

## Royalston Police News

We continue to review the best path for our communities' policing needs as a result of the restrictions placed onto us by the Police Reform Bill. This Reform has had a detrimental effect on smaller communities as it eliminates the training for those that wish to give back to their communities as a part-time officer. Royalston has relied heavily on part-time staff that are committed to giving back to their community.

Prior to implementation of the Reform Bill, the Royalston Police Department employed 19 part-time officers. This staff covered daily patrols, responding to reports of crimes, response to medical emergencies to quickly get a medical trained first responder on scene to assist the fire and ambulance personnel, crime prevention patrols and responding to emergency calls during overnight hours. Our current staffing level has dropped to 9 staff. I recently attended a meeting with Western Massachusetts Representatives as they are feeling this detrimental impact on their policing services due to the loss of available part-time staff.

Communities have considered shared services, regionalization with a larger community or adding full-time staff to ensure the policing needs of the community are met to the satisfaction of the residents. Regionalizing and shared services have been implemented in Western Massachusetts with a few small neighboring communities, that are similar in size and population, and were exploring the idea for several years. One of the main points the representatives made clear during the discussion, was if communities are exploring regionalization (a host community taking over the policing of a neighboring community) there is no cost savings and costs have increased to the community taken over, and they continue to review if the same services are being provided by the host community.

A main take away from this meeting was you need to have neighboring communities that are interested in regionalizing and or sharing some basic policing services. I have explored this with our neighboring communities and there is no interest at this time, as all agencies across the Commonwealth are struggling to fill their own staffing needs and taking on additional work (response calls) would only negatively impact and be unfair to their communities. While exploring this idea with neighboring communities, if it were to work, the host community would require hiring additional full-time staffing for all 3 shifts throughout the day, and this expense would be assessed to the non-host community. Collectively it was determined this regionalizing would be more costly to our community than if we were to do it ourselves.

The concern our Community is facing with its policing needs is having enough part-time staff available to fill daily patrols and responding to emergency calls during non-patrol hours to include overnight. We have been grateful to the Athol State Police for assisting us during this transition time, but they also assist the other 16 communities, 7 of which operate with part-time staff covering the overnights. Select Chair Deb Demico and I recently met with the State Police Major and Barracks Commander, and they will assist us in any way possible, but they are having a staffing issue as well statewide.

A review of the years 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 (6-months) has determined an average of 996 emergency calls per year, this does not include general calls for service received at the police station. These calls breakdown into the following shifts:

7am-3pm Shift (61%)

3pm-11pm Shift (34%)

11pm-7am Shift (5%)

As requested by the Selectboard, I have proposed two budgets for FY25. One budget reflects our policing operation to continue as is, and the second budget reflects what I feel will provide the best policing

operation for our community based on call volume, staffing requirements and fiscal cost. I feel providing a patrol from 7am–3pm and 3pm–11pm Monday through Friday will provide the community with a strong visible crime deterrence during the daytime while residents are away from home at work or away on vacation. The 3x11 shift will be available to be visible, respond to emergency calls and meet with residents which are more available in the evenings. This will additionally provide our First Responder Medical trained police to quickly respond and assist with emergency medical calls. I have recommended one eight-hour patrol on Saturdays and Sundays from late morning to early evening. Overnight coverage for emergency calls would continue to utilize staff for callouts and if no one is immediately available, the call would be forwarded to the State Police in Athol or to a neighboring community if we should enter into a Mutual Aid Agreement (MOU) for the overnight assistance when our staff are unavailable or on another emergency call.

The Selectboard and I will continue working to provide the best immediate police service to the Community and future work will include informational meetings with residents as your thoughts and concerns are needed to be part of the solution to ensure we continue to live in a safe New England Community.

Sincerely, Chief Curtis Deveneau