

# **Meeting of the Richmond and Hinesburg Police Governance Committee February 29, 2024**

**Members Present:** Anthony Cambridge, Hinesburg Police Chief and Interim Richmond Police Chief; Josh Arneson, Richmond Town Manager; Jay Furr, Richmond Selectboard Chair; Bard Hill, Richmond Selectboard Member; Merrily Lovell, Hinesburg Selectboard Chair; Maggie Gordon Hinesburg Selectboard Member; Todd Odit, Hinesburg Town Manager

**Members Absent:** None

**Others Present:** Meeting was recorded by MMCTV; Connie Van Eeghen.

**Call to Order:** 3 pm

**Welcome by:** Furr

**Public Comment:** None

**Additions or Deletions to Agenda:** None

**Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present**

**Review of ongoing contractual relationship for police and chief services including length of contract**

Odit: The agreement goes to about the end of June. It seems to be going well from my perspective.

Furr: We discussed at the last meeting making the contract longer.

Odit: It seems we would continue to share the chief. We'll have to determine how to proceed once there are Richmond officers.

Furr: That will also involve discussions with the Union.

Hill: The FY25 budget calls for contracted chief services. If the budget passes we could look at extending that contract. We budgeted for four officer positions.

Odit: It's not replacing Richmond officers with Hinesburg officers it is more about having management rights to cover shortfalls in staffing.

Hill: This will be a product of collective bargaining.

Odit: In an ideal situation we would be able to use officers from each town to provide joint coverage.

Hill: I agree with the flexibility of collaboration between the two towns.

Gordon: This seems to be about management.

Furr: Chief Cambridge as one chief for both departments helps to make management work.

Lovell: The recent public safety study affirmed that we have a good amount of officers to cover Hinesburg. The study also showed that there are currently enough officers to also cover Richmond. If there are more officers how does that fit in?

Odit: I think we look at officer availability and then how do we deploy those resources.

Lovell: There are events like July 4<sup>th</sup> where we need more officers for both towns.

Furr: If we are able to hire more officers we'll have enough for July 4<sup>th</sup>, but it will be hard if we do not increase staffing.

Hill: Many departments are understaffed in the state, Richmond is no exception.

Lovell: Outside of larger events the staffing levels may be appropriate.

Arneson: I'd like to hear how Chief Cambridge feels about staffing levels and officer workload.

Cambridge: Officers like to be able to be on shifts where they are not alone. There is a lot of demand and opportunities for officers to go elsewhere. The officers are okay with covering both towns for now but they would like to get more staffing in the long run for better officer quality of life and to provide better service to the communities.

Furr: Have you had overtime limits?

Cambridge: We have never had a significant amount of overtime, but it has increased more recently to ensure we have two officers on to cover both towns. But with adequate staffing overtime would be reduced.

Hill: With vacant positions, Richmond has one officer on military deployment but for the remaining positions and we have some candidates?

Arneson: Yes, we are doing a background check on one officer and have three interviews coming next week.

Hill: So we do have candidates in the pipeline and we are trying to fill the positions. Our department is budgeted for four officers and a chief. So if we hire three officers we will be fully staffed with the one officer on leave.

Cambridge: When we have more staffing we can have better set shift schedule and office hours.

Hill: 24 hour coverage can get expensive.

Arneson: We have looked at this in the past and decided the cost was not worth it in relation to the number of calls that are received overnight.

Cambridge: I'd like to see 8 officers and a Chief at minimum to properly cover both towns.

Arneson: The current admin is budgeted for 15 hours per week but she is retiring in a few months.

Cambridge: I used to have a 25 hour admin plus a volunteer admin. That was a good amount of coverage.

Furr: We may be able to split an admin position between the Town's and pay for a full time admin.

Odit: We do have capacity in the budget to help pay for an admin.

Hill: There are some economies of scale for shared services including admin. Fully staffing officers would also allow for some better solutions to shift coverage in both towns. We do have a history of sharing employees in Zoning. The better path forward may be for one town to hire an employee and contract with the other town to cover half the costs.

Lovell: The current contractual relationship is working and is more simple than a Union Municipal District

Furr: Sharing a chief seems to work well. Two chiefs would be challenging in this model. I would like to see an admin position filled because there is plenty of admin work to be done.

Hill: There are pros and cons to both models, contractual and Union Municipal District. Regionalization is challenging to develop, just look at how long it has taken to regionalize dispatch. It is hard to merge existing organizations into one.

Odit: To the second item on the agenda, we may not need this service at this time.

Hill: It may be worth keeping this option on the shelf and use it if and when we need it.

Gordon: What other economies of scale could there be?

Hill: We could look at items like cruisers, equipment, inventory and policies.

Cambridge: Storage of police cars is challenging. They need to be secure and sometimes taking home a car is a good solution to security of the car.

Lovell: Based on reluctance to school mergers, a police merger could face similar resistance.

Gordon: I think people are more tied to their school than their police department

Hill and Furr agreed that people are not as tied to town specific police as they are tied to a town specific school

Hill: It seems to me that most people are happy to have police presence whether they are from Richmond or Hinesburg and the performance of that officer is more important than the Town the officer works for.

Cambridge: I have felt welcomed by Richmond citizens becoming used to seeing Hinesburg officers in Richmond.

Furr: We seem to be equal partners.

Odit: It would be good to layout a plan for how the relationship will work as Richmond increases the number of officers that it has.

Hill: Shift patterns should be informed by the data on when there are calls

Cambridge: Providing clear shift coverage hours to State police is important so they know when the town's are covered and when they are not.

Hill: Todd and Josh should work together to hire a joint admin.

Hill: If it comes to a point where a Richmond officer responds to a call in Hinesburg, how will Hinesburg residents respond to that?

Lovell: Residents are welcoming to having Richmond Rescue cover Hinesburg so hopefully that would extend to police officers.

Odit: It seems to be more about how people are treated by the individual officers.

Cambridge: There is an increasing amount of activity in the middle of the night when officers are off shift.

Hill: Again we can look at the data and see what the cost of coverage would be.

Hill: Next meeting is an update on Admin coverage and a look at a roadmap as Richmond staffs up.

### **Discussion of hiring a facilitator for the Richmond and Hinesburg Police Governance Committee**

Above item was tabled based on quick discussion in previous agenda items.

Hill moved to adjourn. Godon seconded. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 3:58pm.