

From the Office of the Sheriff:

The Future of Law Enforcement

It seems every week there is a news story regarding a village or city seeking to eliminate their police department or contract out their law enforcement services. This fall it is the communities of Jackson and Pewaukee. These conversations all have similar context – save \$\$\$. Dodge County is blessed with numerous full-time law enforcement agencies that provide critical services. Dodge County also is host to several part-time departments who provide an enhanced level of protection that the Sheriff's Dept. can not. Five years ago, when local law enforcement administrators never would have believe they would experience drastic cuts, they are living them today.

Recently, a Dodge County community eliminating two full-time police officers. The cuts were budget related and were immediate, leaving the city unable to maintain their 24-7 coverage. This generated a call from the Police Chief to the Sheriff's Dept. to work out coverage for the period they could not. Yes, we are the back-up for these municipal departments for "emergency" calls-for-service. In the absence of local law enforcement availability, the Sheriff's Dept. is the response to all calls-for-service. However, we are not staffed to cover non-emergency calls. Local communities will need to consult with the Sheriff's Dept. prior to such cuts to see if we can fill those voids. We may be a short term solution, but this is a long-term challenge. It is exactly these types of immediate cuts in law enforcement resources that must be orchestrated and planned.

I have written and spoken publicly about law enforcement consolidation and contracting since 2003. Those conversations were based upon looking forward and understanding the fiscal health of municipal and law enforcement budgets in a world of diminished resources. It is only a matter of time that these conversations must begin, to ensure the safety and protections of the citizens we serve. I am concerned as your Sheriff because the expectation of communities reducing services is to rely upon us to pick up the slack. This provides a community a sense of false hope.

This is why I have talked publicly about consolidation and contracting because it impacts more than the local department and its citizens. I have no interest in contracting law enforcement services unless it would be the only viable alternative to a community eliminating its department. At that point it is all about maintaining services and that can be best addressed with communities maintaining their own identity and law enforcement agency.

Consolidation on the other hand can satisfy both the need for essential law enforcement services as well as the lack of resources to support municipal departments. These conversations are only a matter of time and many people just do not want to believe it. We are living in times in which budgets have been cut to the bone to balance budgets and the areas to cut have been exhausted. As with our own Sheriff's Dept. budget, it now comes down to personnel and cutting funding for positions. I am concerned that at a time when we find ourselves in a position of having to do less, our municipalities may be asking us to do more. Hence the conflict.

There are two part-time departments in Dodge County that have taken the initiative and contracted with neighbors in an effort to provide enhanced services while saving money so there are examples of this working and working well. I think there are great opportunities out there full-time

agencies to partner with adjacent municipalities. This will increase revenues for the gaining municipality and reduce expenses for the absorbed municipality. In these times of diminished resources, this will not become the vogue thing to do, budgets will require it. Thanks for listening, tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us.