

TOWN OF ALSTEAD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

POLICE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

August 6, 2026

Present

- David Hogan, Selectman and Committee Chair
- Mary Ann Wolf, Committee Member
- Brian Hughes, Committee Member
- Jesse Moore, Ambulance Chief
- Ed Reller, Committee Member
- Wendy Underwood, Police Officer/Officer in Charge
- Rebecca Kelley, Committee Member
- Emily Sherwood, Committee Member
- Gordon Kemp, Committee Member and Recording Secretary
- Bindy Curtis, Resident

Police Department Comparative Information

Mr. Hogan opened the discussion by reviewing research he had requested concerning police department budgets and police chief salaries in municipalities comparable to Alstead.

Ms. Wolf presented information she had compiled from publicly available sources. She explained that population alone may not provide an accurate comparison between municipalities and therefore included total town valuation as another measure of a community's financial capacity. Her spreadsheets also included population and population density.

The Committee discussed other factors affecting comparisons between communities, including proximity to larger population centers, commercial activity, call volume, crime, and whether municipalities provide full-time or 24-hour police coverage.

Ms. Wolf agreed to distribute the spreadsheets electronically to Committee members.

Mr. Hogan noted that the Alstead Police Department currently represents approximately 10% of the Town's budget, while the Highway Department represents approximately 26%.

Current Police Department Staffing

Mr. Hogan reviewed the current staffing situation following the retirement of Chief Steve Murrell.

The Department currently consists of Corporal Wendy Underwood as the full-time police officer and Penny Gendron as the part-time administrative assistant. Ms. Gendron is expected to leave the position in March. The Town also has a part-time/per diem police officer, although Corporal Underwood reported that he worked approximately 84 hours during the previous year.

The Committee discussed how much of the former Chief's time was devoted to administrative responsibilities. Mr. Reller noted that Chief Murrell maintained a detailed spreadsheet of his activities and suggested reviewing that information.

Corporal Underwood described current administrative responsibilities as including maintenance of policies and procedures, Police Standards and Training reporting, reporting to the Attorney General and other State agencies, required testing and compliance matters, and similar departmental responsibilities. She noted that she personally performs functions such as fingerprinting.

Potential Police Service Models

Mr. Hogan stated that he had identified six potential approaches to future police services, while recognizing that additional alternatives could be developed.

1. **Maintain the existing structure with a full-time Police Chief**, one full-time police officer, part-time/per diem police officer, and part-time administrative support.
2. **Hire a part-time Police Chief**, primarily to perform administrative and supervisory functions while allowing the full-time and part-time officers to concentrate on active police work.

3. **Use a combination of local and contracted services**, maintaining a full-time Alstead officer as Officer in Charge and purchasing Sheriff's Department coverage during vacations, illnesses, or other periods when local coverage is unavailable.
4. **Contract with the Cheshire County Sheriff's Department**, for some or all municipal police coverage.
5. **Rely upon or contract with the New Hampshire State Police.**
6. **Explore a cooperative or merged arrangement with a neighboring police department**, with Walpole identified as the most practical neighboring department to approach.

The Committee also discussed the possibility of purchasing a limited number of dedicated Sheriff's Department patrol hours rather than contracting for 40 hours per week.

Part-Time Chief Considerations

The Committee discussed the concept of employing a retired law enforcement officer as a part-time Chief, similar to an arrangement the Town had used previously.

Mr. Hogan explained that such an individual could concentrate on administrative duties while Corporal Underwood and other officers focused on active law enforcement responsibilities.

The Committee also discussed certification and physical-fitness requirements applicable to officers entering or returning to law enforcement employment.

Corporal Underwood stated that part-time police officers and a part-time Chief would not receive Town retirement or benefits.

State Police and Sheriff's Department Options

Mr. Hogan reviewed notes from a prior meeting that Mr. Kemp and Chief Murrell had held with representatives of the New Hampshire State Police and Cheshire County Sheriff's Department.

Mr. Kemp explained that dedicated State Police patrol coverage would depend upon troopers being available and willing to work overtime assignments. Costs could vary depending upon the officer assigned.

The Sheriff's Department was described as providing a more comprehensive municipal-contracting model and having experience providing services to several area communities.

Both agencies had previously indicated they could assist with matters such as the evidence room if Alstead discontinued its municipal police department. The Sheriff's Department had also indicated a willingness to take over certain Town-owned police equipment and account for its value as part of an arrangement, while State Police had not expressed interest in the equipment.

The Committee reviewed preliminary Sheriff's Department hourly rates:

Year	Hourly Rate
2026	\$70.71 per hour
2027	\$72.07 per hour
2028	\$73.39 per hour

Mr. Hogan estimated that 40 hours per week of Sheriff's Department coverage would cost approximately \$150,000 in 2027 and \$153,000 in 2028.

For comparison, Alstead's 2026 Police Department budget is \$225,889. The Committee noted that this figure does not necessarily represent the full cost of maintaining the municipal department because expenses such as retirement and health insurance may appear elsewhere in the Town budget.

Mr. Kemp noted that approximately \$45,000 is budgeted for police retirement in 2026 and that health insurance should also be considered when evaluating the cost of hiring a future full-time Chief.

