

DATE: April 22, 2022

TO: Plainfield Select Board

FROM: Bob Baker, Rebecca Coletta, Kimberly Longey, and Susi Westwood - as Plainfield Police Police Working Group members

CC: Chief Litchfield, Paula King, Bob Silberberg

RE: April Update and recommendations

Following the Community Survey on Policing in Plainfield, and the [summary report](#) released March 13, we offer a new set of recommendations for the Select Board and police chief to consider. These ideas are not all-inclusive, they simply represent the topics that rose to the top based on survey response and the information we've gathered over the past 16 months.

Our current recommendations build from those sent to the Select Board in [March 2021](#) (a year ago) in which we provided updates on our initial research related to:

- Police logs, time tracking and time utilization
- Records Management Systems
- Police department structure, size and budgets of 11 area towns, and issues those police departments were grappling with in 2021
- Regionalization experiments in nearby towns
- Plainfield's town budget growth between 2015 and 2021 and proposed FY 2022 police department budget
- POST

These current recommendations also build from our [November 8, 2021](#) update in which we provided responses to questions from Hilary Weeks:

- Survey: our rationale for why to issue one and how the responses could be used to support the Select Board, the police department and the town
- POST: why it was necessary to have a plan from the police chief for how he would handle the required trainings before any direct legislative requests could be made
- Regionalization: our recommendations that Plainfield start with shared service

agreements for some aspect of police related work (e.g. evening/weekend shift coverage, administrative support for grant writing, reporting, etc) and our related recommendation that any discussions of regionalization need to be grounded by clear goals and objectives and desired outcomes before conversation with other communities are initiated

- Supervision: our recommendations that a robust supervision system need not be complicated and starts with agreement on job responsibilities and priorities; a proposed annual work plan from the Chief; regular meetings throughout the year to provide informal two-way feedback; and input from department members on the Chief's performance.

New Recommendations April 2022:

The following relate to major themes contained in survey responses:

1. **Safety: Speeding motor vehicles is the number one area of concern.** (58%/103 of the survey respondents). Ideas for ways to address speeding, without significantly increasing department personnel, include:
 - a. Given the likelihood that local residents contribute to the speeding problem - conduct a community engagement and awareness effort, using the Plainfield Post and social media, and consider asking residents to make a public commitment not to speed in Plainfield.
 - b. Use the existing mobile message boards recently purchased by the town with ARPA funding to spread messages that caution drivers about excessive speed.
 - c. Deploy mobile radar speed signs that notify drivers of their current speed as compared to the posted speed limit. These traffic calming devices are affordable and many area towns are using them to augment their limited patrol officer capacity.
2. **Weekend Coverage: The lack of local police officer coverage on weekends was mentioned more than 40 times in the survey comments.** Many respondents do not necessarily want to see an increase in the police department budget or size of the department, they want to see the resources allocated differently. Ideas include:
 - a. Clarify the expectations for the police chief position, a full time, salaried, management/supervisory position, that is exempt from overtime provisions of labor laws. Note the expectation of any department head (be it fire, highway,

buildings, broadband, and all town committee chairs) to ensure adequate (typically 24/7/365) coverage of work related to their town role by scheduling themselves and their staff appropriately.

- b. Ensure that the Select Board and the Chief are in alignment about expectations for work. For example: if the police chief is called to duty on an evening or weekend, he has the ability and authority as department head to adjust his hours elsewhere in the same pay period. This is called flex time (not “comp time”) and is typically how exempt managerial positions perform, while staying compliant with compensation requirements and limits. Please consult town counsel if the Select Board or Chief need information on this.
 - c. Adjust the Monday-Friday public office hours, and limit the hours for non-emergency business to two times a week for 2 or 3 hour blocks (one during day, one in the evening). This allows a shift of officer time to weekend coverage.
 - d. Vary the Monday-Friday 6 a.m. through 9 p.m. schedule to increase hours of coverage on Saturday and Sunday. There are multiple ways that schedules can be arranged to accommodate the town's needs, while providing predictable work schedules for the department staff, other than the existing Monday through Friday schedule.
- 3. Department funding continues to be an area of concern.** 35% of respondents perceive the department has too much funding, and another 22% do not have information to form an opinion. Based on the survey data and comments, there is an opportunity for deeper engagement between the Select Board, police chief and community about the appropriate level of resources. This starts with a much clearer understanding of what the department does, how resources are being allocated, and what is driving the resource allocation decisions. This is almost certainly going to be a perennial issue for the department and the Select Board, and conversations about this should not be relegated solely to the budget approval process at annual town meetings. Leadership from the Select Board is needed here.
- 4. Police logs and proactive communications need improvement.** When asked if the information provided by the Plainfield police to the community is useful to understand the goals, objectives, activities and accomplishments of the department, responses varied.

