

Wolcott Law Enforcement Committee Meeting April 28, 2021

Zoom meeting: 6:00 p.m.

All Minutes are draft until approved by the Selectboard
Please see future Minutes for approval of these Minutes

Present: Kurt Klein, Linda Martin, Ryan Bjerke, Rick Harkins
Absent: Elliot Waring, Andy Duff
Scribe: Deb Klein
Reporter: Doug McClure, *Hardwick Gazette*

Kurt called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. The Agenda was posted on the Town's website. Minutes will be posted on the website as well. Deb Klein volunteered to serve as scribe, but is not a member of the Committee.

Amendments to the Agenda: None.

Comments from the Community: None.

Committee Purpose & Goals

Kurt explained that the Law Enforcement Study Group that had been meeting with representatives from Hyde Park, Johnson, and Wolcott has dissolved. Duncan Hastings, who had chaired the group, has shared, upon request, his summation report. Kurt believes the report contains good information and statistics that will be useful to this Committee going forward.

Based on feedback from citizens, there seems to be a high level of interest in having this Committee continue investigating law enforcement services to the community. Of primary concern to citizens is the cost of law enforcement in relation to expectation of services. The top three issues appear to be: 1) response time of the Sheriff's Office to calls in Wolcott, particularly in remote areas. 2) Speeding, and the perceived level of patrol; particularly on the "speedways" of Town Hill Road, East Hill Road, Elmore Pond Road, and VT Rte 15. 3) Drug trafficking. Citizens would like to see a greater law enforcement presence in town to help serve as a deterrent to drug sales. The Sheriff's Office has indicated that due to the criminal justice system, drug cases are difficult to pursue without more resources. Wolcott seems to be at a geographic disadvantage since it is further away from Hyde Park. With a higher number of calls coming from Johnson, if a deputy is in Wolcott, then they are out of position.

Citizens would like to see a reset in expectations with the Sheriff's Office, or investigate contracting services with Morristown Police Department, or Hardwick Police Department. Representatives from Hyde Park and Johnson have expressed interest in a three-Town project that would be a regional, municipal police force. Hyde Park may see if a study can be conducted.

Ryan noted there are a couple of different avenues to pursue. Are there means to improve coverage by the Sheriff's Office regarding response time, and perception of police presence. Some years ago Wolcott had considered contracting police services with another town but found it cost prohibitive.

Linda noted that the retirement system available to those working for the Sheriff's Office has been a big issue for a number of years. As a result, the Sheriff's Office has high turnover.

Ryan suggested improved communication with the Sheriff's Office. He would encourage there be a direct person to email or call with concerns. Prior to the pandemic, the Towns did meet monthly with the Sheriff's Office, but it seems the focus was more on statistical information rather than a broader conversation. The Selectboard continues to receive monthly reports from the Sheriff's Office.

Vermont State Police will respond to a 911 call, as will the Sheriff's Office, even without a contract for services. Since the State Police would be coming from Cambridge, that would result in an even longer response time.

The first goal is to improve communication. Ryan will reach out to the Sheriff's Office. The Selectboard will continue to communicate with members of the board in Hyde Park and Johnson. Should the three-Town group reemerge, this Committee will work with them as well.

As due diligence, Rick stated this Committee should contact the Town Administrators in Morristown and Hardwick to explore options or get numbers. Ryan can reach out to Morristown. Wolcott's Town Administrator can reach out to Hardwick.

Establish Meeting Schedule: The Committee can meet on Monday evenings. Meetings may occur every two weeks.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Deb Klein

Next scheduled meeting - Monday, May 10, 2021 - 6:00 p.m.