

Recommendation to the Select Board for the New Salem Police Department  
December 6, 2022

Overall, the police department is in a far better place than when this committee was given its initial charge. The Police Future Committee's (PFC) recommendation to the selectboard is to allow the current version of the department to continue serving the town without significant operational model change. The makeup of the New Salem Police Department has changed significantly since the group was formed in the summer of 2021. Accordingly, the following circumstances are currently present within the department which were not last year:

- 1) The department is led by John Bonafini as Chief, following the previous Chief's retirement.
- 2) The department has a full-time police officer, who works 40 hours per week, and one part time position, also currently filled with a qualified officer.
- 3) Staffing levels and scheduling have allowed coverage on nearly every day of the week.
- 4) Due to a different philosophy from the previous chief, the department has an additional cruiser to use for patrols, one which is marked with blue license plates and plans for lettering.

The Police Future Committee (PFC) recommends the following:

- 1) Continue to have an internal police department, with a part time chief as manager and department head. Work closely with the police department to create goals and objectives for the department that match those of residents and the selectboard.
- 2) Ask the police chief to report to the selectboard on a periodic basis the status of the police department, vacancies, turnover, and concerns, and provide all information requests made by the board. Monthly seems too frequent and annually inadequate. The emphasis of this recommendation is that communication is the key, and a frequency the board finds useful but that the police chief does not find burdensome would be the goal. Implement a similar communications routine with all department heads (Fire, Library, DPW, Clerk, Treasurer, Collector, Assessors' clerk).
- 3) Request office hours where an officer is in the station to handle routine matters, meet the public, and allow time for concerns to be communicated.
- 4) Establish a plan for the department's management over the next three years (2022-2025), anticipating the need for replacement staff (promotions, turnover, retirements, etc.) and the relevant financial burdens associated with their training and benefits. The PFC, or another relevant committee, can meet before the end of each fiscal year to assist with these discussions.
- 5) Periodic review should be undertaken by the selectboard with input from the townspeople and advice from this committee if the board would like the committee to remain quasi-active. The PFC could meet bi-annually, for example, with the department head or designee to discuss any relevant issues. Further PFC recommendations could be made based on those meetings.

- 6) Focus on community policing best practices, so the residents of New Salem and the New Salem Police Department can better get to know one another. Town survey, both in person hearings and written survey results, indicates that residents favor a local, familiar, and respectful department.
- 7) Consider a residency requirement for the (future?) chief's position. This was a frequent opinion in the survey.
- 8) The police chief, like all department heads in town, needs to feel free to bring staffing and budgetary concerns forward to the Finance Committee and Selectboard in the normal annual budget planning cycle with the Finance Committee.
- 9) Department position descriptions and standard operating guidelines should be made available for public review. Selectboard should have an active Personnel Committee to adjust job descriptions to guide town employees.
- 10) Public periodic surveys of all town departments should be performed. This could be yearly or every other year.
- 11) Seek alternatives to move the police department to a suitable building for offices, storage, and general space and security needs. This was outside the charge given to the committee, but came up very frequently in public session and in survey results.

It was particularly interesting to learn, and the Select Board should take care to understand, that having an officer with more hours on duty allows for more reporting of the work they are doing, essentially data creation. Chief Bonafini told us Officer Brooks is now recording all kinds of stuff the department didn't have time to record before. The chief and the board need to be extremely careful that more data is not construed as incremental needs. It is not more calls, or more crime. The Board should be able to get call volume in a readable format, both routine prevention and patrol as well as emergency through Shelburne Control. How often did New Salem PD provide mutual aid and to whom? How often did New Salem receive mutual aid and from whom and why? The PFC was not able to get this information in a usable format for analysis. We used the town reports to quantify call volume and were not able to get any data on mutual aid. Better crime statistics (such as what type of criminal activity, safety issues or other major incidents are being reported in New Salem and how each is addressed) are important information for the Board and all residents.

Although the new qualification rules have not yet caused New Salem to fund police academy training, the PFC recommends careful monitoring of the situation. So far, the department has been lucky and has benefitted from overlap with the Sheriff's Department.

Survey results did not indicate that our residents expect a 24/7 department of internal staff. The need for mutual aid and the Massachusetts State Police is understood, and our residents highly value those additional supports.

Respectfully submitted,

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