

Town of Nelson
Selectmen's Forum for Public Discussion
7:00 PM

November 28, 2023

Executive Board Attending: Brenna Kucinski, Michael Blaudschun, Don Carlisle, Edie Drinkwater, Admin. Assist.

Absent:

Others attending: General Resident Attendance

Brenna called the audience to attention at 7:04 PM.

- Brenna presented a brief introduction of the evening's topic: Employing a Full Time Police Chief.

She explained how the Select Board reached their conclusion that the time has arrived for Nelson to take this step. This realization followed several years of searching for part-time officers that are few in number and Nelson is competing with every other community in the area for anyone that may be available and seeking part-time work. Even thoughts of hiring someone and then sending them to the Police academy were fruitless. Further weighing on their decision was a letter from NH State Police advising the Board that response from the State Police is limited to extreme emergencies. Routine calls such as Noise, fireworks, dog complaints, suspicious vehicles or people etc. can not be handled due to their lack of personnel and the broad area they are covering with just a few officers.

- Brenna reviewed the credentials of the current Part-time Police chief as well as noting the town's investment to date in equipment and vehicles to maintain a Police department.

- Brenna noted the importance and benefit of the time spent by the current Police Chief at the school, lunching with the kids, being nearby for afternoon pickup, being a part of school activities, and getting to know the kids. This would not be offered by State Police or the Sheriff's department.

- Don expressed to the audience how his own thoughts have evolved from not feeling the need for full-time police to now having a better understanding of the crisis that all small communities are facing as they seek protection for their towns and their residents. He now supports the concept while developing the best plan for the most benefit to the Town.

- The number of positions needing to be filled across the state and the lack of candidates to even apply has created an extreme bidding competition with regard to pay, benefits, and even some very substantial sign-on bonuses.

- The audience expressed concern over the cost and if the need actually exists, requesting information about the number and types of calls that occur each year.

Questions, Concerns, and Suggestions From the Audience

- ❖ Reworking and negotiating benefits
- ❖ Cost of insurance
- ❖ Discussion should not focus on an individual but rather the position
- ❖ Concern over the number of lawsuits brought by Police officers
- ❖ Does the Town really need a Police or Fire Department?
- ❖ What types of calls occur in Nelson

- ❖ How many hours would they physically be in Town and what about incidents after hours:
- ❖ Some feel that State Police will still respond
- ❖ What is the coverage for the large number of hours beyond the 40+ of active duty
- ❖ Why can't abutting town's officers respond the way they used to?
- ❖ Want a job description
- ❖ Why can't Harrisville cover Nelson?
- ❖ Nelson has too much expensive, unused vehicles and equipment
- ❖ How do other full-time towns schedule coverage of off duty time?
- ❖ Will the voters have a say or will the Selectmen decide if this happens?
- ❖ Can't we then expect that every year the cost will rise?
- ❖ Would like to see money spent for self-defense classes and medical training for residents
- ❖ Personal experience with State Police and Sheriff was expressed as unpleasant experience
- ❖ Isn't the town really looking for a social worker - Not a Police officer
- ❖ Liability increase
- ❖ Officer should be contracted to reside in town.
- ❖ Sheriff's department as an option for coverage
- ❖ What would "on-call" hours look like and how long a response
- ❖ Further hand-out presentations – want them published in advance of any meeting and available to the public

● A resident from Stoddard reported that they are also looking for Police Coverage. Their engagement with the Sheriff's department is concerning because, there too, the cost is high and the County's shortage of officers limits what they will be able to actually cover for additional communities. Without adding new officers to the County, any contract with the Sheriff's dept. is also in question.

● The Police Chief from Marlborough presented a clear picture of the shortage of law enforcement personnel and its effect of all small towns. All towns abutting Nelson are now, and have been for some time, seeking part-time police officers. Each town has experienced months and even years of searching for candidates. People expressing frustration at any current lack of coverage should understand that their issues would be better addressed if a Full-time Town Police Chief were available to them in a more consistent schedule and their primary job responsibility is to Nelson.

● The Board expressed their intention to research the answers to all of their questions, address their concerns, and have a discussion with Stoddard regarding the future of their Police coverage and perhaps consider how the two communities could develop a plan for sharing the service. The Board further assured that the final say will be with the voters.

● At 8:50 PM Brenna closed the Forum with thanks to all for attending.

Forum closed 8:50 PM

Notes from November 28, 2023

Brenna Kucinski, Chair

Michael Blaudschun, Selectman

Don Carlisle, Selectman