

Police Study Group (PSG) – Thursday March 9, 2022 5:45 pm Virtual Meeting

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

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, Mike Vinskey

Absent: Select Board member, Rita Farrell

General Public: Rachel Schwab Rehorka, Gary Rehorka, Tim Logan, Mark Foster, Roo Trimble, Walter Tibbetts, Officers Nate Masse and Taylor Beaudry, Rory Valentine, Carl Lounder, Larry Smith, Brian Donovan

The meeting convened at 5:49 pm

Public Comments

Mark Foster: How many complaints have been made to the Select Board against the SPD? Why not appoint the acting chief – if there are no complaints, what's the problem?

Gary Rehorka: Urges the town to offer the Police Chief position to Acting Chief Kristin Burgess without delay. The position has been open since February of 2021 and in order to restore the morale and stability to the department, Kristin Burgess needs to be appointed. The lack of chief is not due to failure or a pressing need to change. We have an exemplary leader in the role. We have little to gain and much to lose.

Mike Vinskey: The Leverett/Wendell agreement is not on tonight's agenda as expected.

Tonight's review of the town survey results is a priority. The Leverett/Wendell agreement will be on the next meeting's agenda.

Shutesbury Police Study Group Survey

Thanks were given to the volunteers who spent about 60 hours, tallying the survey and to Melissa who created a power point presentation to share with the town. The committee reviewed the results for the seven survey questions.

There were 322 surveys returned, 7 were unopened and totally blank. The response is 20% of the adult residents, a very good survey response rate. Some households sent in one survey representing more than one member of the household, so the response rate is reasonably estimated at more than 20%. 73 surveys came in before Mike's social media posting, 249 came in after. The tally of these two groups separately did not seem to indicate an impact on responses.

The power point presentation will be posted on the Police Study Group webpage. Overall, the data and comments support a local department, 10 minutes or less response time, and the current structure.

While there haven't always been officers on duty from 7 am – 11 pm as Question 4 presented, most of the shifts are covered and it was stated that the main problem has been lacking a full Chief to lead a fully staffed department. The state-required Bridge Academy is taking one officer's time away from shifts. The Acting Chief is on call and responds if needed.

More than half of the survey respondents listed attend town events, interact with Town departments and interact with the school as positive ways for the police department to engage with the community.

The survey took a lot of time and energy to draft, tally and present. The data and comments showed thoughtful citizen responses. The response rate is four times the national average. Satisfied people don't always take the time to fill out a survey; the anonymity of the format allowed for people to voice their complaints, but there were very few negative comments. The positive results are a testament to the current members of the police department and to community policing they do.

The survey gives a look at other people's reality, other people's concerns regarding police services in Shutesbury. This information is important in considering the work and structure of the department. The comments and further data analysis may be of value to the SPD, similar to the experience the Montague police department found after their survey process.

The PSG work is not evaluative of the department; it is meant to examine alternative structures to find what would be best for the town.

The Summary of the Police Interviews

The summary of the police interviews was the result of interviewing the four current officers on the SPD by Melissa and Susie. The interviewers agreed that the four officers felt very strongly about the positive leadership and direction of the department as reflected in the summary of comments.

The format of relaying the comments instead of creating data points was criticized as an inadequate process, relying on feelings instead of data. The results were termed, "meaningless." Whether this step met the charge of the committee was challenged. The point of view of the service providers is useful and the fact that the charge includes, "The police department will be partner in this review," is relevant.

In explaining the basis for the PSG charge to the officers during the interviews, it became very clear to Susie that our process has taken much too long and the end is no where in sight. The Select Board would need time to consider the PSG report and if they have changes to propose, town meeting to engage, agreements to work out and/or go through a hiring process, the undue stress and corrosive effect the delay has on the department is untenable.

The PSG charge may have not been well suited for a seven-member committee process. Susie would like to write up "What I learned During My Eight Months on the PSG" and let the Select Board decide what information they have/need to make their decisions. This point of view was agreed with and disagreed with by other members of the PSG.

It was decided that each member should write up what they think the next steps for the PSG should be. The written pieces should be emailed to the chair by March 21. She will send them out to the members to read, but not comment on, before our next meeting on March 24. A review of Open Meeting Law is available at [https://www.mass.gov > doc > download](https://www.mass.gov/doc/download)

Committee Best Practices

We discussed the role/problems of a committee member using social media as a platform to represent the committee's information. The PSG survey was developed in a democratic, committee manner with input and votes from its members. The NDS posting that represented information not voted to be included, was put out before deadline for citizens to return their forms. This compromised the survey as it was voted on and led to a situation where other members of the committee could not object due to Open Meeting Laws.

Some members doing committee work see it as something bigger than themselves and only act as a spokesperson when the committee gives permission to specifically represent some agreed upon

information. Other people feel compelled to speak out and believe that members should not be held in a lock-step with the committee decisions.

A motion was made and seconded: To not use social media to represent the committee's work. 6 yes, 1 no; the motion was approved.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 24 at 5:45.

On the agenda: Approve minutes from Jan 17, Feb. 3, Feb 17, and March 9.

Next steps for the committee

The Leverett/Wendell agreement

Meeting adjourned at 8:22. Minutes by Susie Mosher