

**Plainfield Police Working Group
Community Survey on Policing Methodology
February 8, 2022**

Background and Overview:

In late 2020, the Plainfield Select Board established an ad-hoc Plainfield Police Working Group (PPWG). The working group is advisory to the Select Board and was charged with an initial scope of work to 1) determine what the police department does and 2) what policing costs in Plainfield.

Members of the PPWG met frequently between January and March 2021 and issued a progress report on March 20, 2021. The report contains a summary of findings and recommendations regarding Plainfield's police department staffing structure; time study findings; comparisons to several other western Massachusetts area police departments staffing, fleet, and budget size; examples of regionalization and shared services; analysis of growth in public safety costs in Plainfield between FY 2015 and FY 2021; review of POST legislation; and analysis of the Plainfield Police Department's recommended budget request for FY 2022. The report is available on the town website.

Plainfield's May 1, 2021 Annual Town Meeting voted to appropriate \$107,892 for police salaries (a 34% increase from prior year) and \$34,531 for police department expenses (a 9% increase from prior year). The current fiscal year police salaries and operating expenses, which are part of the public safety section of the annual town budget, are \$142,423 (costs for police employee benefits, police station expenses and acquisition of police vehicles are included in separate line items in the town budget).

The Plainfield Police Department employs one full time chief, one full time sergeant and two part time patrol officers. Chief Litchfield and Sgt. Miazga are on duty Monday through Friday, covering the hours from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. The police station is staffed Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and by appointment. Police coverage outside of this schedule is provided by Massachusetts State Police.

At its May 25, 2021 meeting, the Select Board re-affirmed the PPWG and established the following priorities for fiscal year 2022:

1. Conduct a community survey, assuring anonymous input by participants;
2. Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) legislation and state-wide regulations - gather data & seek assistance from legislators;
3. Research regionalization;
4. Work to establish a supervisory relationship between the Select Board & Police Department - comprehensive plan.

The PPWG met numerous times between early September 2021 and January 2022, providing the Select Board with notes from each meeting, and issuing progress reports to the Select Board on October 28, 2021 and January 16, 2021. The primary thrust of the PPWG work during

this period was to research, draft and design a community survey to be implemented in early 2022, so as to provide additional opportunity for the community to provide input - beyond the typical town budget creation and review cycle - on matters pertaining to policing in Plainfield.

The objectives of the community survey are as follows:

- To offer all adults in Plainfield the opportunity to provide their input to the Select Board on matters relating to policing in Plainfield;
- To provide the Police Department with information that can help form specific goals and objectives for addressing the policing needs of the community;
- To provide the Select Board with information to help hold the Police Chief accountable to the needs and concerns of the community.

Survey Sponsor, Survey Creation/Tabulation and Survey Funding:

The Plainfield Community Survey on Policing is issued by the Plainfield Select Board, the appointing authority for the Plainfield Police Chief.

The Plainfield Police Working Group conducted extensive research on survey design, content, data collection and data tabulation methods. The group researched:

1. How community surveys can serve to increase public awareness of police department activities, provide a mechanism for community evaluation of the department's performance, and provide information that can be used to establish future priorities.
2. Police department surveys previously conducted in Massachusetts and across the U.S.
3. U.S. Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Service (COPS) sample community surveys.
4. International Association of Chiefs of Police sample community surveys.

The PPWG designed the survey for ease of dissemination (via online webform), to ensure anonymity for responders while also controlling to one response per adult resident (via randomly assigned control numbers), and to keep costs of survey data collection and tabulation as low as possible.

The costs of the survey are estimated to be less than \$500 and will be paid for by contributions to the Town of Plainfield by members of the PPWG, so as not to impact the town office or police department budgets.

Note: The Plainfield Police Chief has stated that neither he nor members of his department can be involved in the design, development or implementation of a survey about the department's performance, so as to avoid actual or perceived intimidation or undue influence over the survey process, respondents, or results. While PPWG found no regulation supporting this position, and has found several Massachusetts police department-issued surveys, we respect the Chief's wishes. PPWG has kept the Chief informed of the survey development process and has shared the final draft survey and methodology with the Chief for his awareness. The Chief and any department member who is an adult resident of Plainfield is eligible to complete the survey.

