



Athol Police Department

Staffing Requirements



Finance & Warrant Advisory
Committee

Police Staffing Review Overview

Presented to the Board Of Selectman
November 20, 2012

Over the past 6 months, the Finance and Warrant Advisory Committee (FWAC) has undertaken the task of reviewing the operation and staffing needs of the Athol Police Department (APD). This task was undertaken at the request of the former Town Manager, David Ames, and current Police Chief Tim Anderson.

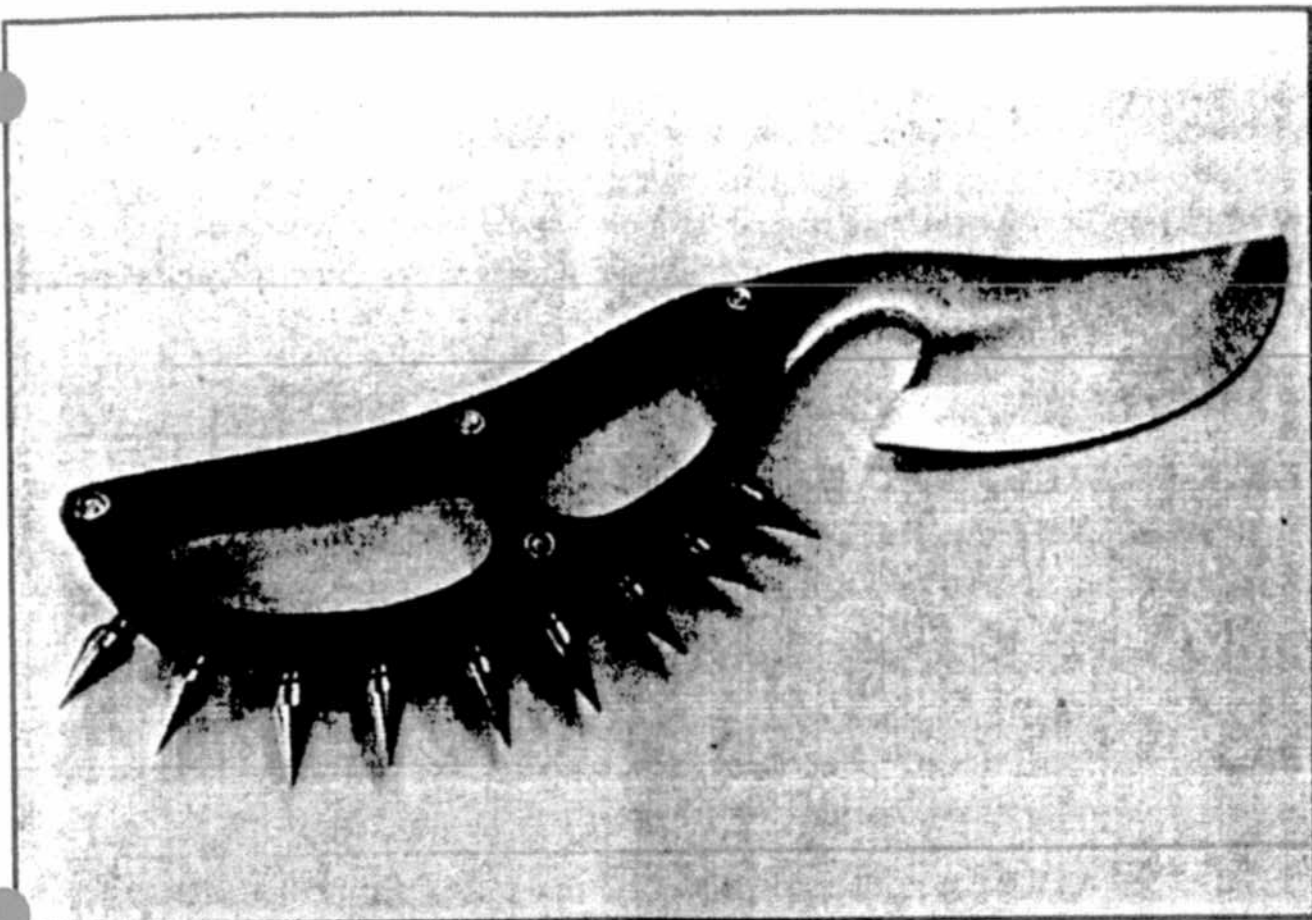
Much like the Ambulance Review Study, the FWAC undertook this study as both a learning experience for the committee and a project that would provide an insight into the operation being reviewed.

