

Meeting of the Richmond and Hinesburg Police Governance Committee

May 27, 2025

Link to meeting video:

https://youtu.be/sYJ7U_n4OJM

Members Present: Bard Hill Richmond Selectboard Member, Josh Arneson Richmond Town Manager, Matt Cohen Richmond Police Corporal, Dennis Place Hinesburg Selectboard Member, Mike Loner Hinesburg Selectboard. Todd Odit Hinesburg Town Manager, Frank Bryan Interim Police Chief Hinesburg and Richmond;

Public Present: Patty Brushett, Michael Bisonette, Brad Worthen, Bob Stafford, Dee Barbic, Corey McDonald

Welcome and Public Comment

Place opened the meeting.

No public comment.

Additions or Deletions to Agenda

None

Consideration of approval of minutes from 5/12/25

Cohen motioned to approve the minutes. Loner seconded. All in favor. Minutes Approved.

Review of proposal to conduct search for interim Police Chief

Odit: Julie and Jim sent an outline of a proposal to conduct a headhunting search for \$4,000. If this was unsuccessful we'd have to have a further discussion of a hiring strategy. They would reach out to their contacts in this search.

Loner: Will Jim and Julie help with a position description?

Odit: I think so, but I'll check. He will need to explain to the person what position he is filling.

Hill: A position description should be a deliverable of the agreement.

Brushett: It sounds like he would be helping us find interim chief and what we need is an administrator.

Loner: This new person may or may not be a working chief, but they would be an admin chief. It is unclear if it would replace the current interim chief.

Stafford: When Richmond did this in 2018 they hired a person who was not currently a certified police officer and he designated an officer in charge to carry out police duties for which you need to be certified.

Cohen: I would like to see a timeline for the process before committing. As well as how long the role would be filled for.

Place: Would this committee still be involved?

Loner: This committee would work directly with the new chief or admin.

Bisonette: Are the departments merging?

Hill: We have had conversations about shared police services for a number of years. Merging departments is complicated. One option is for one town to give up their police department and contract with the other town for police services. I don't know that either town is ready to do that. The other option is a Union Municipal District which would be separate from both town governments, to provide police services. I don't know that everyone agrees that this is preferable option. We seem to have agreement to share a chief, but it is awkward to operate with a shared chief and two separate departments.

Bisonette: You need to move forward with the staff and resources that you have. What does the selectboard say in regards to Jim's recommendations?

Place: The interim person we hire would help us decide how to move forward with both departments.

Loner: I'm hoping the person can find a way to have both departments work together, possibly in a merger. We need some expertise to help with this process.

Bisonette: Would it be an Australian ballot vote to merge?

Hill: Richmond Selectboard has stated they want to pursue working with Hinesburg for police services. In terms of process a municipal charter would require legislative approval and this would take a few years. Voters will also want a voice in this through a vote.

Stafford: Isn't Richmond under contract with Hinesburg for police services?

Hill: We have a contract with caveats due to the existence of the Union. We need to be aware of the Union going forward.

Stafford: Does the contract define who the leader is for police services?

Arneson: Both contracts have Richmond contracting with Hinesburg for services.

Stafford: Both contracts can be renewed?

Hill: Yes, and they can be amended.

Odit: I think to be successful moving forward the next general police coverage needs to be reciprocal. I don't know how much longer we can sustain being the sole provider.

Review and discussion of Intermunicipal Police Agreement between Hinesburg and Richmond

Cohen: We can have a true reciprocal contract with equal payments between the towns and there would be one bill at the end of each month, taking into account offsetting charges. The Union will come into play when it comes to officers taking on a higher workload due to covering another town.

Brushett: The chief can assign schedules. If a person is on duty for 8 hours why do they need to get paid more if that includes Hinesburg?

Cohen: The officer is assigned currently to only Richmond. Taking on calls in both towns adds to the workload. They look at it as a private duty contract as if the officer is hired for private work. This would be a contracted rate. Hinesburg currently gives the officers a stipend for working in Richmond.

Bryan: I am the only officer covering Hinesburg for the day. If I need a day off I need to move an officer to day shift, which leaves one officer on at night covering two towns. Right now it is not an option to have a Richmond officer cover Hinesburg.

Hill: Reciprocity is based on staff capacity.

Bisonette: How many officers are in the Union and how does mutual aid come into the picture?

Hill: Richmond has no non-probationary officers, but we will have one by June 13.

Cohen: When fully staffed all four officers would be in the Union. Going for mutual aid is helping an officer in another town. Covering another town with no officers on duty is different than mutual aid.

Loner: Can we have a stipend for Richmond officers similar to the stipend that Hinesburg officers receive?

Cohen: Union reps are looking out for the best interests of all Union positions in Richmond.

Hill: There are rules about bargaining and it does not happen in public. They didn't want Hinesburg officers coming into Richmond. The Union cares about the officers that they represent. They are also interested in president for other towns that they work in. It illustrates the vagaries of trying to accomplish something with two separate departments.

Odit: I won't be surprised if there is not an agreement for general police services after June 30th. I don't see how Richmond is going to get that settled with collective bargaining in two weeks. We may be in a position where there is a shared chief but not shared police coverage.

Hill: I think the Union wants us to have a fully staffed department. They may still have an objection to non Richmond officers patrolling in Richmond.

Odit: If we want a reciprocal contract it does not seem feasible to complete that in a week or two

Hill: All of this is subject to bargaining including the future of the departments.

Place: Isn't it the point here to help each other because we are both short staffed?

Loner: The point is that Hinesburg covers Richmond but Richmond is not able to cover Hinesburg. If we can't figure out reciprocal services it will be hard to work together.

Stafford: You need a good leader to attract good officers.

Place: If each town is fully staffed, why even share a chief? It seems to be too complicated to work together. I was hoping we would have less officers and we would get better service for less money.

Stafford: You need about one officer per 1000 residents. That is about 9 officers to cover both towns. But Richmond only has one officer right now.

Place: Why do I want to spend \$4,000 if we can't get over the hurdle of the union?

Loner: I'd still be interested in having a paid chief to explore how the two departments would merge. We may be able to share a chief and not services at this point

Arneson: We would have to bargain with the Union. It is possible to come to an agreement.

Bisonette: What can you provide to the current interim chief to be able to work together better right now?

Hill: We budget for a 20 hour per week admin. We intend to fill that position again. The second part is to get to the next phase of cooperation between the towns and if we can bring in someone to help with this and that would relieve the chief of that responsibility.

Brushett: I think I heard Jim say last week that it is harder to find a chief for a small department. But combining the departments makes it more attractive to chief candidates. Until we have a police district, it may be best to have a chief help us with cooperation between the departments.

Place: I am interested in getting more information, especially if Richmond is interested in engaging with the Union on this topic.

Hill: The goal is still worthy.

Loner: A larger department could make a better workplace for officers with more opportunities.

Cohen: We need 8-9 officers right now. An increase in staff is down the road. We need to get through the short-term needs before we get to a merger, which could be years away.

Items for next agenda

Follow up on questions for Jim Baker

Follow up on renewal of contract for police services

Hill: We may need to look at the features that we want and then discuss those features with the Union.

Discussion on setting up a meeting on June 13 with the union.

Loner: It would be interesting to see if there is an agreement in place between two towns with the union involved that we could use.

Adjourn

Arneson moved to adjourn. Loner seconded. All in favor. Meeting adjourned.