

DATE: March 21, 2021

TO: Plainfield Selectboard

FROM: Bob Baker, Rebecca Coletta, Kimberly Longey, Jack Nelson, Joe Sabourin, and Susi Westwood, as Plainfield Police Ad-Hoc Working Group

CC: Chief Litchfield, Sergeant Miazga, Paula King, David Kramer

RE: Update, recommendations and request

We are providing this update on our recent activities, recommendations and near-term next steps as part of our effort to keep our work transparent and to fulfill our advisory responsibilities to the Selectboard. We would like feedback from the board about the usefulness of our research and advice as well as some guidance from the board on areas of focus for next phases of work.

Background/Context

Plainfield Police Ad-Hoc Working Group is advisory to the Selectboard with an initial scope of work to 1) determine what the police department does and 2) what policing costs in Plainfield.

The group includes Rebecca Coletta (liaise from Selectboard), Bob Baker (liaise from Finance Committee), Kimberly Longey, Jack Nelson, Joseph Sabourin and Susi Westwood. There is no expense budget for this activity. The group works closely with Chief Litchfield and Sergeant Miazga who are kept apprised of our activities and who are included in meeting invitations/meeting notes and who have been helpful in providing requested information.

Progress Report/Recent Activities

The group met 3 times between February 17 and March 17, with additional work carried out by individuals or pairs in between each meeting. We also attended the March 1 finance committee meeting. An update was provided to the Selectboard on March 9 outlining near-term research activities. Since then substantial information has been gathered from within and outside of Plainfield. To date we have:

- **Learned more about the department staffing structure and schedule, which includes:**
 - A part-time (20 hour) chief paid at an hourly rate, working evenings and weekends primarily focused on FID/pistol permits and call responses.
 - A part-time (30 hour) sergeant paid at an hourly rate, primarily focused on training, scheduling traffic details, administration, call responses.
 - Three part-time regular officers (ranging from 10-12 hours each) provide a total of 32 hours a week for administration, grant writing, DART, HOPE, patrols, and call

response. *(Please note: FY'21 & FY'22 budgets indicate that 42 officer hours/week are budgeted?)*

- 7 “special officers”, 2 constables, 1 animal control officer (note that both constables and the animal control officer are also designated as “special officers”, so of the 10 positions there are 7 individuals involved). We are awaiting details on what the special officers do, if they are paid and if they are required to comply with the mandatory training (current and expanded under POST).
- **Compiled and analyzed the police logs published since July 2020. Key findings:**
 - Monthly 911 call volume ranged from a low of 17 (January 2021) to a high of 43 (August 2020). Calls are handled by the Northampton dispatch center and include medical and fire calls to which police respond (along with firefighters and EMTs). Calls include: alarms, animal complaints, assisting citizens, assisting another department, breaking/entering, fraud/larceny, motor vehicle accident, motor vehicle complaint, noise complaints, road hazards/wires, suspicious activities, unwanted persons, welfare checks, and misdials/hangups.
 - Calls to our local department (police office phone, chief or sergeant cell phones, Ed Morann cell phone) varied from a low of 72 (December 2020) to a high of 220 (September 2020). A few people walk into the station each month. This activity includes: traffic hazards; reports of phone scams; fraud; speeding complaints; snowy roads complaints; suspicious persons/cars; questions about Plainfield weather conditions; questions from citizens or other towns about Plainfield crime rates, court related work, hunters, etc.
 - We have developed a spreadsheet to assist in the analysis of police logs.
- **Worked on a tool for use by the department to track their daily activities at a high level of detail (including administration, call response and training) so that we can get a better understanding of how much time typical police activities require.**
 - This is a simple excel spreadsheet tool that can be accessible to each officer either on a smartphone or a desktop computer, with the ability to merge and sort data to provide a variety of information reports.
 - We have requested Chief Litchfield to maintain this level of detailed activity tracking for at least 2-4 weeks, after which time we can revisit the need for continuation.
 - This level of information will be useful to both the Chief and the Selectboard in future staffing capacity analysis and planning.
- **Learned more about a regional Records Management System (RMS).**
 - Plainfield is part of a grant-funded effort to equip towns with software, training

and ongoing support on a Records Management System that will streamline the mandatory records retention and data collection process. This project began over a year ago, has been delayed by COVID-19, and is expected to be implemented by July 1, 2021. Costs for implementation are included in a multi-town grant coordinated through the Northampton dispatch center on behalf of their area towns. Funding for annual costs of the software and training for the first year are also included in the \$83K project. After that, annual software licenses will need to be paid for through the department's expense budget (approx. \$3K).

