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Report: Merging Mt. Arlington cops won't help safety

SaveMAPD.com says action could decrease current level of service

BY MICHAEL SCHOLL
DAILY RECORD

Friday, October 19, 2007

DISCUSSTHIS Post Comment

MOUNT ARLINGTON -- A group opposed to a proposal to disband the Mount Arlington Police Department and transfer police functions to another town has released a 45-page report that rebuts a consultant's claim that the proposal is a good idea.

SaveMAPD.com, an organization dedicated to fighting the proposed disbanding of the police department, commissioned its own report in response to a report by Blue Shield Consulting.

Blue Shield recommends that the 13-member MAPD be dissolved and absorbed into either the Roxbury Police Department or into the department that patrols Wharton and Mine Hill. It contends that Mount Arlington can save money and enjoy better police services if it enters into a "shared services agreement" with Roxbury or Wharton/Mine Hill.

But the SaveMAPD.com report provided to the Daily Record on Thursday says that disbanding the MAPD would not improve public safety in Mount Arlington.

"The existing police agency (in Mount Arlington) appears to adequately meet the safety needs of its residents," according to the report. It was written by Colleen M. Cusak, a California attorney who specializes in [criminal justice](#) policy analysis, and Luis Martinez, a researcher with expertise in police operations.

The Cusak/Martinez report says the proposed shared services agreement "does not appear to meet or exceed" the current level of police service received by Mount Arlington residents.

"Transferring police services to a neighboring community could result in a decreased level of service and safety to the community," the report states.

Specifically, it states that "the Mount Arlington police department should continue at its present staffing levels as these appear adequate to meet the safety needs of its residents." It also says a 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 to resident safety," the report says.

"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."

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"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 continues.

The Cusak/Martinez report also says the available [data](#) are unclear as to whether a shared services agreement would save Mount Arlington taxpayers money.

"The cost-effectiveness of a possible shared services agreement cannot adequately be determined based on the relatively few figures presented by (Blue Shield Consulting) and its unsupported speculation," the report says.

The report also says the available data are insufficient to conclude whether the safety of Mount Arlington police officers would be improved if the MAPD were absorbed by a larger department. The safety of officers has been questioned because the 13-member MAPD is so small that it has little manpower to rely upon for backup in case of an emergency.

"Alternatives within the Mount Arlington Police Department or the Mount Arlington community should be explored to address issues of officer safety," the report says. "Transferring police services to a neighboring community does not appear to address issues of officer safety."

Possible alternatives to improving officer safety, according to the report, 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; relying upon citizen volunteers to supplement the patrol function; hiring a single officer to cover shift shortages; reviewing the current command and supervisory structure and job descriptions, and obtaining grant funding to secure additional officers or develop community alternatives to traditional patrol.

The leader behind the effort to save the MAPD said he strongly supported the new report's conclusions.

"I feel the report is almost irrefutable because it is so well backed up," said SaveMAPD.com founder Dave Rubinstein, who commissioned the report.

Rubinstein said he plans to provide copies of his group's study to Mount Arlington Mayor Arthur Ondish and the borough council. He said he hopes it will have impact on deliberations on the issue.

Those deliberations will continue on Monday, when the council holds an open public meeting on the MAPD's future at 7 p.m. at the Mount Arlington Public School.

Michael Scholl may be reached at (973) 428-6644 or mscholl@gannett.com.

STORYCHAT

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