

Truro Police Department

Hello Everyone. I hope that you all have had a nice break during the Thanksgiving Holiday and had the opportunity to spend time with your families and friends.

This time of the year finds those of us who work for the Town preparing budgets for the upcoming year. We actually start in October, and by the end of November we are ready to submit new budgets, which take effect on July first next summer (2014.) Over the next two months the Police Department budget will pass through a number of gates. The purpose of this is to ensure what has been proposed meets the needs of the Department, is fiscally responsible and finally, assures the taxpayers that we are being good stewards of your tax dollars. Largely, our charge from the Board of Selectmen reflects what was just mentioned and, additionally, that we keep growth in our budgets to only what is absolutely necessary.

During this upcoming budget cycle I am concentrating on finally "Right Sizing" the staff for the Police Department. For a number of years (too many) we have been operating at an authorized level of 12 sworn Police Officers which includes all Officers from the most junior person to the Police Chief. Additionally we have four full-time Telecommunicators and one Administrative Assistant who also must be a fully-certified Telecommunicator. Now even though this is our authorized (funded) level, we rarely are fully staffed. As I write this we have two vacant positions and are in the process of filling both of these to get back to twelve. In addition, even with twelve Officers, we lose people off the schedule due to retirements, transfers, mandatory training, court, injuries, family medical issues, military leave, and vacation time. The end result of running short is two-fold: first, we operate with single-Officer shifts and secondly, at times we are unable to deliver the basic services that a Police Department is expected to provide. I would like to take a moment of your time to explain each of these and some of the unintended consequences.

Single-Officer Shifts. Police work is at times unpredictable and dangerous. Issues we will deal with involve individuals who can be under the influence of alcohol or drugs (or both), emotionally unstable, argumentative and sometimes assaulting. When Officers work alone, they have no back-up nor help. They must wait for help to arrive from a neighboring town, provided, of course, that those Officers are not busy with their own work. Since 2006 your police Officers have been involved in two shooting incidents. And this type of assaulting behavior is only on the rise, not just across the country, but right here on Cape Cod. I fail to see why we continue to accept the premise that it's ok for our Police Officers to face these types of risks alone.

Further, when we ask our Officers to work all the additional hours, sometimes 16 or 17 hours in a row and in some cases all of that alone we are setting them up for failure. We know that multiple hours of shift work, doubles (16 hour shifts) followed by 8 hours off, which minus the travel, meals, and personal time, equates to maybe 4 or 5 hours of actual rest before starting the cycle all over again. The cognitive reasoning (decision making) skills diminishes over time. The Officers also frequently go from sedentary positions in their cars or offices to adrenalin-pumping physical situations requiring extreme concentration, strength, and stamina under stress. Their ability to react to threats, make split-second decisions, defend themselves or you, can be compromised severely. Officers and the public are being placed at risk unnecessarily with this continuing practice.

I also mentioned that at times we are unable to provide basic services to the Town. When the Department is understaffed, we assign the Officers to the night and evening shifts first. The Police Chief and the Lieutenant

work during the day. We both are continually busy with administrative and leadership functions. Accordingly, we sometimes don't have any regular patrols on the roads. When the Officers are off the schedule for any reason, the Police Department's overtime budget is not large enough to fill all of these shifts. Even if it were, we would revert to compounding the problems we highlighted above. In addition, when the Chief and the Lieutenant are out answering calls, the work we are supposed to be doing comes to a stop. As your Police Chief, I balance calculated risks vs. unnecessary risks. Now that we have highlighted this risk, we also don't want to put the Town in a position where an accident or bad incident occurs because we knew we were not adequately staffed and failed to do anything about it. Also, doing so can expose the Town to unnecessary litigation.

The long-term answer to the problem is to increase our patrol staff. I look at four levels of staffing: an optimum level, a critical level (where we frequently operate,) our authorized level, and lastly – a level between our authorized level and the optimum level. I'll call this an "acceptable level" of staffing at fourteen (14) Officers. To get to the 14, we need to authorize and hire two additional Officers. The yearly cost to our Town for the two positions is approximately \$107,000.00 for both, plus their benefits. This expense, to safeguard the Officers currently working and all of our residents and visitors, at an acceptable level is well worth the investment.

What I have highlighted for you in these few paragraphs is really just a quick glimpse of a very serious issue. And at that, it's only a partial explanation of the total issue. I would be happy to meet with any of our residents or groups to discuss further our staffing issues.

Lastly, I would like to thank the women and men of the Truro Police Department whose continuous efforts on behalf of all of us make Truro a great place to live.

Please feel free to reach out to me as needed.

Very Respectfully,

Kyle Takakjian
Chief of Police

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