- This system will only provide data for calls handled through Northampton dispatch (911 calls). This system will not provide records of all daily activities of the department.
- **Conducted one/one telephone interviews with several area towns to compile data on department staffing, fleet size, physical plant, pay rates, benefits and current year and projected FY 2022 salary and expense budgets.**
 - We targeted towns close in population size to Plainfield (Hancock, Cummington, Peru, Windsor) as well as nearby towns with larger populations (Ashfield, Worthington, Chesterfield, Westhampton, Chester, Blandford, Huntington). We spoke with town administrators or police chiefs (or both). Key findings:
 - Towns closest to our population size all have part-time chiefs (ranging from 19 to 25 hours per week), most are paid an annual salary (not an hourly rate) and are considered management and exempt from overtime. All of the chiefs have part or full-time jobs elsewhere (either in town or out of town).
 - Chief pay ranges from annual stipend of \$1,700 (Hancock) to annual salary of \$32,000 (Peru).
 - Chief benefits, where they are offered, include state retirement and health insurance. A few have small amounts of paid time off.
 - Most towns have a part-time Sergeant and 1 or 2 part-time officers working 20 hours or less (some are very part-time, 5 hours or less).
 - Most towns have 1 or 2 "special officers", retained to provide manpower for traffic detail work.
 - No other towns include animal control officers on the police force.
 - Current officer pay rates range from \$17 to \$20 per hour.
 - Most of the part time officers work less than 20 hours per week and are therefore not eligible for benefits.
 - Two departments have designated administrative (not police) staff providing 3-10 hours a week of support. These staff provide general centralized administration

to the town and other departments. Many towns are exploring this as a way to shift/consolidate administration and to reduce the need for the mandatory training expenses.

- Most departments have 2 cruisers.
- Most departments have designated space in their town offices or in a shared public safety building.
- Department annual expense budgets ranged from \$700 to \$28K.
- All towns have at least two major state highways, and none identified the presence of those as major impacts to the department's policing needs.
- No towns identified particular socioeconomic impacts that were driving their policing needs.
- Three towns have established annual evaluations of the department, typically conducted by the designated Selectboard member liaison to the department. These are not complicated processes. The other towns are figuring out evaluation methodologies. All see the need for evaluation as part of accountability.
- Publication of police logs are inconsistent throughout the towns we spoke with. Some publish in local papers; most have the Chief provide reports at regular Selectboard meetings (monthly or quarterly); a few do not post logs. *(Please note: **MGL, Section 98F: Daily logs; public records; confidentiality of certain entries** -... pursuant to section 63 of chapter 22C, police departments shall make, keep and maintain a daily log, written in a form that can be easily understood, recording, in chronological order, all responses to valid complaints received, crimes reported...)*
- Community engagement in policing objectives is also inconsistent. Some Chiefs are proactive about gathering information about concerns/needs; most Selectboards have a designated liaison to the department. Selectboard often acts only in reaction mode when there are complaints or other similar problems.
- All towns are concerned about the costs and training demands that will be required by POST. Some have begun discussing "leaning up" their police force, reducing the number of part-time officers in favor of fewer positions working more hours per week.
- Also in the context of POST, several towns are concerned about retention, and are actively discussing bringing their part-time chiefs to full-time status to ensure retention (assumes higher pay and benefits will assist with this).
- **Gathered information about regionalized or shared services between towns.**
 - Blandford and Chester have a shared services agreement that is working well.

They identify that the criteria for success included geographic proximity, location within the same county, and similar size (population, budgets, etc). See their shared service agreement for more.

- Windsor has an agreement with Dalton. Dalton handles all calls to Windsor police and dispatches calls to either state police or local officers, as they are available.
 - Several towns employ part-time officers that work in neighboring towns, i.e., informal shared services.
 - While all towns do rely on state police as back up, and a few rely heavily on state police, all mentioned the lengthy response time as a down-side to doing so, and noted that the state police have little interest in providing robust services to any town.
 - While many towns agree conceptually that regionalization could be a good solution, many have identified concerns about the details and the cons as compared to pros (better to be host, so capacity is local). There is concern on the part of very small towns that their voice would have less weight if part of a regional solution.
- **Examined the growth of Plainfield's annual town budget, including all public safety line items between 2015 and 2021.**
 - Public safety expenses include emergency management, animal control, fire department, Highland Ambulance, police department, town building alarms/Blackboard Connect and radio repair/maintenance, and building/plumbing/wiring inspectors.
 - Plainfield's overall budget grew 51% from \$1,821,052 to \$2,744,164, an increase of \$923,113 over 6 years.
 - The portion of the budget devoted to public safety grew 153% from \$84,692 to \$214,635, an increase of \$129,943 over 6 years.
 - The police department salaries budget grew 792% from \$9,000 to \$80,275, an increase of \$71,275 over 6 years (with the significant increases starting in FY2019).
 - The police department expense budget grew 190% from \$11,986 to \$34,707, an increase of \$ 22,721 over 6 years.
 - The police department budget in FY 2021 represents 53% of the total public safety costs for the town.
 - The public safety costs in FY 2021 represent 8% of all town costs.

