

TOWN OF SUFFIELD

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TO: Suffield Board of Police Commissioners
Suffield Board of Selectmen

FROM: Melissa M. Mack, First Selectman

DATE: October 31, 2019

RE: Suffield Police Department Management Operational Study Report

Please find attached a copy of the report by Daigle Law Group regarding the Management Operational Study of the Suffield Police Department I received yesterday afternoon. I am sure you will all agree that the report is a comprehensive snapshot of the Police Department's operations, and provides a great deal of information for us to digest and discuss. Police Commission Chairman Pascoe and I have called a special meeting of the Police Commission and Board of Selectmen on Monday, November 4 at 7:00 p.m. in the Suffield Middle School Auditorium. Mr. Daigle will be available at the meeting to answer any questions about the report you may have. This meeting will be open to the public.

I would like to make a few comments regarding the information in the report for your consideration while you are reviewing it. First, I would like to point out that many of the recommendations reference conditions in the Police Department that have existed for many years, perhaps decades in some cases.

Chief Brown has already implemented many important initiatives since his appointment in October 2016, including advocating for the creation of a fourth Sergeant position allowing for supervision on each shift, and a Records Clerk position to support the officers and enhance the professionalism of the Department. Recognizing that training opportunities were not afforded to our officers under prior administrations, Chief Brown budgeted Lethality Assessment Program (LAP), NARCAN, Crisis Intervention Training (CIT), domestic violence training and quarterly firearms training and certification to help our officers better serve our community.

Chief Brown instituted a peer support program, community policing initiatives, new laptops, radar units and rifles in every cruiser, new cruisers, new tasers, uniform upgrades and enhancements, including ballistic plates (i.e., body armor), construction uniforms, rain jackets, etc. He renovated the police department and added wireless internet access to facilitate officer work and improve working environments.

He recognized that addressing the historically deficient training issue meant exposing the junior officers to experienced veterans who would model best practices. To that end, he recruited three certified and highly qualified veteran officers to bring police staffing to full levels as quickly as possible to ease the burden on existing patrol. Over the last three years, Chief Brown applied for a variety of public and officer safety initiatives, including the SAMHSA Grant. He also embedded in the department an investigative social worker from the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, together with the embedded clinician funded by the SAMHSA Grant, both of which have added much needed depth to the resources available to address addiction and mental health issues in the Town of Suffield.

The report does not address these and other accomplishments, because an operational study is designed instead to identify areas that might need improvement rather than highlight the things that have been going in the right direction.

Second, I would like to publicly acknowledge and thank the Chief for his full participation in and support of this endeavor. It cannot be easy to have the Police Department, and by extension himself, open to public review, comment and criticism.

Third, I want to correct any misperception that may exist about the Detective assignment, which is discussed in the report. On May 11, 2017, the Town and the police union entered into a Memorandum of Understanding related to the Detective Bureau, which states in relevant part, “to maintain the safety of the officers and the public”...”the Chief retains the right in his sole discretion to temporarily assign the detective to patrol if patrol staffing levels drop to 13 assigned and available to patrol.” As can be seen from the attached history of the available patrol staff and recruitment efforts to fill officer vacancies since May 11, 2017, the patrol staffing has not been above 14. The history and MOU are attached for your reference.

Fourth, the recommendations offered are just that – recommendations. It is our collective job to work together in prioritizing the recommendations and determining the order in which the recommendations will be considered and implemented, or if at all, consistent with the Town’s financial capability.

Finally, many of the recommendations suggest changes to the terms and conditions of employment for members of the police union. The Town and the police union are still currently in contract negotiations, and any proposed changes to mandatory subjects of bargaining will be fully discussed with the union consistent with the Town’s obligations under the Municipal Employee Relations Act and should not be discussed during our meeting in accordance with our collective bargaining ground rules. I look forward to working with the union towards a productive future in the Suffield Police Department.