

Plainfield Police Department Recommendations
Progress Report
August, 2022

This document is a summary of progress being made on implementing the recommendations of the Police Working Group. The **summaries** are written in Times New Roman font and follow the section of text from the working group's original document copied here.

I. Initial Recommendations for Selectboard:

A. Focus on retention of well-trained and well-performing staff.

1. Increase pay rates from the current \$16.78 hourly rate

Status: Done: The 2022 annual Town Meeting approved a budget setting the Officer's rate at \$21.04, presumably subject in the future to the same COLA changes that pertain to all town employees.

2. 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.

Status: Done: The 2022 annual Town Meeting approved a budget making the Chief's full-time and salaried at essentially the same level as that of the head of the Highway Department.

3. Consider "leaning up" the rest of the department to create fewer jobs that are better paid and benefited jobs.

Status: In Progress. The police budget supports two officers (the Chief plus one other position), plus a small budget to support hourly "per diem officers" to provide coverage for gaps in the schedule. A new staffing plan, described in more detail (here), has been initiated to use this budget to support many off hours police responses by the Chief (now salaried), weekend coverage by the second officer, and gap coverage by per diem officers. The effectiveness of this plan in meeting the policing needs of the town is being evaluated.

4. Consider shared service agreement with nearby towns to cover evening/weekends (with reciprocity) to give officers a break.

Status: Done/in progress. The revised staffing plan described above addresses the issue of evening/weekend coverage. At least two kinds of reciprocal arrangements have been made. One is a “Mutual Aid” process in which Plainfield, because it supports per diem officers, can work with other towns with similar rosters to exchange officers for ad hoc duties such as traffic details, as well as staffing in exceptional circumstances, such as ... A second kind of reciprocal work is shown by a collaborative arrangement between Plainfield, Ashfield and several other towns for a grant that will provide a mental health professional response with Police back-up for situations where someone is in trouble, in danger and a non-criminal response is the best outcome. This is a practical, and now current example of a regional response. An active search for similar approaches to collaboration between working police departments like those in Plainfield and Ashfield will continue.

The department is currently collecting, reviewing and networking with professional associations and other departments to collect the current documents and experiences others are having with efforts elsewhere in Massachusetts. The Chiefs of Dalton and Hinsdale, about to merge to a single “regional” department, have agreed to be a resource for us in this regard. The Western Massachusetts Police Chiefs Association has also agreed to work with us in sharing its available resources. We have already been cautioned that regional agreements take time to plan and negotiate and will involve municipal leaders in addition to law enforcement personnel.

B. Evaluate the significant proposed increase in FY2022 police department budget in context of overall town government needs and budget requests.

Status: Done. The most recent FY2022 police department budget establishes a department structure equivalent to, although smaller than, that of the Highway Department, with a salaried Chief with varied responsibilities (including routine patrol as well as administrative functions)

and one almost full-time hourly officer. It should be noted that contemporary standards for law enforcement, including POST requirements, preclude the use of volunteers to support police functions, and make problematic the part-time chief/state police model that preceded it. The requirements of training, state certification and the limits of liability mean that municipalities must employ paid professionals if they wish to have local police.
