

Report and Recommendation

Ad Hoc Committee on Policing

Londonderry, Vermont

Introduction

The people of Londonderry have experienced a significant, steady and unprecedented increase in crime over the past several years that shows no sign of relenting. Occurring in Londonderry and its vicinity, this criminal activity has included:

- **Arson:**
 - More than 12 unsolved arsons occurring in Londonderry and adjacent towns in the past ten years. This includes the most recent arson of a Londonderry home that set ablaze on May 5, 2015.

- **Burglary:**
 - Numerous burglaries of Londonderry homes and those in neighboring towns.
 - Burglaries of the Londonderry Transfer Station, South Londonderry Post Office and multiple businesses in the IGA shopping center.
 - In October 2015 alone, there were burglaries of the Twitchell Town Office Building; the Flood Brook Union School; two residences; and two schools and a highway garage in neighboring towns.

- **Direct Drug Crime:**
 - The sale, possession and distribution of controlled substances occurring in known locations within Londonderry on an ongoing basis.
 - The August, 2015 traffic stop on Route 11 in nearby Peru resulting in the felony narcotics trafficking arrests of four people, including two Londonderry residents, found to possess 480 bags of heroin, 50 grams of crack cocaine, 15 grams of powder cocaine and other narcotic substances.
 - The October 8, 2015, arrest of a Guatemalan man, in this country for just three days, who accepted possession of 88 pounds of heroin, enough for one million doses with a street value of \$5,000,000, destined to be distributed in Vermont, on the sidewalk in nearby Manchester.

In response to criminal events and residents' concerns, at various times over the past eight or nine years the Londonderry Select Board has considered contracting with the State Police and/or

the Windham County Sherriff to patrol Londonderry. However, no police agency has ever been hired.

In late 2014, in response to increasing local concern, the Select Board again began investigating policing options for Londonderry. During the last week of May of 2015, just weeks following the latest arson in Londonderry, a meeting was held in the Old Town Hall to update an anxious populace on the status of the investigation into the many unsolved arsons. The meeting was attended by various policing and investigative agencies, state and town elected officials, and approximately 200 local residents. During this meeting, it became very clear that residents were not only concerned about unsolved arsons. They were equally alarmed about drug related crime in Londonderry, including the possession and sale of narcotics, theft, burglary and the potential for drug related violence.

On July 6, 2015, the Select Board voted to create an ad hoc committee “to examine and study possible options for policing and to bring a recommendation to the Select Board.” A call went out for volunteers and the people responded. On August 4, 2015, the Select Board chose nine members and two alternates from the pool of volunteers to serve on this Committee. The Committee met for the first time on August 11, 2015 and was charged with returning a recommendation to the Select Board on November 2, 2015.

This document is the requested Report and Recommendation to the Londonderry Select Board of the Ad Hoc Committee on Policing.

Committee Process

Over a period of two and a half months this Committee met on nine separate occasions. All were public meetings held in open session at the Twitchell Office Building. Within the first couple of meetings, one member and one alternate member left the Committee due to personal time commitments. The remaining alternate member became an official member, and the Committee moved forward with the full complement of nine members.

Based upon the Select Board’s directive—“to examine and study possible options for policing and to bring a recommendation to the Select Board”—the Committee established a work plan to guide its process and ensure accomplishment of its charge. This work plan was published in the September issue of The Londonderry Monthly.

Among the topics of investigation identified in the work plan were:

- Contracting for police services
- Establishing a town police department
- Using town constables for policing
- Using integrative community policing methods

The Committee then set to work researching the identified topics.

It became clear early on in the Committee's research, that, for compelling reasons, the **use of town constables** for policing services was an untenable and unwise choice for Londonderry. Thus, the Committee voted to focus its energies elsewhere.

Another area of investigation the committee eventually steered its focus and limited resources away from was the **establishment of a town police department**. To be very clear, consensus on the Committee is that this option may well be a long term solution for Londonderry in some form. However, establishing a town police department from scratch presents significant complexity. Effectively researching and evaluating this option will take significantly more time than that which was afforded this Committee. Moreover, organizing and installing even a rudimentary department would not be accomplishable within a timeframe that is responsive to the community's pressing concern with crime.

Fortunately, Londonderry has at hand three potential **contract police agencies**—the services of which are far more easily evaluated and may be deployed in the relative short term. The Committee arranged public meetings with each of these agencies. On September 17, the Committee met with Lieutenant Timothy Oliver of the Vermont State Police; on September 24, the Committee met with Windham County Sherriff Keith Clark; and on October 1, the Committee met with Chief Jeffrey Whitesell, Sr. of the Winhall Police Department.

At these meetings, the Committee had the opportunity to interview each of these law enforcement officials across a broad range of topics including: the costs and terms of policing contracts; qualifications of officers; paperwork and court time responsibilities; experience with Londonderry; experience with contracting arrangements; and the potential relationship between the policing agency and the Town of Londonderry, including communications, community involvement, and the Town's input, control and direction regarding contracted police services.

In summary, each official brought a unique perspective on what might be effective for Londonderry; and each offered different structures and services. On coverage, the Committee heard proposals ranging from 15 hours a week to full time 24/7 policing. On cost, options ranged from \$52,000 annually to a three year contract at \$350,000 per year. On timeframes, two of the agencies could start work upon execution of the contract; a Winhall Police contract would require approval of the Town of Winhall and several months to hire officers and purchase equipment. Each agency official made clear that their agency would support the work of

whatever agency the Town of Londonderry eventually chose. This Committee wishes to express its sincere appreciation to each agency for working with Londonderry in this investigation.

