

Policing in Hartland Meeting Minutes Thursday September 28, 2023, 7:00 PM

Recorded by Christine Knippenberg

Committee Attendees:

Mandi Potter, Tom Kennedy, Trace Tancreti, Alan Beebe, Robyn Mosher, Christine Knippenberg

Public Attendees:

In Person: Phil Hobbie, Bill Donahue, Andrea Tarrington, Doug Linnell, Kevin Geiger TRORC (moderator), John Bartholomew, Robert Sangster, Victoria Davis, David Singer, Sherry Clarke, Kate Bell, Jeffrey Bell, Ryan Palmer, Chuck Fenton, Rachel Obard, Jim Kenyon (Valley News), Jill Lloyd, Charles Pettross, John Sanders, Jerry Hickson, Nina Hickson

Zoom: Jim Reilly, Nancy Lewis, Marie Hadlock, Jody Himebaugh, Jay Boeri, Margaret Tucker, Curt Peterson, Jan Fisher, Anne-Rebecca-Glenda, Ron, James Dow, Sjheila Vowinkel, Owen, Peter Tannenbaum, Ariel Arwin, Sarah Bruce, Lori White

1. Opening comments by Selectboard Chair, Phil Hobbie regarding history of policing in Hartland and the charge of the committee.
2. Slide presentation by Mandi Potter outlining the process and progress of the committee to date. Martin Dole added additional financial details (numbers are approximate):
 - a. Constable budgeted \$34,781 now working elsewhere
 - b. Vermont State Police contract \$45,000 , 780 hr. per year. \$88.06 per hour incl. paperwork, all services are on overtime. Currently used 34.5 hours
 - c. Sheriff \$65.00. hour for requested coverage, currently 107.5 hours \$6987.00
 - d. Total expenditure about \$10,000, within budget year to date.
 - e. Presented a chart of what the increase in taxes would be if 150,000 (arbitrary number for comparison purposes) at various home assessment levels was added to budget for policing services.
3. Citizen comments section: In addition to hearing input from townspeople, some specific information was provided in answer to questions and is summarized in the addendum (a sequential listing of public questions and comments and responses during the session). The session was moderated by Kevin Geiger with In-person and Zoom participants. Questions and comments are summarized below:

Questions from the public:

- a. What does the sheriff do? If there is a problem in town, do you call the sheriff's department? Why are there police and sheriffs? How is the sheriff paid? Does the sheriff's department handle domestic calls? What are the training levels at the sheriff's department? Do sheriff's department officers work on weekends?
- b. How do calls come into dispatch? Have the number of calls gone up over time? How do other communities our size in other areas (state, nationally) handle their communications needs?
- c. What are the different training levels for police officers?
- d. If there is a medical/mental health crisis, what is the process to assist these individuals in the community? What mental health training do officers get?
- e. Are officers on duty 24 hours a day?

- f. Are we going far enough in thinking about police services (e.g., our own police force)? Is Windsor an option for police services? Would they provide a shorter response time?
- g. What is the response time in other communities? What is an acceptable response time and how does that factor into how many personnel are provided?
- h. Has a Community Safety Organization approach been considered? A Neighborhood Watch?
- i. Is the building in North Hartland an option for a police station?
- j. How many of our safety needs have been unreported given our limited policing access?
- k. Are speed bumps an option for speed control?
- l. Given the low turnout, is a survey an option to get more feedback?

