Change in Police Services in Greensboro
Information about the Orleans County Sheriff’s Department

Message from Greensboro’s Selectboard
(posted in the Hardwick Gazette on 3/17/21, to Front Porch Forum on 3/14/21, and on the Town’s website)

At our March meeting, Greensboro’s Selectboard signed a one-year contract for police services with the Orleans County Sheriff’s Department. We arrived at this decision after four months of careful deliberation over the contract terms and conditions. It is in no way a condemnation of the quality of service we received from the Hardwick Police Department and we thank them for their work over the years.

Contract negotiations with Hardwick stalled in November, primarily over how to fairly determine Greensboro's cost for police services. Both our current contract and the proposed renewal contract put Greensboro in a highly disadvantageous position. Therefore, the Selectboard was obligated to investigate other options. A few weeks ago, Hardwick's negotiators finally decided to take Greensboro's point of view seriously. However, by that point, we had found an alternative that we believe will be more responsive to our concerns and requests.

After many meetings and interviews, we determined that the Orleans County Sheriff's Department was the best candidate to provide police services for the town. There was no disagreement among the current and previous Selectboard members in the final decision. We are confident that Greensboro will receive as much, or more, patrol presence as the town presently receives, as well as increased accountability and improved reporting, and at a lower cost. The new contract begins July 1, 2021.

Sheriff Jennifer Harlow and her deputies look forward to meeting and serving the people of Greensboro, and it is with enthusiasm that we welcome them into our community. We invite your questions and comments at any time. We will continue to solicit input and monitor the quality of police services during and after the transition.

Why can’t you tell us more about the law enforcement plan?

Disclosing too much information about specific law enforcement operations, such as where a deputy may be at any given time, is not in the Town’s best interest. The Selectboard will share what is happening without compromising the security of the Town.

What will change and when?

Our contract with the Hardwick Police Department (“HPD”) ends on 7/1/21, and they have indicated that they will fulfill the remainder of the contract. When a call is made to HPD, we expect HPD to respond. Aside from responding to our calls, we do not know how much time HPD spends in Greensboro, although we have been told that HPD tries to have an officer in town for 2 ½ hours per shift.

In March 2021, we signed a one-year contract for $190,000 with the Orleans County Sheriff’s Department (“OCSD”) covering the period from 7/1/21 through 6/30/22. The public may notice a increased law enforcement presence in Town. Adjusting for population, Greensboro was, and remains, a significant outlier in the amount we pay for police. We will have the opportunity to adjust our coverage as our relationship with OCSD evolves. Both parties value open communication and recognize that there may need to be adjustments in the way the contract is executed.
What about worst case scenarios?

The Selectboard has given serious consideration to “what if” scenarios. Anyone can of course imagine worst-case scenarios in which a very short response time is critical, or envision the kinds of events that may develop over, say, 15-30 minutes before significantly escalating. The fact is that in our rural area, it is unlikely that a law enforcement officer will be in the exact right place at the exact right time to prevent a worst-case scenario.

What about coverage and response times?

HPD has offered a 24/7 service to Greensboro.

OCSD currently does not have a 24/7 service available, although the Sheriff has indicated that she would like to build up her department to offer that service in the future. We are expecting that coverage and response times will vary based on certain categories of service:

1. **When OCSD has a deputy in town.** This will be a significant portion of the time and we believe you will notice an increased law enforcement presence in Town. During these times, we expect response times to be shorter than what we have had with HPD.

2. **When OCSD has a deputy in a nearby town.** Glover, Albany, and other towns further north also have contracts with OCSD. During these times, response times are expected to be roughly comparable to when HPD had an officer somewhere in Hardwick who needed to respond somewhere in Greensboro.

3. **When OCSD is on call.** There will be times when OCSD is on call and will respond to calls for service. In general, we expect response times to be longer than what we had before. Some calls of a less serious nature will receive a response the next day when a deputy is on duty.

4. **When Vermont State Police (“VSP”) is on call.** There will be times, likely on some overnight and/or weekend hours, when VSP will be the primary agency responding to calls. We expect these response times to be longer than what we had before. Some calls of a less serious nature will receive a response the next day when a deputy is on duty. There aren’t many towns that have 24/7 coverage without relying on VSP and we note that OCSD and VSP work very well together.

How far away is OCSD?

OCSD is based in Newport. This is a 40-minute drive from Willey’s Store when driving at regular speeds. For reference, HPD is a 10-minute drive from Willey’s Store when driving at regular speeds. Note that we anticipate OCSD will have a business office in our Town Hall.

What phone numbers should I use starting 7/1/21?

For emergencies, call 911. For non-emergency calls, call OCSD directly at (802) 334-3333.

Will the Sheriff’s office respond to home security systems hooked up to the telephone?

Yes, when a deputy is in Town or in a nearby town and when OCSD is on call. If a homeowner wants VSP to respond when they are on call, the homeowner must fill out a form and pay an annual fee.
Barton recently had problems with the Sheriff. How do we avoid having similar issues?

Each relationship is unique. Greensboro and the Sheriff have entered this contract in good faith and have had great communication and pleasant conversations. Both parties believe that open lines of communication will be key to having a satisfying contract.

What if the Town finds the new relationship or service unsatisfactory?

The contract can be terminated by either party.

How much thought went into the decision to change?

In the five months from mid-October 2020 through mid-March 2021, the Selectboard held 13 meetings. There was some sort of discussion, update, or notice of negotiations about the police contract in almost all of those meetings. 10 of those meetings had an Executive Session about our police services. In addition, individual Selectboard members have spent many more hours thinking about and researching this issue.

What issues need to be resolved prior to the 7/1/21 start date of the new relationship?

- Police radios and reception: We need to ensure that OCSD’s radios get reception in the different areas of Town and at all times of year (especially when the trees leaf out).

- Dispatch services: We need to coordinate dispatch for OCSD, the Greensboro Fire Department, the Hardwick Rescue Squad, and VSP. OCSD currently uses the Newport Police Department for dispatch. The Greensboro Fire Department and the Hardwick Rescue Squad currently use the Lamoille County Sheriff’s Department for dispatch. As of now, we anticipate continuing with the Lamoille County Sheriff’s Department for a period of time to make sure that things are operating properly. Note that the Town pays a separate dispatch fee to the Lamoille County Sheriff’s Department.

What if I have additional questions?

Please contact any Selectboard member or the Town Clerk for more information.