

**Lamoille County Sheriff's Department
Budget Committee
February 4, 2016 Minutes**

Present: Nat Kinney, Town of Johnson; Roger Audet, Town of Hyde Park; Bessie Martin, Town of Wolcott; Duncan Hasting, Town of Johnson; Belinda Clegg, Wolcott Selectboard
Absent: None
Staff: Ron Rodjenski, Hyde Park Town Administrator

Meeting opened by Ron at 12:13 p.m.

Welcome and Agenda Review - No agenda changes. No changes to the Jan 7th Mission Statement were made. Ron provided the 2012 committee binder for review.

Current Patrol Contract - The current patrol contract with LCSD includes provisions for large animal protocol, which was the only major change in recent years. Bessie noted that Wolcott voters will see the LCSD patrol and communications budgets voted separately this year. Belinda noted that if there is not much discussion on those two articles, then next year they might be included in the overall town budget article. No discussion occurred on the communications budget/contract. Both the patrol & communications contracts are expected to be signed by the three towns prior to June 30, 2016, if funding is approved at Town Meeting.

Identify areas of Concern – Ron explained that with the significant taxpayer funds being applied to patrol services, it is a good idea to revisit the quality of that service from time to time through this type of committee. After a couple of meetings, the Sheriff would be invited to attend. Nat noted that costs are one area to be reviewed with the Johnson share of patrol costs now over \$400,000 per year, advising that he would like to see more statistics and comparisons to other police agencies to better determine the value received for that large amount of tax dollars. Some specific concerns shared from Johnson: why are traffic warnings given much more than citations, can more speeding enforcement be provided with current funds, and sometimes, the LCSD response to complaints or questions gets lost over time. Wolcott wondered about the new detective position's impact on lowering the number of open cases. The committee acknowledged that vacancies in the position reduce the effectiveness of the additional funding recently approved by the towns and appreciated the partial credit given to the towns to reduce the FY2017 budget but it was unclear how the credit was calculated. The committee wondered if the high turnover at LCSD could be reduced with increased wages, a better retirement plan or a different internal management strategy, none of which can be answered until the committee meets with the Sheriff.. Bessie noted that she has seen Morrisville PD cruisers in our 3-town service area, but could not get clarification from dispatch as to what the purpose was. Nat would like to see more statistics on drug cases and comparison of stats to prior years. Belinda felt that understanding the stats would help the towns understand the return on investment to taxpayers, noting that Wolcott has been pleased with LCSD services. Ron offered to collect available stats from the State or other departments and bring that information to the next meeting. Duncan would like to ask about setting performance measures for the detective position, including asking the Sheriff – where are we now? - on open cases and hours per week for that position. Nat would like to see LCSD develop long-term strategies to address community issues, such as speeding and drug investigations. Ron noted that LCSD will respond to complaints on concerns like speeding, but after a good effort on one location, the community is expected to ask again for directed patrols rather than LCSD continually managing that location. Duncan noted that a past response from LCSD regarding a request for directed speed patrols during the morning commute hours was difficult due to shift scheduling. The committee felt that this should not be an issue for LCSD to address and, for example, why couldn't part-timers be called to cover this time of day. The Committee felt that working with LCSD on communication and statistical comparisons is the next step to understanding how tax dollars are benefiting the community. Alternate police patrol options available to the towns instead of LCSD present their own challenges with only limited service possible from the State

Police and creating a small municipal department comes with many challenges. Ron noted that a bill pending in Montpelier would allow existing regional planning commissions to provide more than planning services to county towns, possibly providing a new management structure to create or address regional police and ambulance services. The regional Council of Governments (COG) H.249 structure would replace the LCPC and be operated by municipal representatives. Wolcott wondered if the LCSD could designate a point person for media releases rather than having all deputies be allowed speak to reporters. This concern was based on a Wolcott embezzlement article in today's News & Citizen. The committee agreed that better communication was needed to know if the money being spent on patrol is addressing community needs, such as reducing drug hot spots, speed control, and domestic abuse and burglary investigations. For example, is the \$110 per capita of LCSD effectively serving the communities needs. Belinda noted that the only Wolcott concerns seem to be speeding and school zone safety. Nat reported that Johnson State College is satisfied with LCSD services as is Laraway. Ron suggested that solar-powered speed indicators might be the next best improvement along Route 15 in Johnson to help with speed control. Duncan suggested that a community survey is a useful tool to better understand if the community at large is satisfied with LCSD services. Belinda agreed, noting that Wolcott does an annual town meeting survey to ask the community how things are going.

Next Meeting: The committee agreed to meet on Thursday, March 10th at noon in Hyde Park. Ron will bring police statistics that are currently available for review.

Meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.