Comments from the Public:

- m. Noticing more sheriff's presence in town, general remarks that enforcement of speeders is positive.
- n. Known drug house, drug use, trash and leftover needles, no response from VSP. Most recently sheriff's department has patrolled and improved situation.
- o. Traffic concerns in several parts of town, speeding, accidents, lack of enforcement
- p. Response times that are excessive in dangerous situations.
- q. Police officers should be part of and familiar with the community they are policing and know where the problems are.
- r. A recent statewide Fair and Impartial Policing promotes more inclusive practices and sensitivity training for a range of public service providers and is seeking local feedback.
- s. It is premature to consider money at this point in the process vs. identifying needs.
- t. An active and varied police presence can serve as a deterrence.
- u. Surveillance cameras, blinking lights at intersections, and speed radar carts can help extend physical police presence and increase compliance. Possible grant money available as well as potential revenue through fines.
- v. Suggestion that communications be modeled after fire/ems.
- w. Observation that overall speeds on town roads has increased. All speed limits should be posted fully across town. Newer folks don't seem to understand how to drive on dirt roads, causing further safety concerns.
- x. Let's not make it a good place for criminals
- y. Need for enforcing traffic rules—parking on Station road blocking driveway and access for emergency services. Request Selectboard to do a better job.
- z. Appreciation for the citizen turnout and providing input to the committee

4. Meeting adjourned 8:38

Addendum: Listing in sequential order for questions and answers provided during the meeting by individuals with knowledge of the topics (e.g. Sheriff Palmer, David Singer, Jonathon Bartholemew, Alan Beebe, Mandi Potter, and others).

1. **What does the sheriff do?** *The sheriff is an elected law enforcement official (4 years). State mandated duties: transport prisoners, serve civil process, mental health transport. Also provides contractual law enforcement to county towns (8 towns,) security in court houses, department of corrections/children and families support, among others.*
2. **if problem in town, do you call the sheriff's department; why are there police and a sheriff?** *Sheriff's charge is county-wide though all officers have statewide jurisdiction.*
3. **How is sheriff paid?** *Small county budget that cannot fund law enforcement, financing done through contracts (e.g. speed control on interstate).*
4. **How do calls come into dispatch? How does the sheriff get involved?** *911 call goes to call center in VT or NH based on location, dispatch will send the appointed responding agency to that location. In Hartland calls go to Vermont State Police (VSP). Hartford police dispatches for Hartford, Windsor, and Hartland Fire and Rescue. If an urgent call is on the border, police might ask for service from other providers. Currently sheriff will do some calls based on town manager's requests (e.g. traffic control)*
5. **Clarifying state police and sheriff? Does the sheriff's department respond to domestic issues?** *Sheriff will respond for service in contracted towns.*
6. **What are the different training levels?** *There no longer is a level 1. Level 2 can now work full-time, a shorter training time, restrictions on what they can investigate. Windsor police are all level 3. Sheriff's department of the 27 employees in sheriff's department: about 60% are level 3, rest gone through level 2, longtime employees, supplemental training.*
7. **Comment:** *about seeing of sheriff's department in town.*
8. **If a crisis with EMS case (e.g. frail, mental health) is there a process to assist these individuals in the community?** *We are the least prepared for a mental health crisis, rely on police force as first on scene. , are there resources?*
9. **Are there folks in town who could get training to handle mental health (e.g. town nurse).** *Hartford has added a FT person to deal with mental health issues. Currently encourage the individuals to be sent to the hospital.*
10. **Comments:** *The "known drug house"—calls to state police gone unanswered, at covered bridge on Martinsville road, dumping of trash, people passed out, traffic and safety concerns. Seeing sheriff's department on the road and problem has been vastly improved (including asking junkies to pick up their needles). 1 hr. 45 minute response time for an incident on Martinsville road. Currently feels Hartland is in the center of the two VSP districts and underserved, that the expense for more police services is viable.*
11. **Are officers on duty 24 hours a day?** *No state police on duty, will respond to a call. Windsor or Hartford police might respond. Difference between contracted service (regular and expected hours) and when there was a call for dispatch.*
12. **Are we going far enough in thinking about police services?** *Unlikley we would have our "own" police officer in any near future.*