- i. Survey comments included several constructive ideas for how to improve the quality of the police logs that are now published monthly, after more than a year of townspeople advocating for this practice. Specifically: Adopt a log format that not only provides a summary of the volume of calls in any given month; but also provides meaningful information about the nature of call and the disposition of the situation. (e.g. date/time/location/response/action). Good examples of meaningful and compliant police call logs have been previously provided to the chief by members of this working group, and include the [Ashfield Police Department log published in the Ashfield News](#); and the [Northampton police department daily logs](#). The town of Greenfield also publishes a meaningful police log.
 - ii. Note that the police department website page content was cited as the least effective mechanism for info sharing. Consider using the Plainfield Post or the “Everything Plainfield” social media Facebook page to provide periodic updates on Plainfield police department activities beyond publication of the log.
 - iii. Consider providing regular remote access to Select Board meetings and/or disseminating recordings of the Select Board meetings via the town website, a practice increasingly in use by neighboring towns in order to increase public participation in town affairs. Doing so would expand the opportunity for residents to be informed about town matters, and hear the police chief’s reports.
 - iv. Continue judicious use of the reverse 911 calling system (aka Blackboard Connect), as was recently done in context of an uptick in local area vehicle break-ins.
- b. When asked if Plainfield police make it easy for community members to provide input about the department’s activities, 50%/88 respondents said they are unsure/don’t know and another 21%/37 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- i. Publish the chief’s goals and objectives for the department.
 - ii. Host a periodic meet/greet where community members could speak with each other and directly with police department staff.
 - iii. Provide an online google form for residents to submit feedback, this

would create a year round mechanism for the Chief and the Select Board to stay aware of the community's concerns and ideas.

- iv. Post frequently asked questions (FAQS) and answers so as to simultaneously increase public service and decrease time spent on repetitive questions. This is a standard practice for many area police departments.

5. Conduct an analysis of the police off-duty traffic detail program and make this information transparent to townspeople. Many survey respondents have questions about Plainfield's long standing practice of assigning police officers to work off-duty using town vehicles - both in town and outside of town - for various road construction projects. This practice has been touted by the Chief as both a revenue generator for the town and a recruitment/retention mechanism for the department.

- a. Survey responses expressed concern about the focus of this effort, in context of taking manpower and vehicles outside of town; the wear and tear on the vehicles; and the diversion of attention to this off-duty activity from attention to on-duty activities that more directly support community safety in Plainfield.
- b. In fiscal year 2021 the town reported revenues of \$29,312; and paid off duty officers \$77,200. In fiscal year 2022 (partial year data through January) the reported \$5,025 in revenues and off duty officer pay of \$44,255. No other expenses are attributed to the program (for example: fuel, vehicle maintenance and depreciation, staff time to schedule, document, invoice and collect the revenues). The officers receiving the greatest amount of compensation through the off-duty road traffic detail work are Officer Wright (who has no regularly scheduled police duty shifts); Sergeant Miazga (who has a full time job with the police department) and our two long time part-time constables Ed Morann and Mert Taylor Sr. The appointed part time special police officers who live outside of Plainfield and who hold police jobs in Springfield, Chicopee, Hadley, Ashfield, Whately, Enfield, CT and elsewhere have been recruited to expand capacity of the Plainfield department, though perform no scheduled work shifts for the department (with the exception of Officer O'Brien who periodically works 5 hours a week). These special officers perform the least amount of off-duty traffic details. So while it is clear this program may be a good perk (and contributes to the annual income of local officers) it is not clear if this practice results in retention of police department capacity or in net earnings for the town.
- c. Consider the true costs of this program, including labor performed by Plainfield

police officers while on duty (scheduling this work, dealing with the paperwork) or off duty (oil-changes and vehicle maintenance); calculate all of the indirect costs of billing, collections for this work, and the costs of insurance, fuel, and vehicle depreciation that impact other town expense accounts.