On October 8, the Committee was visited by representatives of Project Vision— Rutland City's **integrative community policing** program. Project Vision is the only program like it in Vermont and is one of just 23 similar programs in the United States. Presenting at the meeting were: Rutland City police officers Commander Scott Tucker, Crime/Intelligence Analyst Brad Goodhale and Sergeant Matthew Prouty ; Rutland City Mayor Christopher Louras; and Project Vision Chair, Joe Krauss. This meeting was filmed by GNAT-TV and should still be available on its website.

Project Vision is a partnership of law enforcement, social service and the community. By collaborating, rather than working in isolation, these partners support and enhance law enforcement, safety and healthy neighborhoods in Rutland City. The program establishes and maintains two-way lines of communication among its partners, integrates officers into neighborhoods, collects and shares law enforcement data among partners, and focuses on data driven decision making for smarter and more efficient policing and service. Notably, the good work of Project Vision was the subject of an October 26, 2015 article in the Boston Globe.

The Committee is very impressed with Project Vision and foresees that many of the elements of its program can be adapted to serve Londonderry. The Committee wishes to thank awfully much the folks from Project Vision who traveled to Londonderry to assist in this investigation.

In the Committee meetings that followed the Project Vision visit—October 15, 21 and 29—the Committee worked diligently to process the information developed over the prior two months and construct the recommendation requested by the Select Board. What follows is the **unanimous recommendation** of this Committee.

Decision Making

The Committee convened in August as nine independent members with nine separate and discrete life experiences. On the issue of policing, members' perspectives ranged broadly from there being no need for police in Londonderry to there being a need for fulltime 24/7 coverage. What bound us together ideologically, and allowed us to move forward effectively and collaboratively, was our common understanding of the serious purpose for which we were assembled. This civic commonality facilitated our work and our unanimous recommendation.

In arriving at this recommendation, the Committee strove to balance important community concerns, needs and interests. In particular, the Committee earnestly considered (1) the community's alarm with rising crime and the need to address it promptly and effectively; (2) the community's concern over un-managed policing and the need to exercise control and direction over police patrols; and (3) the community's responsibility to manage expenses wisely and the need to accomplish policing goals cost effectively. The Committee is confident its recommendation equitably balances these occasionally competing interests.

The Committee knows that its recommendations will not be a quick fix, and that there is no magic wand to wave that eliminates crime and makes us all safe. And no matter how expertly a policing program is implemented, evaluating its effectiveness may be difficult, especially in the short run. It will require sustained effort to achieve the intended effect in Londonderry.

The Committee is also cognizant of the inherent irony in establishing a police presence: that increasing police patrols will give the impression that crime is continuing to rise, merely because more crime is being detected and addressed—precisely a goal of policing. However, the Committee believes, even reflected as an increase, the data collected will more accurately describe what is happening in Londonderry. This will help us better understand and address the root causes of crime in thoughtful, rather than reactionary ways. It may also displace the swirl of rumor, blame and calls for retribution that seem to surface with each new crime. Ultimately, understanding what's really happening in Londonderry will be one of our strengths, and will help us intelligently and compassionately protect and serve our community.

Finally, the Committee acknowledges its recommendation is just a first step. There is plenty more work to be done in managing, monitoring and adapting these recommendations to be most effective for Londonderry. However, this is where we must start. This is where we must take steps to strengthen the community against an unavoidable threat. Steps to shine the light of day on and deter crime with patrols and enforcement. Steps to encourage and facilitate community participation in safety and security with integrative citizen/police/social service engagement. This is where Londonderry stands up for its people and its community values.

Recommendation

The Committee unanimously recommends that the Londonderry Select Board take the following action as soon as possible and, in all events, no later than Town Meeting 2016.

1. Vermont State Police

Engage the Vermont State Police, through Lt. Timothy Oliver, in a one year contract for 25 hours per week of patrolling at a cost of approximately \$86,000. A provision of the contract is recommended to allocate a portion of the hours each week/month to community policing activities.

Some elements that make the Vermont State Police the current best fit for Londonderry are:

- Commitment to work with the Town on designing patrols and policing activities. The Town can have officers focus on patrol activities.
- Commitment to cultivating communication with the community.
- Commitment to sharing detailed crime and policing activity data with the Town.
- Flexible hours that help manage costs and provide for the most effective policing.
- Ability to start upon an executed contract.
- Highest level of police officer training in Vermont.
- Seamless communication/links with agency that investigates all major crimes in Vermont (VSP).
- Use of cruiser video cameras and body voice recorders for protection of officers and the public.
- Town is only billed for patrol time. No charge for court time or travel time.
- The agency and the troopers already have experience with Londonderry.

2. Permanent Londonderry Policing Committee

Establish a permanent Policing Committee charged with facilitating integrative policing practices, including:

- Consulting with VSP on contract patrolling activities in which the Town is interested.
- Monitoring police activity reports and crime statistics; and communicating this data to the community.
- Using data driven decision making to adapt policing and community activities to maximize effectiveness and efficiency of policing.
- Pursuing alternative funding options for policing activities.
- Researching new options for effective, cost efficient and best fit policing for Londonderry's future.
- Identifying partners and engaging citizens in ways that increase community safety.

Respectfully submitted this 2nd day of November, 2015

By: The Ad Hoc Committee on Policing

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