

Town of Hinesburg

Police Advisory Committee

November 7, 2011

Background

The Town of Hinesburg Selectboard formed the Hinesburg Advisory Committee on Public Safety Services as a result of a Motion made at Town Meeting on February 28, 2011 to reduce the police department's funding to \$70,000 that nearly passed by a floor vote.

Mission and Goals

The Selectboard stated the following mission in appointing the Committee: to act as an advisory committee to the Town of Hinesburg Selectboard for the following purpose: to gather, identify, and assess information concerning the Town's public safety needs and how those needs are currently being met; and to report to the Selectboard about how the town might best meet those needs cost-effectively, and consistent with appropriate standards of service. The Committee was charged to complete its report in time to aid the Selectboard, Town Administrator, Police Chief, and citizens with the formation of the FY2012-13 Town budget to be voted on at Town Meeting on March 1, 2012, effective July 1, 2012.

Committee Membership and Meetings

Seven (7) Hinesburg residents were appointed by the Selectboard to serve on the Committee: Lynn Gardner, Ellen Fallon, Carl Bohlen, Victor Morrison, Diane Barber, Brad Wainer, and Maggie Gordon. Lynn and Ellen served as co-chairs. Because of illness, Carl was unable to attend the meeting in which the Committee's recommendations were formulated and therefore does not join in this report in that regard. The Town Administrator assisted the Committee by collecting data, taking meeting minutes, engaging in public communication regarding the Committee's work, and helping draft a final report for the Committee.

The Committee met six (6) times between July 11, 2011 and November 7, 2011. The meetings were open to the public and were announced on Front Porch Forum and on the Town website.

Information Provided to the Committee

- 1) Hinesburg Community Police 2008 Strategic Plan
- 2) Hinesburg Community Police Annual Call Log 2nd Quarter 2010 – 1st Quarter 2011
- 3) Hinesburg Community Police Response Statistics for Champlain Valley Union High (CVU)
- 4) FY2012 Shelburne Dispatch Contract
- 5) Chittenden County Regional Policing Study – Phase 1 (July 2011)
- 6) FY2012 Hinesburg Community Police Department Budget

November 7, 2011

Information Gathered by Committee

1) Comparable Community Data – The Town Administrator investigated the following Vermont communities: Richmond, Fair Haven, Ludlow, Rockingham/Bellows Falls, Chester, Windsor, Georgia, Rutland Town, Thetford, and Jericho. His investigation uncovered that there are a variety of ways police departments are structured around the state and there is no ‘one size fits all’ template. Most communities have police departments shaped less by industry standards and more by their own unique histories. The services offered and the ways in which those services are provided vary significantly. Of the towns surveyed with police departments, Ludlow and Thetford had police departments that accounted for a smaller percentage of their total municipal budget compared to Hinesburg. Georgia and Jericho do not fund their own municipal police departments; rather, these communities contract out to the Vermont State Police and Chittenden County Sheriffs Department for police services at a total annual cost to each town of \$106,000 and \$65,000¹. Both communities reported general satisfaction regarding the level of services received from the other agencies. The Town of Rutland receives 24/7 coverage by using three (3) full-time officers; two (2) of which are elected constables. Rutland Town does not own police cruisers and the department members work from home saving the Town building and equipment costs.

2) Research paper by Norwich Student – While this paper was not discussed in detail at the Committee level, Richard B. Gauthier² attacks a problem facing many rural Vermont towns. That is, the need for police services many small towns have that are beyond the level of coverage offered by the Vermont State Police (quality of life issues), balanced against the reality that a municipal police force is often times cost prohibitive for rural Vermont communities. His paper looks at four (4) existing options for increasing police services and evaluates their advantages and disadvantages: 1) regionalization; 2) contracting; 3) constables; 4) resident trooper program.