- With the exception of the fire department general expenses (increase of 74%) and fire department salaries (increase of 11%), other public safety line items have been level funded year over year, have had small increases, or have been eliminated.
- **Reviewed the proposed police department budget for FY 2022, which includes:**
 - A proposal to raise hourly pay rates from \$16.78 for all officers (including the Chief) to hourly pay rates of \$25.65 (Chief), \$23.01 (Sergeant), and \$19.56 (other regular).
 - A proposal of 4,784 hours a year for police officers (92 hours each week).
 - A total salary budget of \$105,291 (a 31% increase from current FY 2021) **(3/23 update: Plainfield Chief updated budget proposals on March 23, 2021 to include his preferred scenario of \$127K salary budget)**
 - A proposal for department expenses of \$34,530, which includes \$10,000 for fuel and \$6,000 for cruiser maintenance, among other expenses (basically level funded, just a slight decrease from FY 2021).
 - We also received information from Paula King about “off budget” expenses related to the police department, which include:
 - Retirement benefits (available to officers who work more than 20 hours per week); not yet quantified (waiting for Treasurer data).
 - Health insurance benefits (available to officers who work more than 20 hours per week): Town pays 75% of \$729.84 monthly premium, for an annual cost of \$6,569 (worth roughly \$4.21 per hour as a benefit).
 - Law Enforcement Liability Insurance: \$1,665 per year.
 - Firefighters/Police Insurance: Not broken out; covers all officers, including auxiliary/special; and includes workers compensation insurance.
 - Unemployment tax to Massachusetts at .01% of salaries.
 - Facility expenses for utilities, maintenance, cleaning, repairs (falls under Buildings Committee budget).
 - Capital expenses: Vary from year to year. FY2022 request for facility improvements is approx \$26K.
- **Reviewed the revenues attributable to the police department:**
 - FY 2020 traffic details \$22,005
 - FY2021 year-to-date (Feb) traffic details \$18,983

- FY 2020 civil fines \$6,702
- FY 2021 civil fines (not yet available)
- We are awaiting information about grant revenues raised for department activities.
- **Crafted additional potential staffing hours/pay rate scenarios which include:**
 - Assumptions for meeting the requested hourly pay rates while reducing the annual hours
 - Assumptions for phasing in the requested hourly pay rates over a few years
- **Reviewed the Peace Officer Standards and Training POST legislation and gathered available information (which is minimal):**
 - Legislation enacted in December 2020 goes into effect July 1, 2021.
 - Details of the legislation still being developed.
 - Lack of clarity on how this will apply to small rural towns (e.g., credentialing vs. accreditation standards are different).
 - Lack of clarity as to whether mandatory POST training will apply to auxiliary/special officers.
 - Lack of clarity as to whether State financial support to become POST compliant will be forthcoming (e.g., payment of training fees) and/or time for the additional annual manual training.
 - Awareness that western Mass area Chiefs are organizing to coordinate communications about concerns and needs.
- **Compiled an inventory of our research, internal correspondence, reading/reference materials and model documents received from other towns. with records stored in a Google drive. See attached list.**

Recommendations for Selectboard:

- **Focus on retention of well-trained and well-performing staff.**
 - Increase pay rates from the current \$16.78 hourly rate
 - Consider establishing the Chief position as a salaried position (not hourly), with potential to increase from half time to $\frac{3}{4}$ or full time.

- Consider “leaning up” the rest of the department to create fewer jobs that are better paid and benefited jobs.
- Consider shared service agreement with nearby towns to cover evening/weekends (with reciprocity) to give officers a break.
- **Evaluate the significant proposed increase in FY2022 police department budget in context of overall town government needs and budget requests**
 - Keep in mind that many boards and committees are under capacity, have been level funded for years, and retention and succession planning for the volunteers who serve on those committees is also a priority for our town, and in many ways contributes to public safety.
- **Explore overall administrative needs of police department in context of the town-wide administration needs.**
 - The effort to explore options to bring added capacity to centralized town staff, via a regional agreement or another way, could support the police department as well as other departments and committees that contribute to public safety (e.g. highway, fire, planning, building, etc). There may be ways to create efficiencies and lower police department costs.
- **Evaluate the investment in needed police department capacity to provide traffic details outside of town.**
 - There are pros and cons of the traffic detail programs. Pros are that this activity provides a perk to existing officers to earn off duty income. Cons are that it takes a considerable amount of officer time, as well as central administration time, to administer this program. It is not clear if this program actually covers costs or makes a “profit” for the town. Revenue from this program is not offsetting growth in department expenses.
- **Continue the practice of a designated Selectboard liaison to the Police Department (and all departments)**
 - Serves to fulfill the responsibilities as appointing authority for Police Chief.
 - Having a liaison system allows support and regular performance evaluation (at department level) to occur routinely and provides opportunities to engage in problem solving with the Chief outside of the public meeting forum.
- **Actively engage with Representative Blais and Senator Hinds to advocate for a “right sized” application of POST to Plainfield, and for financial support to offset the anticipated costs for compliance.**

Next Steps

We have highlighted key trends and themes related to policing activities and costs in Plainfield

and compared to similarly sized towns in our area. These internal and external comparisons will hopefully assist the Selectboard in evaluating Plainfield's future policing needs, activities and costs. We would like to know if our body of work is useful, and whether you have specific questions or would like us to gather additional information.

Our group is a working group. We are scheduled to meet on April 7 and again on April 21st, though we would like to have feedback from the Selectboard before we proceed further, so that we are working in alignment with the board and with clarity on the direction you'd like us to take.