Survey Design and Data Collection:

PPWG members will contribute their volunteer time to drafting, vetting, editing, and finalizing the survey instrument; preparing and mailing the notice about the survey to all Plainfield households; manually entering survey responses that are returned via paper form into the online survey data collection form; tabulating survey results; and summarizing survey findings in a report for the Select Board.

The survey is available as an online web form at the Town's website and via paper form available for pick up at the Town Offices or Town Library. The survey form can also be downloaded from the town website. **Responses via the online web form are strongly encouraged to assist with ease of data tabulation while ensuring anonymity.**

The survey asks respondents for their perceptions and opinions of:

1. Safety, crime and quality of life in Plainfield;
2. Overall performance of the Plainfield Police Department;
3. Contact and satisfaction with the Plainfield Police Department;
4. Effectiveness of the Plainfield Police Department's community information and engagement efforts;
5. Any other feedback related to policing in Plainfield (optional);
6. Demographic information (optional).

You can see the specific survey questions and downloadable paper format:

<https://plainfield-ma.us/policesurvey>. Respondent perceptions and opinions are collected through topical lists with multiple choice response checkbox or multiple choice grids and through text boxes provided for short or long narrative responses.

Survey responses are anonymous. Given the desire to limit responses to one per eligible person, the PPWG will develop a list of 4-digit numbers to serve as control numbers. The total number of 4-digit numbers is capped at the total number of eligible survey respondents (all adults in Plainfield). Control numbers will be randomly placed onto the survey notice which is placed into an unaddressed envelope. The PPWG working group member who completes the assembly of the mailing will not coordinate with the PPWG working group member who completes the addressing of the envelopes, affixing of stamps and bringing the mailing to the post office.

All survey respondents must provide the 4-digit number on their survey in order to validate their response. At time of survey tabulation, PPWG members will cross check the provided 4-digit numbers with a master list of all numbers issued. Any survey respondents that contain numbers not on the master list will be invalidated.

A back up list of randomly generated 4-digit numbers will be on hand, in case a recipient of a survey notice misplaces the piece of paper with the original 4-digit number. PPWG will provide, upon request, a replacement number. Hopefully the need for this extra step will be minimal.

Notice of the survey, on town letterhead will indicate the response deadline and will be mailed via USPS in a business size envelope with town insignia to all eligible residents. Each notice will include the randomly assigned control number. The envelope will be prominently marked as containing time-sensitive and important information.

Target Survey Audience:

Adult (18 years or older) residents of the Town of Plainfield. Year-round and seasonal residents are encouraged to complete the survey.

PPWG will use the street list from the Plainfield Town Clerk to determine the universe of eligible respondents.

Proposed Survey Timeline:

- January 25: Select Board review and approval of final draft.
- By February 8: PPWG incorporates any changes from Selectboard, secures street list from Town Clerk
- By Feb 14: PPWG prints survey announcement letters, generates master list of random control numbers and assembles the mailing.
- February 14: Survey announcement distributed to Plainfield residences via USPS.
- February 15: Paper copies of survey announcement and survey data collection forms distributed to Shaw Memorial Library and Town offices.
- February 14-18: PPWG conducts outreach to encourage responses via email, town website news item, article in February 18 Plainfield Post and word of mouth.
- February 28: Deadline for responses.
- March 1-15: PPWG inputs data from any paper forms received, tabulates survey responses, prepares draft summary report.
- March 15: Draft report prepared by PPWG sent to the Select Board.
- March 22: Select Board meeting to review and discuss survey report and distribution of survey results.
- By March 31: Survey results are available to all townspeople via website download. Print copies of the survey report can be picked up at the Library or Town Offices.

Summary:

Implementation of the Community Survey on Policing in Plainfield per the above methodology will provide the Plainfield Select Board with an affordable, efficient and effective way to gather broad and diverse input about policing in Plainfield. Survey responses will provide timely information separate from, and alongside, the typical town budget development and town meeting process. Survey findings will help the Select Board execute its supervision and oversight responsibilities of the Police Chief and department. A community survey will also help inform the Select Board as it grapples with general questions of public safety and quality of life in our small town.