

TOWN OF FRANCONIA
PUBLIC HEARING FOR ADDITIONAL POLICE OFFICER
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29th, 2020 AT TOWN HALL

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Jill Brewer, Eric Meth, Jeff Blodgett.

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm.

There were approximately 22 residents in attendance.

Chief Cashin began the hearing with a Powerpoint presentation that reviewed the history of the department, the changes in law enforcement in the past few decades, the current staffing model involving six part-time officers, the finances involved with a new full-time officer and a summary of the benefits of a department with four full-time officers.

Chief Cashin said that at its lowest, the annual cost for a new officer would be \$64,000 - \$83,000, with the lowest proposed salary and single coverage insurance. He said the highest cost would be \$91,500 with the highest experience based salary and a family insurance plan. Chief Cashin said the tax impact for the cost ranges would be 22¢ or 32¢ per thousand dollars of valuation.

He then opened the floor to questions.

Lydia Cumbee asked if the presented salary ranges include a full year of salary, insurance, retirement, etc. Chief Cashin said yes, the ranges are for a full year of salary and associated benefits.

A resident asked if any additional revenue could be raised through the Police Department to help support the costs. Chief Cashin said generally speaking, there would not be a meaningful increase in revenue to offset the costs of employing a new full-time officer.

Peter Grote commented that he felt the benefits to the increased efficiency that another full-time officer would provide would positively impact the town and its future development and the benefits would outweigh the associated cost.

Russell Cumbee inquired about last year's Police Department crime statistics. His research indicates that the town had no murders and one rape in 2018. Chief Cashin said yes, thankfully our crime rate is low for those types of crimes but we do have other criminal activity of a serious nature. Russell also said that statistically speaking, we have enough full-time officers for our population at 2.72 per 1,000 people, with the national average being 2.5 per 1,000. Chairman Jill Brewer commented that she feels that a per capita approach is not necessarily the best model to determine appropriate police staffing due to Franconia's many part time residents and influx of tourists. She said making comparisons with towns of similar valuation would be a way that would take into account part time residents that are second home owners. Jill said that seven towns she researched close to our valuation had an average of 5.6 full time officers.

A resident commented that the population increases by two thirds when the town's hotels and part time homes are full.

Chairman Brewer commented that the .22¢ to .32¢ increase would amount to a \$60 - \$80 a year tax increase for a property valued at \$250,000.

State Representative Tim Egan, a resident of Sugar Hill, commented that he supports the addition of another full-time police officer as he doesn't feel that five full-time police between Franconia and Sugar Hill is enough for the geographical area taking into account the proximity to the state highway and Franconia Notch State Park. He also said more towns are looking at regionalizing their forces for increased efficiency.

Russell Cumbee said his calculations show that their taxes would increase \$120 a year for their homes value using a median figure for calculating the cost of the officer. Chief Cashin said he understands the concern about the tax impact and that he would not be asking for the additional officer if he did not feel it were in the best interest of the town.

Chairman Brewer said there has been discussion with Sugar Hill about the possibility of joining police forces at some point. She said Sugar Hill is not interested in joining forces currently but the discussion will continue after Town Meeting.

There was a brief discussion about Cannon Mountain Ski Resort's impact on the town's police and life squad services.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 7:06pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenny Monahan
Administrative Secretary