

Wolcott Law Enforcement Committee Meeting
Minutes
May 13, 2021

Zoom meeting: 5:30 p.m.

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

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

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m.

Amendments to the Agenda: None.

Comments from the Community: None.

Sheriff Meeting Findings: Bjerke reported he met with Sheriff Marcoux last week for about two and one-half hours. The Sheriff wants to maintain a relationship with Wolcott, perhaps on a bi-weekly basis. Bjerke suggested compiling a list of questions that members would like discussed with the Sheriff. Waring, for example, had inquired about training that the Sheriff's Office undergoes. Bjerke noted that law enforcement officers receive at least 30 hours of training per year, on a variety of topics.

The Sheriff noted that his office is down a couple of positions. One individual just started the Academy. The Academy lasts for 16 weeks, then there is additional training. The Sheriff had mentioned to Bjerke his interest in a COPS hiring grant through the Department of Justice. Such a grant would extend over a period of four years. The grant would pay 75 per cent of an officer's salary the first year, and then at a decreasing rate until the agency would be expected to cover the full salary at four years.

The Sheriff noted he is working to minimize costs to his office. Among those efforts, he has had installed a gas tank for the deputies to use in order to save money. The Sheriff would like to hone in on more details about what Wolcott would like to see. For example, quality of life issues? Deputies are expected to spend 2 1/2 hours per 12 hour shift in Wolcott. Bjerke noted he has seen more Sheriff's Office presence in town lately. He suggested to the Sheriff that his deputies engage in community oriented policing, by stopping to chat with residents who may be at the ball field, for example.

The issue of police presence, or visibility is a challenging one. The Sheriff's Office has a significant geographic area to cover. Bjerke suggested the Town may wish to consider issuing a survey to ask residents what they would like to see for improvements with the Sheriff's Office.

The Sheriff indicated he prefers working with the Towns under a three-year budget as opposed to one year at a time. A three-year budget is more stable and is better for planning for all.

Morristown TA Meeting Report: Morristown has a new Town Administrator (TA) who will be taking over that position. That individual has served on the Morristown Selectboard, as well as on the police department. Bjerke will speak with the new TA as well as the current TA to see if they can put some numbers together.

Hardwick TA Meeting Report: The Wolcott TA will speak with the Hardwick TA and the police department. It may be a couple of weeks before there would be an actual meeting.

Three Town Follow Up: Klein noted that the three town group (Hyde Park, Johnson, and Wolcott) had conducted a survey. Cost is always important, but the Chair of the former group thought the contract costs with the Sheriff's Office was about average. We would want to think about the level of service in our survey.

Although the Law Enforcement Study Group with representatives from all 3 towns is now defunct, a couple of Selectboard members from Hyde Park and Johnson would like to have a conversation with a couple of Wolcott Selectboard members. Besides speed control and police presence, the staffing issue is a problem. Since the Lamoille County Sheriff's Office is not part of the State's Municipal Retirement System, deputies cannot foresee retirement in 20 years, but rather 30 years. That makes it more difficult to retain officers. Klein's understanding is that the Washington County Sheriff's Office is now part of the Municipal Retirement System.

Previously, there had been discussion about forming a regional police agency. Bjerke mentioned this to the Sheriff who thought that would be quite an undertaking. It is understood that the hiring pool is pretty small. Hiring is a problem statewide.

Next Steps: Klein stated work would begin on a citizen survey. Klein will bring up with the Selectboard at their next meeting what questions Bjerke should address with the Sheriff. Following the initial meeting with the Towns of Hyde Park and Johnson, Bjerke will be asked to participate.

Bjerke indicated the Sheriff has extended an invitation to the Selectboard to tour his facility.

Meeting adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Deb Klein

Next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, May 25 - 5:30 p.m.