13. **Comment:** Community Safety Organizations: combine different aspects of policing fire, police, EMS, mental health services. Can be very economical if other communities are also involved. Could include volunteers, not a need to call police for everything. Cited a location in California which has been successful. Concept geared toward smaller communities. Individual offered to get more information to the committee follow-up. and provided email for. Some additional community support for more investigation of this approach.
14. **Comment:** Want police officers to be a part of the community.
15. **Comment:** Fair and Impartial Policing meeting: discussion of how to create a more inclusive communities through sensitivity training for the range of Vermont citizens. Statewide movement, looking for feedback from citizens in the community.
16. **Is the building in North Hartland an option?** \$50-\$70,000 to bring up to ADA standards.
17. **Comment:** Concern about confusion over who took which calls
18. **Comment:** It is premature to discuss money at this point in the discussion
19. **How many times have safety needs been missed at our current policing levels?**
Example given of domestic call with firearms and machete with over an hour delay. Some domestic calls handled by phone. With a lack of police presence, seeing and hearing about more drug issues. Importance of police presence as a deterrent.
20. **Thought of combining Hartland and Windsor police departments?** *Not explored yet as we are still identifying our town safety issues.*
21. **Comment:** What does it mean to feel safe? What do we need to feel safe. Windsor might be able to provide more presence faster.
22. **Comment:** One way of increasing presence is surveillance cameras, possible for some buildings. Looking at speed carts.
23. **What is the response time in other communities?** *Committee can look into that information. Need to identify acceptable response time; to reduce that time, it will require more personnel.*
24. **If getting town police force out of question, what are the options?** *Sheriff, Windsor Police. Even if there were to be a police force, there would need to have an interim step. Suggest talking to Randolph who has gone through a similar process.*
25. **Have the number of calls gone up over the years? If so, what are the changes?** *Difficult to tell reviewing the past 18 months as there is less police coverage, so the data may not be accurate.*
26. **What about mental health issues and training?** *Police officers coming on scene are the ones with first contact. If they have crisis training can better assess the needs, refer, contracts with mental health professionals.*
27. **Comment:** Observation that traffic and speed on the roads has increased, a need for more policing. Important to have officers who know the town and where the problems are.
28. **Comment:** Persistent speeding and increase in traffic on back roads. Observations through informal data well exceed the speed limit (e.g. 45- 60 in 35 zone). Traffic Logix example of speed radar that could be very helpful.

29. **Can the speed be lowered on Happy Valley Road?** *Roads in Hartland posted at 35 mph, can put up a lower speed, but cannot enforce. GPS problems directing more traffic to Woodstock across Hartland Hill road, similar problems with other roads in town.*
30. **Comment:** To address speeding can we get blinking sign coming into 3 corners—Happy to see speeders stopped coming into town. Pleased to see Sherriff's presence.
31. **Sheriff's department does it work on weekends?** *In process, some limited coverage, adding night patrols and moving toward weekend coverage.*
32. **Comment:** Suggest looking into communications modeled after Fire department and communities across the country of our size and how they have addressed the question.
33. **How can a community take care of itself in a meaningful way?**
34. **Can police response rate be modeled after fire and EMS?** *Currently 10-12 minutes for fire department to get out the door.*
35. **What about a neighborhood watch?** *Possible supplemental option to increase awareness, but still need an officer to address the problem.*
36. **Comment:** Technology and communications with VSB was excellent when they were strong in the past. There is a communication glitch with Woodstock and Hartland—
37. **Is the communication system already in place or would this have to be built?** *May need some upgrade.*
38. **Comment:** Let's make it not a good place for criminals.
39. **Comment:** Concerns that parking on the road blocks driveways, cannot get emergency services etc. Need to have more ordinances and enforce them, request that the Selectboard do a better job. Example: Station Road.
40. **Comment/ Question:** There is grant money for traffic control—town should explore grants. Possible revenue available through fines. *Vermont laws conservative about license plate readers—privacy issues.*
41. **Comment:** Untrained out of towners don't know the protocols and issues on how to drive on our back roads. Are all the roads posted?
42. **Comment:** Appreciation for the input from townspeople.
43. **Are speed bumps an option?** *Unlikely*
44. **Comment:** Reach out to neighbors and friends to get more town participation and input.
45. **Can we send out a survey?**