taylor Beaudry: Kristen is an excellent chief to work with. Upon request by Taylor, Kristen came back to Shutesbury on a snowy night to help Taylor serve an arrest warrant. Kristen showed understanding and compassion while handling this potentially volatile situation., modeling this for Taylor and taking care of the individual. Kristen followed up with hours of work getting treatment services for the arrested individual that should have been provided months before. Taylor said morale in the department is negatively impacted by the lack of support and criticism that has been part of the drawn-out committee deliberations.

### Review of minutes from Dec. 9, 2021

Tabled until the next meeting due to needing more time to review.

Concern that minutes are too detailed and did not reflect what was said at the meeting. The tone of the minutes was not appreciated. Each person who writes the minutes will have their own style. Defers to another person to take the minutes.

### Review of 12/9 discussion

PSG work is not a referendum on the department. The police department has the responsibility to monitor the quality of their service. Discussion at 12/9 meeting to form a citizen board to function liaison with the SPD will demonstrate and reflect the quality of the SPD. Our committee is in the important process to learn what policing is in Shutesbury. This provides an education for participants and citizens – why the department is so good and how it might be a model to other towns.

We have a good relationship with citizens; they come in and talk. No need to create a middle-man committee – less direct. Is this liaison meant to facilitate communication with minorities? The SPD knows all the minority citizens in town and has positive interactions. SPD has done outreach – Beach walks and efforts to fundraise - has any other group?

Community policing is a two-way street – getting input from citizens by reaching out in an organized way. Race can be an issue. The reason there have been “bad apples” in police departments nationally is that people who are being policed have no power. Mutual accountability between police departments and the people they serve is needed and we have that here in Kristen in Shutesbury Community policing

is a mutual responsibility and includes education and community participation. Here a liaison committee can highlight what the SPD is doing right.

#### New Topics:

Paul Vlach's letter needs to be discussed. There are points to consider and points of disagreement. SPD is very familiar with logs and data. Minute to minute accounting is too detailed and is not part of this committee's charge.

Paul's letter is in response to questions raised at the last meeting during the review of the data spreadsheet assembled by Cheryl and Kristen. How much time does each activity really take? For example, cruiser maintenance. The spreadsheet doesn't make sense.

The letter raises ideas that the SPD may wish to apply for a grant to dig into data, showing the hours spent of various types of police work.

The intention of the spreadsheet was to demonstrate the range of activities of the SPD and the relative frequency each category of tasks occurs. The mission of the PSG committee has other components to examine. The amount of staffing is not based on hourly task management but for coverage for 7 am - 11 pm, seven days a week, one officer per shift. If different staffing is needed, the Chief will discuss this with the Select Board.

#### Back to topics/questions raised at the last meeting

Western Mass Mutual Aid agreement signed in 2019 - A map of participating towns shows mutual aid covers a large area. The agreement states every sworn officer is empowered to respond to any mutual aid request or self-activation situation as needed. Shutesbury regularly responds to other town requests as well as makes requests for additional coverage by other towns. Most small towns only have one officer on duty at a time and mutual aid enables calling for back-up for the officer's safety. Mutual aid gives towns access to officers with a range of skills, such as proficiency in sign language, and providing female officers or male officers for situations when that is appropriate. The data on the logs does not always make mutual aid responses apparent.

Paperwork – This category covers serving warrants, court orders etc. The Sheriff serves trespassing notices. Other papers are served by the police officers and they make sure the orders and consequences for violation of them are well understood.

Why would an officer would stay in a small town, with a lower pay scale? Connection to our community and making a positive impact including on training other officers in good community policing. This is a higher priority for our chief than her salary.

Doing the same thing over and over in a small town, less excitement, less room to move up and less salary seem to be why small towns can't keep officers.

There are multiple possible reasons officers leave - disagreement with leadership, more money, and the instability of the department under review by this committee. Turnover in small towns is common. Shutesbury could be an exception.

Jeff Lacy: This discussion is focusing on the individual. Chiefs come and go. What is needed is a model that is sustainable. Look at other towns' administrative structures.

Shutesbury has a community policing model for our town. Whether we should have shared chief or contracted services or some other administrative structure, we maintain our community policing. Morale is being negatively affected when our efforts are disregarded.

Gary Rehoraka: This committee is taking too long; it is corrosive to the department. There would need to be a good reason to take this long. There was no problem identified with the department. It is time to decide and give certainty to the Chief and department. The town is unlikely to find an acceptable alternative model for our police department.

Gary's comments highlight the conflict between keeping the department as it is and the group's charge to consider alternatives. There are mixed signals as to what direction to take. Is the Select Board ready to deal with a report that makes recommendation for changes?

This committee's charge is to do the research and send the Select Board information. The Select Board will pick out a path and make a recommendation – Town meeting will likely be part of the process. This committee has gotten way off track, out in the weeds. The committee needs to complete the charge.

This is a waste of time. In order to consider other models, we need specifics. The discussion with New Salem was the beginning of a proposal. If Shutesbury is serious, it needs specific details.

We are gathering information. The survey will also guide the Select Board, reflecting the citizens opinions. We have been learning the elements of the different models. Our committee will not make a proposal. We are gathering information; the Select Board makes the decisions.

Linda Newcomb: This is not a new idea. In the past the town considered a shared chief and that proposal was discounted. We have a good system. In Wendell they do not have police officers in town [reliant on agreement with Leverett] What kind of response time to serious injuries do they have?

The past history documents are posted on the Police Study Group webpage.

Review of 6<sup>th</sup> draft of survey

Question #1, strike "who was acting in an official capacity." Agreed

Change in # 4 "adequate" changed to "acceptable." Agreed

Concerning #7, all police officers, including, "auxiliary" have to have the same, full training. The words "auxiliary patrol" should be taken out. Agreed

Change in #7 for last sentence to read, "How would you like the police to engage with you, your family and other residents?" This will change the intent of the question and it will not gather the same information. The committee supported the change by a vote of 4 yes, 1 no, and 1 abstention.

The survey is not ready to go out until the committee reviews the drafted cover letter. People need to take time to read and edit it. The importance of getting the survey out was reiterated. People should get their edits to MMO next week (Dec. 27-32) so she can redraft it, if necessary.

The strategies to make sure only one response is tallied from each adult were briefly discussed. Using colored paper, numbering the surveys, allowing households to request an additional survey for second adults in a household were all considered. People should make their suggestions to MMO next week (Dec. 27 – 31) so she can craft a proposal.

Our next meetings are tentatively scheduled for Thursdays: Jan. 6, 13, and 20 at 5:45. We may not need them all. Meeting adjourned at 7:52. Minutes by Susie Mosher