3) Chittenden County Unit for Special Investigations (CUSI) Funding Mechanism Information – This Unit promotes cooperative efforts between the various agencies that are involved in the prevention, investigation, advocacy, medical and therapeutic treatment and prosecution of cases and to better protect and serve victims and families impacted by sexual and severe physical abuse crimes. Community funding for CUSI is determined as a percentage of population for communities, like Hinesburg, that are non-officer contributing towns. Hinesburg is responsible for 7.86% (\$5,426) of \$70,611 total budget for FY2012.

4) School Resource Officers (SRO) – In 2010 the Hinesburg Community Police Department responded to 74 total incidents at CVU. 18% of the student body is from Hinesburg; the rest come from surrounding communities. Municipalities like Middlebury, South Burlington, Barre City, Windsor, Fair Haven, and Richmond have SRO programs in which the school district shares in the

¹ These figures do not factor in additional expenses Jericho and Georgia must pay for ambulance service.

² Mr. Gauthier is also the Chief of Police for Bennington, VT.

November 7, 2011

cost. These municipalities reported both positive outcomes from the SRO program and strong support from the school district and the town/city.

5) Regional Policing/Merger – Many Vermont communities have discussed regional police service as a way to improve services to the taxpayer. Fair Haven, Thetford, Windsor, and Richmond all reported that they had investigated regional policing with their neighbors. Merging may also offer small towns like Hinesburg increase officer retention rates by allowing upward mobility as part of a larger department. It's difficult to estimate the impact a merger would have on overall costs. Most likely costs would not decrease dramatically but services may increase.

6) Dispatching Services – Dispatching options range from \$0 cost for those municipalities with 'Grandfathered' Vermont State Police contracts like Richmond, Rutland Town, Fair Haven, and Chester to \$99,000 for Windsor's payment to Hartland Dispatching. Other municipalities like Ludlow, provide their own dispatching service. Like Hinesburg some police departments pay a fee to another municipality or to the Vermont State Police for dispatching service, effectively 'regionalizing' this service.

7) Hours of Operation and Staffing – Departments around the State vary in their coverage hours. Ludlow and Windsor operate 24/7. Fair Haven's service hours go from 8am – 3am; Chester reported service hours to be 6am – 2am. Richmond and Hinesburg operate from 7am – 11pm. Richmond has moved to on-call hours during their off time. All of the departments visited by the Town Administrator operated shifts with one (1) officer except for Bellows Falls, which was mandated by their Union Contract to always have two (2) officers on-duty. The constables in Rutland Town work solo shifts and are on-duty approximately 40hrs a week each.

8) EMT and Ambulance Service – Hinesburg does not pay for EMS service because all full-time police officers are required to be certified EMT-B. Some municipalities, such as Richmond and Thetford, pay private ambulance services directly; others, such as Chester and Windsor, own and operate their own EMT/Ambulance service and invoice patients for revenue. It's worth noting that during the time the Committee was meeting, one (1) Committee member needed to call 911 for a personal emergency and reported two (2) Hinesburg officers were at his door within four (4) minutes. He reported, 'I am hard pressed to find fault with that response and feel grateful to live in a town where, when it was my loved one, I didn't have to wait or worry.'

9) Independent Evaluation of Law Enforcement Services for VT General Assembly (02/09)- The findings in this report suggest that too many police departments across the state are dependent on the Vermont State Police and a better option is to pool resources and establish a full-time police department that can appropriately address community issues and provide a local control mechanism for police services.

10) 2008 Strategic Plan Update – Chief Silber presented the committee with an update of the 2008 Strategic Plan. Silber identified the following top objectives from the report and informed the Committee how each objective has been met.

