

**BOARD OF SELECTPERSON'S
Public Hearing to Discuss Police Services
April 20, 2015 7:00 p.m.
Mountain Valley High School**

PRESENT for TOWN OF RUMFORD: Vice-Chairperson Jeffrey Sterling, Selectperson Bradford Adley, Selectperson Frank DiConzo, Selectperson Mark Belanger, Town Manager John Madigan, Jr. Police Chief Stacy Carter. Absent: Chairperson Gregory Buccina

PRESENT for TOWN OF MEXICO: Chairperson Richard Philbrick, Reggie Arsenault, Byron Ouellette, Albert Aniel, Andy Dupuis, Police Chief Roy Hodsdon

PRESENT for OXFORD COUNTY SHERIFF: Sheriff Wayne Gallant, Chief Deputy Hart Daley

Vice-Chairperson Sterling Called the Public Hearing to Order at 7:00 p.m. to discuss the options of receiving Police Services from the Oxford County Sheriff's Office or to continue to receive police services from both the Rumford Police Department and Mexico Police Department.

Sheriff Wayne Gallant explained that the Towns of Rumford and Mexico requested a proposal for Police Services from Oxford County. He outlined the cost for the first year as \$1,321,251.00 that would include start-up costs for uniforms, cruisers and other equipment. The second year cost would be \$1,185,851.00 and he believes they could hold the line for several years, such as they have done in the Town of Bethel. Existing cruisers in Rumford and Mexico would be turned over to the County. If the contract was abolished in the future, the County would give back the same amount of cruisers and equipment (in comparable condition as they were when received) to the towns. All current employees would have the option to apply to the Oxford County Sheriff's office to fill the 12 positions proposed to cover Rumford and Mexico.

Mr. Sterling informed those present that a majority of the Select Boards from Mexico and Rumford have voted to place a question on each Town ballot that would give voters the option of receiving Police Services from the Sheriff's Office or to keep the present Rumford and Mexico Police Departments as they currently exist. There will not be an option to merge the two departments.

Rumford Police Chief Stacy Carter outlined his proposal to continue Police Services and noted that the Rumford Police Department has been in existence since 1904. He stated that the Rumford Police Department has well trained officers with many years of service, with all but one having completed the Police Academy. The proposed budget for the Rumford Police Department includes an operating budget of \$778,776.00, benefits of \$294,898.00 and a Capital Account of \$30,000.00 for a total of \$1,103,674.00 for 12 officers in the Town of Rumford. He believes that first year costs if going with the Sheriff would include payment of accumulated sick and vacation time and possibly unemployment benefits for both Rumford and Mexico officers. He also noted that the portion of the Rumford Police budget that is not spent goes back into the General Fund to offset taxes. Last year the Rumford Police Department returned \$84,500.00. A contract with the Sheriff will be a set amount.

Mexico Police Chief Roy Hodsdon noted that both Mexico and Rumford have complete control over their Police Departments at this time. The Town of Mexico's Police Department has instituted many community oriented programs such as the Explorers and Neighborhood Watch

that have been beneficial to the community. The Mexico Police Department has reduced the 2015-2016 budget of \$421,400.00 by applying for a Federal COPS grant that was awarded and approved by the Board. The grant will pay \$52,000.00 of the overall \$70,000.00 officer costs for a 5th officer's salary. The Town of Mexico's cost for the grant is \$17,800.00 per year to maintain the 5 man department. Several grants are received to help offset the costs to the Department. They currently have 4 full time officers and a position to fill.

Chairperson Sterling informed those present that Town Manager John Madigan prepared budget information for the proposed Police Service budgets from the Sheriff's Office, and the Rumford and Mexico Police Departments and were available for the public's review at the front of the Auditorium.

The Town Manager explained that the Sheriff's Office budget would cover both Mexico and Rumford. If the citizen's vote for the Sheriff's budget, the Boards of Selectpersons would need to enter into an inter-local agreement to share services. The estimated formula for shared services would be 72-73% for Rumford and 27-28% for Mexico and are based on several factors including town valuation and population. The ratio would need to be looked at every five years as we do now with existing shared services, with Med-Care for example.