The Committee also discussed Richmond's use of approximately 848 hours of Sheriff's Department service at a cost of approximately \$54,000 and confirmed that communities may purchase substantially fewer than 40 hours of Sheriff's coverage per week.

Police Presence and Coverage Needs

Ms. Wolf asked what level and type of coverage Corporal Underwood believed Alstead needed.

Mr. Hogan stated that, based on previous conversations with Corporal Underwood, she would prefer an active Chief who also performs police work. He discussed the possibility of scheduling the Chief and Corporal Underwood on different shifts to expand coverage into evenings, weekends, and early mornings.

The Committee discussed the value of visible police presence and the importance of determining when police calls actually occur.

Chief Moore asked whether data was available showing the number of police incidents and the time periods during which calls most commonly occur.

Corporal Underwood confirmed that she has access to information concerning Alstead Police Department activity.

Mr. Hogan asked Corporal Underwood to compile that information for the next meeting so that the Committee can better evaluate staffing and scheduling needs.

The Committee noted that reported "calls for service" do not necessarily represent incidents requiring an officer to respond in person.

Requirement for Police Chief or Officer in Charge

Mr. Hogan raised the question of whether New Hampshire law requires a municipality that maintains its own police department to employ a Police Chief.

Corporal Underwood stated that she believed the Department must have an officer in charge.

The Committee did not reach a conclusion and identified the issue for additional research, particularly regarding responsibility for matters such as evidence, departmental administration, and statutory compliance.

Neighboring Communities

The Committee discussed contacting municipalities that do not maintain traditional municipal police departments to learn about their experiences.

Gilsum was identified as particularly useful because of its relatively recent transition to Cheshire County Sheriff's Department coverage.

The Committee also discussed Acworth, Langdon, Surry, and Marlow and the different approaches used by those communities.

Chief Moore agreed to contact several nearby municipalities that do not maintain their own police departments and ask about their experiences with State Police and Sheriff's Department coverage.

Future Agency Presentations

Mr. Hogan proposed inviting representatives from the principal outside law-enforcement options to upcoming Committee meetings.

The Committee intends to hear from:

- Walpole Police Chief Justin Sanctuary;
- Cheshire County Sheriff Eli Rivera; and
- a representative of the New Hampshire State Police.

Corporal Underwood agreed to contact the representatives and attempt to schedule one presentation at each meeting, beginning August 20 and continuing every other Thursday.

The Committee intends to ask each representative to explain:

- What services the agency can provide;
- What services it cannot provide;
- Estimated costs;
- Available staffing and coverage;
- Practical considerations for policing a small New Hampshire community; and
- Any alternative approaches the agency recommends that the Committee consider.

Public Participation and Committee Process

Ms. Kelley asked how the public would be involved in the process.

Mr. Hogan explained that the Committee's present assignment is to investigate the available alternatives, determine which options are feasible and best fit the needs of our Town, and make a recommendation to the Selectboard.

The anticipated process is to narrow the alternatives to viable options and subsequently hold a public hearing so residents can provide input before a final decision is made.

Mr. Hogan stated that, if the Town ultimately contracts with the Sheriff's Department, the proposal would need to be addressed through a warrant article in March. Mr. Kemp noted that would only be true if the contract were for more than one year.

Additional Discussion

The Committee discussed the number of communities within State Police Troop C's coverage area and the limitations associated with relying upon State Police for routine municipal matters.

Corporal Underwood stated that Troop C covers 38 communities in Cheshire and Sullivan Counties.

The Committee also discussed the broader shortage of law enforcement and emergency-services personnel and the difficulty municipalities face in recruiting and retaining qualified officers.

Ms. Wolf raised questions concerning reported State crime statistics for Alstead, noting that the figures she located appeared to show only one violent crime in 2021, one in 2024, and one in 2025. Committee members questioned whether those statistics accurately reflected local incidents.

Mr. Kemp noted that currently, NHSP covers the town approximately 75% of the time based upon our current staffing covering 40 of the 168 hours in a week.

Action Items

Responsible	Action
Ms. Wolf	Distribute the municipal police budget and compensation comparison spreadsheets to Committee members.
Corporal Underwood	Compile available Alstead Police Department activity information, including data that may assist the Committee in determining appropriate staffing and coverage times.
Corporal Underwood	Contact representatives from the Walpole Police Department, Cheshire County Sheriff's Department, and New Hampshire State Police and attempt to schedule one presentation every other Thursday beginning August 20.
Chief Moore	Contact nearby municipalities that do not maintain their own police departments to obtain information about their experiences with State Police and Sheriff's Department coverage.
Committee	Research whether New Hampshire law requires a municipality maintaining a police department to have a Police Chief or whether an Officer-in-Charge arrangement is permissible.
Committee	Continue evaluating the actual total cost of Alstead's existing Police Department, including expenses appearing outside the departmental operating budget.
Ms. Kelley	Contact the Town of Marlow to begin discussions for a possible merger or co-operative agreement

Adjournment

Mr. Hogan asked whether there was any further business. Following brief additional discussion, he thanked those present and adjourned the meeting at 6:00 pm.