- d. Make the revenues and expenses of this program completely transparent to townspeople. Note that many neighboring towns accomplish this by including off duty detail program revenues generated payments to off-duty officers clearly in the town annual report.

The following recommendations emphasize feedback we have provided in recent Select Board meetings and in our previous written updates cited above.

6. The police department's technology adoption, usage and training needs improvement.

Over the past year, the chief has repeatedly stated "we're working on it" when asked about the apparent ongoing struggles by department staff to utilize, troubleshoot and enhance the Records Management System (RMS) recently installed as part of Hampshire county initiative. The in-depth time tracking system designed and put in place last year to assist the chief, this working group, and the Select Board in deeper understanding of how police department staff time is spent has been abandoned.

- a. Use of technology is no longer considered a "nice to have" skill in any workplace.
- b. The Select Board must ensure that police department staff have the necessary skills and training to use the systems and software required of them so that department activities can be compliant and also transparent.
- c. The Chief has said the department is "data driven", but shares little about the data that is driving decisions or about the challenges the department is having with the RMS system.
- d. Evaluate the technology in use by the police department, and develop a financial, staffing and training plan to effectively harness its use and plan for future uses (and investments).

7. The Chief must provide a written plan for the department's compliance with POST, including a plan for each officer, the overall estimated costs for certifications/recertifications, and assumptions made about timing for the same. Even with the evolving nature of POST legislation and implementation, the Select Board cannot effectively advocate for the town's needs without a conceptual plan.

- a. Neighboring town police departments have prepared such plans as part of their FY2023 budget proposals. There are examples readily available for our chief to adopt for Plainfield's purposes.
- b. Plainfield has 4 regular officers, 8 special officers, 1 animal control officer and 2 constables. This is an extraordinary number of positions, given the size of our town; and makes the implications of POST even more crucial for all to understand.
- c. Without a plan showing order of magnitude and impact, the Select Board cannot request legislative support or ensure the town's future compliance.

8. Consider shared services as a precursor to more formal full department

regionalization. The idea of regionalizing services looks and sounds great on face value; and the hard work is in the details. Explorations for regionalizing anything need to start with clear goals and objectives: Why do it? What for? Who with? How will we know it is a success? We recommend starting with smaller, shorter term shared service agreements.

- a. For example: Shared services can be within existing Plainfield town departments, and some ideas are:
 - i. The municipal hearings officer, identified by the police department as a necessary position, has duties (and skills, with the required training) that could be resident in a Town Clerk or Administrative Assistant. This model is in practice in many neighboring towns.
 - ii. Rather than having multiple very part-time stipend assistants working in siloed departments, consider consolidating administrative functions to well qualified, technologically competent and better paid position(s) serving multiple departments while providing improved public service to taxpayers. We understand this concept is under discussion and would be happy to provide additional input as requested.
- b. For example: Shared services can also be between one or more area towns. The current pressures of late night and weekend coverage could be one example of a problem that could be solved, without increasing the Plainfield police budget substantially, by collaboration with neighboring towns, as many are seeking to

solve the same problems with staffing and budget limitations.

- c. Exploring shared services agreements provides the Select Board and the chief to try something out via intergovernmental agreement prior to establishing longer term arrangements that require town meeting approval and financial commitments.
- d. Clarifying the goals and objectives of shared services or regionalization, in writing, with measurable outcomes for success, is essential in order to attract political or financial support for such arrangements.

We hope this update and these recommendations are useful and, more importantly, we hope the Select Board and Chief can commit to acting upon at least some of the ideas we have shared over this past year.

We're happy to answer any questions.