Frank DiConzo was concerned about the Town Auditor's statement to discontinue using funds to off-set taxes and instead save for any financial emergency. He also mentioned a tax revaluation needs to be done in Rumford and that may affect the percentages.

Byron Ouellette complimented the Mexico Police Chief and Mexico Police Department as they have well trained Academy officers and an aggressive new Chief that gets a lot done and mentioned the community programs initiated. He believes we may miss some of these benefits because of the costs that must be weighed by the taxpayers.

Reggie Arsenault disagrees with some of Mr. Ouellette's comments. He personally supports the local Police Departments and local control. We have a well-respected young group of officers that patrol and know the townspeople and the area crime rate. There are many calls pertaining to domestic violence and drug problems in particular.

Chief Carter responded to come concerns and added more information.

Albert Aniel stated that 6 Selectpersons out of 9 voted to let citizens decide to go with the Sheriff or stay with the town's Police Departments and it is up to them to ask questions.

Peter DeFilipp was concerned about losing local control and about our future. He believes we need to keep the local police. He does not like living in a ghetto which is what is happening with all the tax cuts. There is a lack of direction in the towns for the future and too much focus on reducing taxes rather than making the towns a good place to live. In his experience with real estate, location is more important than taxes to buyers.

George Byam asked about the costs for fringe benefits and liability insurances. He believes each Department does a good job.

Tim Kelcourse asked if the proposal could be increased after the vote and if adding more officers could be negotiated.

Sis Haynes believes the Police Department does a great job and the Chiefs are committed to the community.

Bob Chase asked about the Sheriff's commitment to accidents in Hanover.

Jennifer LeDuc supports the local Police Department.

Eric Giroux asked where the Sheriff's officer would work from and that we need something for kids in our area.

Robert Hamm reported he received poor responses from Mexico and Rumford Police Departments and has had good experiences with the Sheriff.

Mitzi Sequoia felt confused and disappointed in both Boards because the regionalization efforts study considered the consolidation of the Police departments to be the low hanging fruits. She has enormous respect for law enforcement. We can spend less money, but we need safe streets. She noted that she participated in the Citizen's Police Academy that was taught by Rumford Police Officers who volunteered their time. Now we are bringing in different voting for the Sheriff's Office.

Brad Gallant, a Rumford Police Officer, and Union President, noted that the Department employs local employees who want to work where they live. He stressed that people should compare apples to apples. He believes the reason we are saving tax dollars by going with the Sheriff's Office is because they will be providing only 12 police officers; currently the towns of Rumford and Mexico have 17 officers to cover the area. He hopes that how ever the vote turns out that this issue is put to rest.

Sheriff Gallant countered some of Officer Gallant's statements and reminded those present that a proposed merger with Rumford and Mexico was to go with 15 positions. He noted that they already provide services at schools in the county and emergency drills with the State police. He provided a proposal because he was asked to do so by the Boards of Rumford and Mexico.

Mark Belanger asked the Sheriff to reassure the citizens that they would still provide police services at the hospital. The Sheriff responded that the County brings people to Portland or Lewiston as they have security there and the deputies do not have to stay for several hours at the facility.

Tim Kelcourse thanked the Sheriff and Select Boards for the right to vote on this issue.

Sergeant Doug Maifeld, a Rumford Police Officer and part time Deputy for the Sheriff was disheartened by the Boards disrespect for him and the Police Chiefs and other officers who have given their time for the last 20 years. He was concerned that he would have to start out at the bottom if he went to work for the Sheriff's Office after working for 25 years and he would be losing his seniority and benefits that he has worked for and earned.

Byron Ouellette noted that he read an article about the Town of Madison recently contracting with the county Sheriff for cost savings. He believes the towns will save money by going with the Sheriff's Office as our budgets are always increasing.

Albert Aniel believes the Town of Mexico would save \$90,000.00 the first year if going with the Sheriff.

Peter DeFilipp asked what adequate police protection is. He also asked if there would be coverage for events that need security. The Sheriff responded that they will cover these.

Oxford County Deputy Hart Daley responded to concerns about Safe Voices, honoring veterans and the Torch Run that was voiced earlier in the meeting. The Sheriff's Office has a dedicated domestic violence investigator that works with Safe Voices. They also are very supportive in honoring Veteran's with local support and in Augusta. He noted that two officers participate in the Torch Run and other Special Olympic Events.