Hinesburg Police Advisory Report

November 7, 2011

- Traffic Safety - Patrol Activities had increased since 2008 from 25%-45% of total time and traffic accidents were reduced from 124 in 2008 to 83 in 2010.
 - Reduce Crime - Hinesburg's percentage of criminal incidents have been reduced from 22% in 2004 to 12% in 2008 to 9% in 2011; during that same time Criminal Case Closures Rates increased from 30% in 2004 to 49% in 2008 and 2010.
 - Increase Quality of Service. Hinesburg Community Police Department took the following three (3) initiatives: 1) Increased interaction at the schools; 2) Increased public notifications; 3) Implemented Restorative Justice Program.
 - Equipment Replacement & New Facility – Since 2008 the Department has done Lease-to-Own for two (2) new vehicles and obtained grants for Mobile Data Computers (MDC's), Dash Cams, and new Radios.
 - Provide High Quality Training – The department has exceeded its recommended 400 hours of training per year. This figure includes EMT classes and continued training.
 - Maintain Acceptable Workload for Officers – The 2008 Strategic Plan recommended a maximum of 300 cases per officer. Incident count per officer has decreased from 377 in 2005 to 261 in 2008 to 312 in 2010. The response time for both serious and non-serious calls have decreased to under eight (8) minutes.
- 11) Relationship Between Growth of Population; 2 – Number of Police Calls; 3 – Full-Time Officers; and Budget – The 2010 Census showed that Hinesburg experienced a population growth of less than fifty (50) people over the decade. In Fiscal Year 2000-01, the Hinesburg Community Police Department's budget was \$191,065, which equaled 8.1¢ on that tax-rate. In FY2012 the budget for police was \$429,782³, an amount equivalent to 8.3¢ on the tax rate. The number of calls per year increased from 1293 in 2004 to 1550 in 2010; over the same time-period the total percentage of criminal calls decreased from 21.8% to 10.8%. Between 2004 and today, the police department has increased from 3.5 full-time equivalents to 6. Since 2008 the department has increased by one (1) full-time officer.
- 12) Citizen Review & Advisory Boards – Richmond has just recently re-established its citizen advisory board; Thetford police sponsor forums for the public to be able to interact and voice issues or suggestions directly to the police department; Fair Haven sponsors Fair Haven Area Neighbors; and Brattleboro has a Citizen Police Communication Committee with a stated goal of providing “consistent feedback between the police and community, arrange for an independent means to mediate disputes between community and police, and to foster community safety.”

³ The FY2001 budget for Town Meeting showed the HCPD budget without health benefits and the FY2012 budget showed the HCPD budget as \$544,513 but included \$76,756 in health benefits. Grant salaries had to be subtracted out of both figures.

November 7, 2011

Services Provided by Hinesburg Community Police Department

The department follows the "community-policing model" which promotes input and interaction with the public. In addition to patrol, traffic enforcement, and all other traditional police services provided by the department, all full time officers are certified Emergency Medical Technicians (Basic). Officers respond to approximately 1600 calls each year ranging from minor incidents to serious crimes in progress.

Additionally, Hinesburg has the responsibility of handling all calls for service at Champlain Valley Union High School. The school is the largest single user of police services of any entity in Hinesburg and the police department has one (1) officer that is specifically assigned as a liaison to CVU.

The department also provides many non-traditional police services such as: referrals to social service agencies, sponsorship and participation in the Restorative Justice Program, and education for CVU students pertaining to drug and alcohol issues. The police department also provides residents of Hinesburg the service of checking on their homes while they are away and vehicle lock-outs, at no additional cost to the tax payer.

Hinesburg Community Police Department Coverage Hours

The department provides police services from 7:00 AM until 11:00PM. After 11:00 PM priority calls are referred to the Vermont State Police. The Vermont State Police does not operate after 2:00 AM.

Personnel

The Hinesburg Community Police Department is comprised of five (5) full time officers and four (4) part-time officers, whose part-time hours account for an additional full-time equivalent. At the time of this report, a Chief of Police and a Deputy Chief of Police were employed and included in this number. After the Committee completed its deliberations, but before this report was issued, the Selectboard decided that, because of the announced retirement of the current Chief as of January 1, 2012, the Deputy Chief will move into the Chief position and the Town will eliminate the Deputy Chief of Police position. The current practice of the Hinesburg Community Police Department requires that no fewer than two (2) officers are to be on shift at any given time, whenever practical.

