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News

Counter-report: Borough cop shop is adequately staffed Attorney says grants could pay for more cops

By MIKE CONDON, Editor
Thursday, October 18, 2007 3:55 PM EDT

MOUNT ARLINGTON – On behalf of the Save Mount Arlington Police Department (SAVEMAPD) campaign, a San Diego attorney and policy analyst has prepared a counter-report, recommending against a disbanding of the borough's police department.

Last week, the Mount Arlington Mayor and Council released copies of a study it paid \$43,000 to have done which indicates that the borough would experience substantial monetary savings, were it to combine its 13-member police department with another local department, mainly, Roxbury Township or Wharton Borough.

The mayor and council held the first public meeting on the report this Monday night.

Roxbury resident David Rubinstein said, however, that after the mayor and council received and distributed its report, he had attorney Coleen M. Cusack, a fellow faculty member at the University of Phoenix, prepare a report analyzing the report that was prepared by the borough's consultant, retired Washington Township Police Chief Ted Ehrenburg. Ehrenburg calls his consulting firm Blue Shield Consulting Services.

At the conclusion of the 50-page report, Cusack makes a number of recommendations.

Rather than merging its department, she said the department "should continue at its present staffing levels, as they appear to be adequate to meet the safety standards of the residents and the proposed shared services agreement does not offer any guarantees that this level of effectiveness will continue or improve."

"The addition of a single officer to cover shift shortages might benefit officer safety, but does not appear to offer any tangible benefit with regard resident safety," she writes.

Previously, Mount Arlington Police Chief Richard Peterson had said that adding one more full-time officer to the force would adequately address safety issues that were raised by the police department. Specifically, the police union had complained to the mayor and council that, at many times, there is only one officer on the road, and said that can create a safety issue.

"Conversely, transferring police services to a neighboring community would likely result in fewer officers per capita, and could result in a materially decreased level of service and a measurable reduction of safety to the community," Cusack said. "This transfer of services, and loss of local governance, will also likely adversely affect the community's efficacy; its perception of safety, security, independence, control and shared values," the report states.

Cusack's report also suggests that alternatives within the existing police department or within the borough should be explored to address issues of officer safety.

"Transferring police services to a neighboring community does not appear to address issues of officer safety," the report states.

Some suggestions Cusack makes include restructuring of the patrol function to allow for double-manned vehicles during peak hours and single-manned vehicles or no patrol during off-peak hours. In addition, another suggestion made is that the borough could rely upon citizen volunteers to supplement the patrol function.

In addition, a "ride-a-long" program could be developed and/or job descriptions and/or current command and supervisory structures could be reviewed. In addition, another suggestion made is that the borough could obtain grant funding to secure additional officers or to develop community alternatives to traditional patrols.

Lastly, Cusack says that the cost-effectiveness of a possible shared services agreement can not adequately be determined based "on the relatively few figures presented by Blue Shield Consulting Services and its unsupported speculation."

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In the report, Cusack cautions the borough against rushing into a contract.

"As important as the lack of local control should be the financial impact of the consolidation and the contractual obligations the community will be forced to make to a third party, without any real guarantees to the level of police service the community will receive," the report states.

"It is tempting for advocates of consolidation to minimize the real cost, including hidden and variables, of committing to a contract. It is also important for the community seeking consolidation to understand that the higher cost of consolidation includes additional police services that the community may not need, or, if so, the need is so rare that it is best left to a county-level or state police agency to provide these ancillary services as mandated by law, if the legal obligation exists," Cusack said.

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Harold Mabee wrote on Oct 21, 2007 3:08 PM:

"Amen! This is what the citizens of Mt Arlington have been saying all along. Why doesn't the Mt Arlington council represent us properly?"



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