Charlie LeDuc agrees with his wife's earlier comments as they support the local coverage that they get. The efforts of law enforcement in writing grants has been beneficial to keep crime down in our area. He cautioned the voters that with change, we are solving a problem today, but need to be mindful of what that may bring to the future. We are currently suffering from the change in the school system that was regionalized and has become fractured and unable to work together.

An unidentified woman who works at Rumford Hospital and is not a resident of Rumford or Mexico, commented that the Police have always responded in an instant and saved her from being hit or bit by violent patients. She wants to be sure that there is a quick response when needed. The area has had many heroin overdoses, violence, rapes and the community may not be aware of the challenges out there for police officers. She noted that when she began working in the ER she realized that there are gangs in Rumford. Rumford Hospital does not have security, only the law enforcement officers that respond to their needs. A life is not worth just a few bucks.

Lawrence Winson, a Rumford Police Officer, and resident of Dixfield shared some experiences that he has been involved in regarding a lack of coverage from the County. He asked if there was a time period before the Sheriff would take over coverage and who would provide protection in that time frame and who would pay for it.

The Sheriff noted that 12 Deputies would be assigned here to this community.

Chief Deputy Hart Daley explained that the Deputies would be called out by proximity to the location needed.

The Town Manager explained that the money voted for police protection is approved for whatever services are needed, whether with the local departments or the Sheriff's Office. We will need to come up with an inter-local agreement with Mexico if the Sheriff's proposal is approved.

Doug Maifeld asked, "How long do you think people will stay as lame ducks?" We will need to pay more as we will be losing officers to other communities and that would incur overtime for the remaining force.

Dan Johnson, from Mexico, asked what would happen if Mexico votes to go with the Sheriff and Rumford votes not to. Mr. Sterling does not believe it would pass.

Reggie Arsenault stated some corrections of the number of average calls in Mexico. The last three months the call volume has been 190-220 calls. He took exception to comments made earlier and added that sometimes people will be injured and accidents will occur; that is not a

reason to get rid of a police department and these types of things are in the nature of the services being provided.

Brad Adley asked if there is a proximity clause for the Sheriff's Deputies to live within a certain distance of the area. The Sheriff responded that there is not.

Byron Ouellette believes that people are concerned about police coverage and he has no doubts in his mind that we will have adequate coverage with the Sheriff. It is all about the money in considering consolidation of services. He noted that if the Rumford and Mexico Police Departments have to disband they would possibly be applying to the Sheriff's Office or other places of employment.

An unidentified woman asked the Sheriff about the on call procedure.

George Byam asked about where the cruisers are located.

Peter DeFilipp believes the most severe calls are after midnight and on weekends and asked how that will figure in with two deputies.

Terri Palmer, an employee for the Town of Rumford, supports our town and asked how we got here. We hired a firm to help us regionalize but she never thought we would lose people. She thought we were going to learn to be more efficient and spend tax dollars wisely. The Town has been cutting their budgets every year, yet home budgets keep going up. She has a great deal of respect for all law enforcement because they have to deal with people having their worst moments. She noted prevention is key to help children to become good citizens. She was also involved in the Citizen's Police Academy and rode on night patrols and saw a different town at night that made her afraid. Some people are starting their day at that time and not for good things. She noted that all our law enforcement officers are professional people and she does not want to see them demoralized and pitted against each other. She does not want to take our Police Department apart because it is not broken and asked why chose this department when other departments are not as needed. She believes we need to feel safe and our Police Department is doing a good job. We respect them for what they have to deal with.

Rumford Vice-Chairperson Sterling thanked all for their attendance and encouraged everyone to keep the discussion going and noted that the Board is always available to answer questions.

A question was asked about if the voting for the police services article would be at the Town Meeting or Secret Ballot. Mr. Sterling responded that we are waiting for an opinion from our legal counsel and will make this known as soon as possible.

The Public Hearing was adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

John E. Madigan, Jr.
Town Manager

JEMJr/tp

[The Public Hearing was covered by WVAC-TV and will be played on the local access station.]