Facility & Equipment

The Town of Hinesburg is housed in its own facility. The Town has four (4) vehicles, three (3) 4x4 Chevy Tahoe's and one (1) Dodge Charger.

COPS Grant

Currently one (1) officer is funded through a 'COPS' grant. This is a three (3) year federally funded grant that pays for 100% of the total salary and benefits of a Hinesburg Community Police Officer. As part of this Agreement, the Town is responsible for 100% of costs of that officer in year four (4). Grant funding expires at the end of FY2013 and the Town of Hinesburg will be responsible for the cost of that position in FY2014. The total cost of that position will be approximately \$70,000.

Other Revenue

November 7, 2011

The Hinesburg Community Police department receives revenue from fines and other available grants when appropriate.

Services Provided By Others

Chittenden County Special Investigations – CUSI is a regional project that provides investigations of sexual crimes.

Hinesburg's financial contribution to CUSI is not a legal requirement; however, it is relatively modest and the Committee believes that CUSI does provide a valuable service. Hinesburg's contribution for FY2012 was \$5426.

Dispatch – Dispatch is provided by the Town of Shelburne for a cost of \$36,000 in FY2012.

Mutual Aid – Hinesburg also provides mutual aid to any law enforcement agency that requests service and receives assistance from other law enforcement agencies as needed.

Recommendations

Staffing

1. Continue with a working chief model.
2. Keep staffing levels as they are currently with the understanding that the level will need to be reviewed in 2 ½ years - when the COPS grant position ends - and may need to be adjusted at that time (increase or decrease).
3. Set a ceiling for the budget at 8¢ on the tax rate for the police department budget.
4. Police Chief should explore the option of daytime solo shifts.
5. The Town should investigate the concept of 24 hour on-call coverage.

Relationships with other Agencies

1. Review Dispatching Services to ascertain whether the current contract is the most cost-effective means of providing dispatch.
2. Continue Relationship with CUSI
3. Strengthen relationship with Vermont State Police and other regional agencies to promote opportunities for coordination/mutual aid.
4. Continue with a town-specific municipal police department and not look into a merger at this time.
5. Open discussions with CVU for compensation from the school district to the Town for police services provided, in order to ensure that the remaining sending towns support their fair share of police services at the union high school.

Community Policing

1. Create on-going Citizen Advisory Board with the following responsibilities:

Hinesburg Police Advisory Report

November 7, 2011

1. to promote the community policing model in Hinesburg and encourage interaction between the police and residents;
 2. to educate the public about police staffing levels, services, and community assistance tasks;
 3. to establish a platform and process for residents to voice their concerns and grievances;
 4. to work with the Chief of Police on an annual review of the Strategic Plan;
 5. to plan, design, and potentially contract with a professional survey firm in order to do periodic surveys of town residents so to capture all points of view in a scientific manner.
2. Public relations must be improved and could be part of the mission of a citizen's board.

Strategic Plan Update

1. Strategic Plan should be reviewed annually – possibly the responsibility of the Advisory Committee working with the Chief.

Capital Equipment

1. No recommendations

Structural Issues

1. Clarify supervisory roles between officers, Chief, Town Administrator, and Selectboard.

November 7, 2011

Appendixes (available on Town webpage):

A – Hinesburg Community Police Department 2008 Strategic Plan

B – Hinesburg Community Police Department FY2012 budget

C – Hinesburg Community Police Response Statistics for CVU (2010)

D – Hinesburg Community Police Department Statistics 2nd Quarter 2010 – 1st Quarter 2011

E – Hinesburg Community Police Criminal Incident Occurrence Comparison

F – CUSI Funding Mechanism

G – Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Chittenden County Regional Police Study Phase 1

H – Independent Evaluation of Law Enforcement Services prepared for the VT General Assembly (2009)

I – “There is Never a Cop When You Need One: The Problem of Providing Law Enforcement to Rural Vermont Communities”© by Richard B. Gauthier, Norwich University, 2007.

J – Updated 2008 Strategic Plan Power Point Presentation by Chief Silber

K – Community Data Comparison Charts