

OAKHAM BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Friday, November 12, 2010
Minutes

Present: Clayton Rice, Chairman	Marty Goulet, New Braintree BOS
Eliot Starbard, V-Chair	Glenn Merkel, New Braintree
Dennis Bergin, Clerk	Bob Hunt, New Braintree
Ellenor Downer, Barre Gazette	Bill Howland, New Braintree
Laura Pease, ACO	Bert DuVernay, Chief, New Braintree PD
Doug Blood, Oakham PD	Ken Nelson
Fred Gehring, Oakham PD	Jordan Dean
Chris Sherblom, Oakham PD	Paul Rochette
Don Haapakoski, Chief, OPD	Werner Tessnau
Tom Snay, OFD	Lucy Tessnau, Recording

The meeting was opened at 7:00 p.m. by the Chairman.

Mr. Rice asked that each person present introduce him/herself.

Mr. Rice continued by explaining to those present from the Town of New Braintree the situation with the Oakham Police Department as it exists at this moment. The town is in search of a new Police chief and is looking at all options available to get the best coverage for the town as well as the most for the budget. At this time, the BOS would like to discuss the possibility of regionalizing the police departments of Oakham and New Braintree – the benefits and the problems that might exist in such an arrangement. This is the initial conversation between the two towns and they will look at all options. Oakham would like to fill the vacancy as soon as possible. All candidates interested in the post of interim chief for Oakham are present to listen to the proposals.

Several questions were raised on both sides:

- Would the shared police chief be spread too thin trying to do the administrative work of two towns.
- How much visibility would he/she be able to have in the communities?
- Can the necessary work be done in 40-45 hours per week?
- What will the savings be if the post is shared? (Community policing grants are no longer available to the towns)
- It seems that a shared administrator would leave savings enough to hire more patrol officers. One or two could be hired for the cost of one chief.
- More manpower for more money?

Bert Duvernay, Police Chief of New Braintree, noted that there are no regionalized police departments in the state at this time. If this goes through, we would be the first and only.

He presented everyone with a copy of MGL Chapter 41: Sections 99B to 99K – Regional Police Districts. The boards will study this material for future discussions, in particular:

- How will this be adopted by the town?
- How will it be funded and governed?
- How will commissioners be appointed?
- There must be equal power between the two towns.
- Accountability would be to which BOS?
- Who supervises?

All were in agreement that:

- A feasibility study is needed.
- The communities need to be involved and have input.
- There are still many issues left to be discussed in detail.
- This is an idea that cannot be rushed and will not happen quickly.
- The chief needs to have a connection with both towns.
- A subcommittee of 8-10 members from each town needs to be created and appointed by the Boards of Selectmen before going to the next level.
- A time study will be needed.
- Results of studies need to be shown on paper to determine what we have as compared to what we want. What will our gains be?
- Will there be enough savings to make it worthwhile? What will our gains be?
- Eventually all the information will go before the towns for a vote

It may be difficult to convince everyone, but if it is presented by highlighting the positive aspects. New Braintree feels that this is a doable project and would be happy to start the process.

The next issue up for discussion was the dispatch system. Oakham and New Braintree use two different ones. Oakham's dispatch center is in Rutland and New Braintree uses the State Police at no cost. Changing our present system would also impact the Fire and Ambulance Dep't as well as the Animal Control Officer. State Police may not be willing to take on Oakham. One of the towns would need to purchase new radios for a new dispatch – since they are on different frequencies.

The BOS will discuss these ideas more at their next meeting, Monday, November 15, 2010 and will get back to the New Braintree BOS. The Oakham BOS thanked the members of the New Braintree BOS and FinCom and their Police Chief for coming to Oakham to consider possibility of the regionalization proposal. The New Braintree visitors left the meeting.

Candidates for the positions of Interim Police chief were interviewed. The Selectmen asked each applicant to identify himself and to inform those present of their background relevant to the office:

- 1 Sgt. Fred Gehring- Officer Gehring has been a member of the Oakham police department since 1992 and has attained the rank of sergeant. He has served the department as a full time and part time officer in the past and is now a reserve officer. He has successfully completed courses in Mass. Criminal studies and State Police classes. He is a certified firearms instructor. At present he works security at Clark University in Worcester where he supervises 40 officers and EMTs. Also, as part of his responsibilities, he runs the campus dispatch.
- 2 Officer Chris Sherblom – Officer Sherblom has been with the Oakham Police Dep’t for the past four years and has completed training at the police academy a year and one-half ago. Prior to this, he was a member of the Worcester airport police for four years and served 2 years on the Worcester auxiliary police with the rank of sergeant. Before that he owned his own business and was responsible for overseeing 4-5 employees.
- 3 Ret. Sgt. Douglas Blood – Sgt. Blood served as an officer with the rank of sergeant for 17 years in North Brookfield for several years. Since retiring he has served as interim chief for the Town of Brookfield. He was asked to stay on as fulltime chief, but this is not something he desires. Prior to his police positions he worked for Norton Co. of Worcester and became part of their security force. He has been a special officer in Oakham for the past 8 months and has done part time work when needed; he knows a lot of town residents. He has had a lot of experiences and is happy working in Oakham in Brookfield he enjoyed being acting chief and worked with 3 full time officers and had a secretary. Brookfield, of course, is larger than Oakham.

