

**BOROUGH OF WEST READING  
BOROUGH COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING  
December 1, 2020**

West Reading Borough Council held a special meeting at Borough Hall on Tuesday, December 1, 2020 with the following persons present: Council President Jack Gombach; Council Vice President Philip Wert; Council Pro-Tem Christopher Lincoln; Council Members Jennifer Bressler, Patrick Kaag, Samantha Kaag, and Ryan Lineaweaver; Mayor Andrew Kearney; Police Chief Stephen Powell; Sergeants Ryan Phillips, Wayne Holben, and Chad Marks; Borough Manager Nicholas Imbesi; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira.

**VISITORS**     Bryan Ross, Township of Spring Chief of Police

**CALL TO ORDER**

Council President Jack Gombach called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m. via Zoom, which was followed by Roll Call.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no public comments.

**POLICE CONSOLIDATION STUDY**

Chief Ross presented highlights of a police consolidation study for the Township of Spring, and Wyomissing and West Reading Boroughs. The agreed name at this time is Metro Berks Regional Department. Consolidated police services would remove the political boundaries of these three municipalities to create one regional department that would be governed by a police commission consisting of elected and/or municipal officials from each of the participating municipalities.

There are three legal statutes pertaining to police consolidation. Regional departments are not normally bound by provisions of the Borough Code, Police Tenure Act, Civil Service, among others. However, guidance can be obtained from these laws within a Charter Agreement.

A police commission has the authority to conduct business by purchasing property, entering into contracts, hiring/firing, borrowing money, etc. There are currently 40 regional departments with the state of Pennsylvania.

The noted advantages of regional police services were an opportunity to reduce costs, offer specialized training, improved management supervision, and career enhancements. The noted disadvantages were a loss of local services and loss of local control and position.

The general demographics of this consolidation would have a total population of 41,792 people whom reside within a 23 square mile area representing a population density of 1,813 people per square mile. The population density dictates the police workload. There are approximately 203 road miles contained within the three municipalities. As of September 15, 2020, there are currently 64 full-time police officers between the three municipalities and four clerical staff members. There is a total of 41 police vehicles and five specialty vehicles.

Fiscal data of the individual police departments was provided. The Township of Spring yielded a cost of \$121.12 per hour; Wyomissing Borough yielded a cost of \$115.51 per hour and West Reading Borough yielded a cost of \$87.66 per hour. A total general fund police expenditure for the three municipalities was \$12,252,217.

The number of officers based on a population of 1,000 in the Township of Spring is 1.11, Wyomissing Borough is 2.19, and West Reading Borough is 3.56. The average regional department within the state of

Pennsylvania staffs one officer per 1,000 in population. Therefore, regional departments typically provide a cost savings by being able to do more with less expense.

The position taken by the Governor Center in consolidating police departments is that no full-time officer is to lose a position. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) developed a formula to estimate police personnel needs. An example of officers based on the number of reported incidents indicates a need for 36 officers and nine supervisory components or a total of 45 officers.

Makeup of the commission is recommended to have two elected officials; in a Borough this representation could be the Mayor and a Councilperson. In an effort to be able to break a tie it was recommended to rotate a third member between the municipalities. A seventh member could be a citizen. It was recommended to provide equal representation between the three municipalities.

The commission would have a regular monthly meeting that is open to the public with a solicitor. A member of the commission would bring a report back to the municipal meeting. Professional liability insurance would not need to be held by the municipality as this would be provided by the commission. A Charter would be the legal document outlining in detail the agreement between the municipalities. It was recommended to begin with a five-year agreement. A 2/3 vote for disbanding of a regional department with a one-year advanced notice is standard. A lone municipality leaving the regional department would incur the costs of disbanding.

Chief Powell reviewed an organizational chart based on 60 personnel where most of the personnel would be assigned to a patrol division that includes a traffic unit. The traffic unit would address items such as speeding enforcement and large accidents on the bypass. An investigative division would handle specialized narcotics and vice activity, and there would be enough supervision to cover the entire organization. Chief Powell noted the added flexibility to move personnel to operations across the board without the need for overtime.

Chief Ross shared a proposed operating budget for the calendar year 2022 of \$14,353,047 or at a cost of \$132.40 per hour per officer. This amount is approximately \$27,280 lower than the existing police expenditures between the three municipalities.

An unknown to the proposed budget are the pension plans. A consultant was recommended to review the three municipal pension plans to provide guidance.

Headquarters for the patrol and administrative functions were recommended at the larger Township of Spring Police Headquarters. A criminal investigation division could be housed at the Borough of Wyomissing Police Headquarters. The department's traffic unit and other specialty positions could be housed at the West Reading Police Headquarters. Each building would need clerical assistance to handle various duties and resident interaction. The area would be divided into zones to address the needs as opposed to the geographical boundaries. Tracking of time within each municipality was the recommended method to divide expenses. An additional expense that was recommended was the use of video cameras in both patrol cars and on officers.

The easiest method of cost distribution between municipalities would be based on population. However, hours of service were the recommended method of cost distribution to ensure satisfaction of constituents.

Ultimately, the municipalities should see a cost reduction and an improvement in services. Should these three municipalities merge services it would be the second largest regional department in the county.

Chief Powell indicated that West Reading may lose hours of service but there is some flexibility as to the services that are needed.

Mr. Lincoln inquired as to exceeding the total annual hours of service charged to a municipality and the ability to continue to offer services through the end of the year. Chief Ross indicated that a monthly account of hours of service would be provided by the commission for tracking purposes. Hours of service or costs can be redistributed as agreed upon by the commission.

Mr. Kaag asked if officers would rotate through the zones. Chief Powell indicated that new faces would be seen, however individuals would be assigned to areas that they are most familiar with. Chief Ross indicated that most citizens are concerned about professionalism and response time.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 6:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira  
Borough Secretary