



Town of Middlebury, Vermont
Police Department
Frequently Asked Questions

In response to recent email messages to the Middlebury Selectboard requesting that police department budget funding be reallocated to local social service agencies, Police Chief Tom Hanley has prepared the following Q&A regarding the department's structure and function in the Middlebury community.

Q: How is the Middlebury Police Department Staffed?

A: The Middlebury Police Department has 15 full time officers.

This includes:

- 1 School resource Officer, 80% of this cost is borne by the Addison County School District (ACSD)
- 9 patrol officers scheduled 24 X 7
- 3 patrol supervisors whose job is to provide guidance, oversight, professional assurance for officers, and to fill-in to augment patrol
- 1 investigator
- 1 chief of Police

Generally, there are 2 - 3 officers on duty at any one time.

Q: How does this compare with other communities?

A: There are 1.8 officers per 1,000 population.

With 15 full-time officers and a resident population of about 8,500, there are 1.8 officers per 1,000 population. This is much lower than many other communities, even in Vermont. According to FBI Uniform Crime Report Statistics, the average staffing ratio for communities 10,000 population and under is 3.5 officers per 1,000 population. For all agencies, that average ratio is 2.4 officers per 1,000 population; internationally the percentage is 3 police per 1,000 population.

Q: What are officers' primary responsibilities?

A: The 12 officers and supervisors are 1st responders, 24 X 7. Since they are on duty 24 hours a day, they augment MREMS on some medical calls; they respond to a variety of alarms, noise complaints, crimes, disturbances, taking persons in need of treatment into protective custody for medical or counseling, untimely and suspicious deaths, suspicious activity, health and welfare checks, retail theft,

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missing persons, traffic accidents, traffic complaints, and a number of proactive patrol duties such as traffic enforcement and security patrols.

One officer is assigned investigations. These are mostly complex cases involving electronic fraud, child abuse, and sex offenses, in addition to assistance tom patrol with burglary, robbery, and financial fraud investigations.

One officer is assigned to the schools as the School Resource Officer.

One officer is the Chief of Police, assigned to administer the department.

Q: What are other activities of the Department?

A: The department also manages the Towns statutorily-mandated emergency management function, which requires a different level of training and providing the mechanism for the town to be prepared for, respond, and recover from a variety of different events, and is the coordinating structure between other local and state agencies.

Q: What other staff does the Department have?

A: The department has a part-time dog warden, a full-time dispatcher, part-time dispatchers and 1 clerical support person. The clerical support person manages all department records and processes accounts payable and receivable as well as processing parking and traffic ticket records.

Q: Can the State Police and Sheriff's Department supplement a reduced local staff?

A: In an emergency, maybe, occasionally. Daily – no. The Sheriff's Department is not a typical police agency with a standing staff that responds to or investigates things. They provide support to the court, serve civil process, and have individual contracts with towns for traffic services and with private firms for traffic and security at construction or transport of large items. The Sheriff's office is generally open 8am - 4:30pm M - F and has no evening or overnight shift. In order for there to be regular support the town would have to enter into a contract for any service. There are a number of logistical issues that include policy issues, practice issues, control and supervision and accountability. The State Police have their own communities to provide service for; even now, they often request MPD to provide assistance at emergencies they respond to. And the State Police only work two shifts – day and evening. There is no overnight shift.

Q: What are the ramifications of significant budget reduction or defunding?

A: Every aspect of the department operations must be triaged. The largest part of the budget is personnel costs. Reduction in personnel, depending on the extent, means periods of time with no one on duty. It means reduction in the ability to provide training, it means limiting the type of calls the police would respond to and service provided. The department would move to a fully-reactive agency, proactive efforts like traffic enforcement would decline if not stop all together.

Q: How would an increase in funding for social services reduce the need for Police?

A: An increase in funding for social services would not reduce the need for Police. Often the Counseling Service of Addison County (CSAC) and others ask the police to stabilize a situation or person prior to their engagement. Often CSAC will ask the police to make the first contact and try to convince the person to seek treatment, the police may even provide the ride to a hospital. We've long sought an embedded clinician to work with the department but funding hasn't been available. An embedded clinician doesn't work if there is no police to embed them with. This is why the department has invested so much time in the Two-Team approach to response to mental health crisis as well as mental health awareness and response training for officers. Mental health and incapacitated person calls represent but 4.5% of the department call load, though dealing with these issues is enormously time- and personnel-intensive. The other 95.5% of police calls run the spectrum as mentioned earlier.

Q: How busy Are the Police?

A: The police respond to anywhere from 4-6,000 calls each year. These are initial contacts. Many are prolonged and have repeat, follow up calls. Some are simply service calls – checking a vacant house or verifying a VIN so a vehicle can be registered. In a reduction environment, many of these services would cease – no one to do them. And since emergency calls run the spectrum and are unpredictable, it would be difficult to adequately staff a department- any department for that matter, on a 9 - 5 basis.

An incident report for the January 1, 2019 to June 15, 2020 period is available on the Town's website, with the caveat that the COVID months (mid-March 2020 through June 2020 (so far)) saw a marked drop in accidents and other normal things like college noise complaints and the like.