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## Mayor: Mt. Arlington Police Dept. safe for now

### Idea to share another town's service set aside

BY MICHAEL SCHOLL  
DAILY RECORD

Tuesday, October 23, 2007

**DISCUSSTHIS** Post Comment

MOUNT ARLINGTON -- A proposal to disband the Mount Arlington Police Department and to have responsibility for policing the borough transferred to another municipality was declared to be "off the table right now" by Mayor Arthur Ondish.

Ondish made the declaration before a crowd of more than 300 people who filled the auditorium at the Mount Arlington Public School on Monday night to voice their displeasure about a proposal to enter into a shared services agreement with another municipality.

But most of the attendees left a few minutes into the meeting after Ondish and the council indicated that they would bow to community opposition and reject the proposed disbanding of the department,

The council made its intentions clear early on in the meeting when it approved a resolution allowing the 13-member Mount Arlington Police Department to hire a 14th officer. The resolution also accepted a pledge from Mount Arlington Police Chief Richard Peterson to change the department's work rules regarding scheduling in order to improve officer supervision and safety.

Officer safety and lack of sufficient patrol coverage were some of the reasons cited for why Mount Arlington might consider disbanding its relatively small police department.

The adoption of the resolution effectively kills the idea, according to Ondish. He said the approved changes would avert the need for any kind of radical overhaul of the MAPD.

Ondish and the borough council convened a special council meeting at the school on Monday night to hear public comments about the recommendations contained in a consultant's report that was released on Oct. 12.

The report, prepared at the behest of the borough government by Blue Shield Consulting LLC, recommended that the Mount Arlington Police Department be disbanded and that the borough enter into a shared services agreement with either the Wharton Police Department or the Roxbury Police Department.

But the public's response was overwhelmingly negative, as was evidenced by the fact that Mount Arlington officers were greeted with a rousing standing ovation as they entered the auditorium prior to the start of Monday night's meeting.

Most of those in attendance were prepared to speak out in disagreement with the report's conclusions that the borough would save money and enjoy better police services if it had a shared services agreement.

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Opponents of the disbandment had questioned the thoroughness of the Blue Shield study, which cost the borough \$43,400 and was prepared by Ted M. Ehrenburg, a former police chief in Washington Township who currently serves as borough administrator of Bloomingdale.

Gayle Ann Livecchia, a borough resident with several graduate degrees, including a master's degree in public administration, noted that Ehrenburg has a master's degree in education but does not have any degrees in public administration or public policy research.

Livecchia said Monday's night's decision not to disband the MAPD was inevitable given the strong criticism of the Blue Shield report.

"It was a graceful eleventh hour save where everybody can save face," Livecchia said.

Some of the strongest criticisms of the Ehrenburg report have been made by Dave Rubenstein, the founder of saveMAPD.com, an Internet-based organization dedicated to generating opposition to the disbandment of the MAPD.

Rubenstein's group commissioned a 45-page report that rebuts many of the Ehrenburg report's conclusions.

The rebuttal argues that Mount Arlington would have fewer officers per capita if its police department were dissolved and partially absorbed by a neighboring department. It also says the Ehrenburg report does not provide enough evidence to support its conclusion that a shared services agreement would save Mount Arlington money or provide a greater level of safety for police officers.

Opposition to the Blue Shield report grew last week when council member Keri Ann Mulligan issued a letter to her constituents stating that she was dissatisfied with the report, arguing that it is lacking in many facts and figures and in sufficient supporting data. She recommended that the council commission a more thorough report on the MAPD's future.

"I had expected a far more in-depth and complete report (from Blue Shield), especially considering the cost of the study," wrote Mulligan, who is the council's liaison to the Mount Arlington Police Department.

The Blue Shield study noted that Peterson had recommended the hiring of an additional officer to help alleviate the department's current staffing problem and curtail the disbandment discussions. But the report said the MAPD must expand to 21 officers to provide adequate police coverage for the borough and adequate supervision of patrol officers.

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