The Selectmen asked the candidates their views on issuing Licenses to Carry. All three stated that they follow state law which does not truly allow discretion on the part of the chief. Although the chief is the licensing authority in town, he must remain objective. If he denies a license to someone, he must have a provable reason according to the law or else face court action.

The Selectmen asked all three to name what they believe to be their individual priorities.

1. Chris Sherblom stated that keeping stability in the town and the department until the new chief is named is of utmost importance.
2. Fred Gehring said that it would be necessary to build a relationship with the department, service the town’s need by providing more coverage and have a good working relationship with the BOS since that is the board to whom the interim chief is accountable.
3. Doug Blooded responded that the needs of the community come first and residents must be protected. A good working relationship with the BOS is important and the increase of part time patrolmen is a must. He does not see that the department needs a huge overhaul, but he would like to institute a filing system that he feels is expedient.. He sees the position as being able to fine tune until the new chief is named and then provide for a seamless transition. He is a people person. He enjoyed the job in Brookfield and that is why he applied here. He worked 20 hours a week without benefits except for those allowed by Mass. General Laws. He had a secretary 2 days a week and one patrolman on duty

with him. He understands that Oakham PD does not have a secretary. He feels that 20 hrs/week is enough. Anything over 20 hrs. is comp time.

Mr. Rice informed the applicants that the BOS has interviewed 4 possible new part time officers but has taken no action yet. The Selectmen feel that the interim chief would like to have a say in the hiring. That would be the first job of whoever gets the job.

The question of a working chief was discussed. Sgt. Gehring stated that 20 hrs. per week is sufficient, but if the chief is to do patrols as well, then 40hrs. per work is a must. It is necessary to have 1 person other than the chief in charge of firearm licensing. The required paper work is too much for one chief. The working chief must maintain personal control and community policing. Fred feels that a part time chief and 2 full time patrol officers can work, but 3 full timers would be the optimum. Part timers must vow to be committed to the job and when asked to put in 20 hours a month must do so without complaining and excuses.

Chris Sherblom stated that investigations take a lot of time out of a chief's schedule. No matter what, a chief needs time to get out into the community. He feels that a permanent part time chief for the long term is not a good idea. The patrol officers need to have the chief available throughout the day as do the residents.

Eliot Starbard asked the candidates about warrantless searches. All three officers stated the police must take care with the 4th amendment and individual rights. There are a few specific times when it is possible to search without a warrant: exigent (person in distress), permission of the owner, and probable cause. Vehicles can be searched in a case where the person can take flight.

What can the BOS do? All three stated more money would be helpful. The Selectmen should work well with the police by finding common ground and by keeping communications open.

Sgt. Blood asked about monthly reports to the BOS. The Selectmen do not require them. They noted that Chief Haapakoski would visit meetings often to discuss issues and make requests and report on events.

The Selectmen opened the meeting for questions and public comment.

Mr. Paul Rochette asked what the policy is on high-speed pursuits. No high-speed pursuits are allowed in town without permission from the supervisor. The town's policy is the same policy observed by the state police.

Jordan Dean was concerned with actions of part timers in the past without regard to homeowners and residents. They seem to like to go in like gangbusters. He would like to see that issue brought to their attention especially with the new hires. He also suggested that the chief bring the new hires around town for a while and introduce them to the residents so they can get to know them.

Mr. Ken Nelson stated that he was there to support Fred Gehring for this position. He finds that Fred is hard working, knows the town and the workings of the police dep't, is smart and is a good candidate.

The candidates were also reminded that the Animal Control Officer comes under the Police Department. The chief must be supportive and work well with her. Chief Blood has been an Animal Control Officer in North Brookfield and understands the needs of that department. He worked with the ASPCA and Boston well.

Hours for the positions have not yet been set. See what the demands of paperwork etc. will be. Everyone needs time to feel out the situation. All will not be known until someone is in there.

Chief Blood asked whether the interim chief would be required to be in uniform while on duty and on patrol. Yes, Chief Haapakoski said there is money for uniforms

How are we set for new officers? 3 of the 4 possibilities are trained and just need to be told of the town policies and learn the area. The 4th new one needs some training. We have one person in the academy who might be interested in working for the town full time when she has completed her courses in January.

The Selectmen will take this all of this information provided under advisement and each will put forth a prioritized list and present it at the next meeting, Monday, November 15, 2010 at 7:00 p.m.

Dennis made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Eliot seconded the motion and it was so voted.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m.