The Ambulance Study Review has served as a "blueprint" for the needs of the municipal ambulance operation as it is currently setup and it is hoped the information and recommendations to follow for the APD will be considered in the same vein.

Last winter – at a joint meeting of the Police Department, the Board of Selectmen and the FWAC we heard various concerns expressed by the APD management and members of the department staff. Their message was clear "we are losing the battle to keep Athol a safe community for our citizens and businesses".

We heard a story about a domestic call that was answered by one officer. That location had been the scene of various other calls in the previous months. The previous calls had not been violent. This night – it was different. The officer responding – by himself – with no "backup" encountered a much different situation as he answered this call.

Lying on a bed as he entered the room – was this knife. He now had to control a much different situation, he had to deal with an exposed weapon, which was a danger to all involved. This situation had to be handled without any "backup" as his partner was already involved with another call across town and the shift was short with only two officers on duty that evening – instead of three. Luckily – this officer was experienced enough to handle this situation without any incident to anyone involved...but it could have ended up in a tragedy. We all left that meeting with a sense of concern – about the safety of our fellow citizens, neighbors and friends.... along with the safety of the members of the Police Department as well.



ILLEGAL WEAPON—This knife, with what is considered to be a “brass knuckle” handle, is illegal because of the studded handle and was confiscated recently by the Athol Police Department when officers responded to a medical call. It is an example, police said, of the types of weapons that are “on the streets” locally in addition to handguns. Chief Timothy Anderson said it is planned to put a selection of the types of weapons seized over the years on display at the station at some point in the future. Aside from guns and knives, he said other weapons seized include machetes, swords and battle axes.

Photo by Brian Gelinas

Since the start of 2012 we have had 7 armed robberies in town. We have had 110 breaking-in events and we have had 221 domestic calls. Sexual assaults and drug related incidents and arrests are on pace to be higher than ever for Athol, in 2012.

This year to date ...we have lost 4 police officers in Massachusetts alone. This past spring a Springfield police officer answering a domestic call alone – was shot and killed. As he approached the door of the apartment shots pierced the door and struck the officer, who never had a chance.

We all realized we are living in a different world while our community is safer than most, we are naive to think we are not effected by this change.

After our review of the operation and staffing needs of the APD – the FWAC has come to the conclusion that we need to take steps to ensure the safety and well-being of our citizens and their properties along with the safety and well-being of those officers and members of the APD – who are doing their best to protect us.

You will find various facts and figures contained in this report. Once you have reviewed this information – you will agree, we need to take steps to ensure the APD can do their job of protecting persons and property.

The FWAC is recommending that the APD receive the added funding to allow for an additional two positions – bringing the staffing level to twenty positions. These two added positions will allow the management of the department to take the needed steps to relieve the stress of understaffed shifts along with overworked staffing. These added positions will also allow the APD to become “proactive” in its efforts to protect the Town of Athol as opposed to “reactive” which puts the department in a “defensive” position.

While it is easy to recommend the need for added personal for the APD – the ability to fund this recommendation is another matter.

As the committee that reviews and watches over the budget – it is our responsibility to give both the Selectboard and Town Manager some “options” to fund this need.

As mentioned at the Annual Town Meeting in the Chairman’s Report, this funding must not be the result of added taxes to the taxpayers – but must come from within the existing budget.

You will see - we have provided as examples, various ways this funding can be accomplished. After review, you may have other thoughts on how and where this funding may come about – but again, the FWAC urges this funding comes from within the existing budget framework already in place.

Lastly – the FWAC can only recommend the course of action we feel is needed on this subject. It is not within our authority to make this change alone. The Board of

Selectman, as the leaders of this community, must make public safety the number one priority, and as such, must set the course to ensure the protection of persons and property.

Without protection of persons and property, without law and order, we do not have a viable community - we have chaos.

What good is it to have a new library, a new senior center, a new school and new supermarket or shopping mall, if we can't protect and watch over them and those who use them?

We respectfully ask that the Board of Selectman make the issue of public safety – the protection of persons and property, the priority it needs to be and instruct to the Town Manager to take the needed steps – within the budget – to ensure that Athol is safe community for those who live, work and visit here.

Sincerely,

The Finance and Warrant Advisory Committee

Ken Duffy – Chairman
Ben Feldman – Vice Chairman
Gary Deyo
Cindy Caldwell
Alan Dodge
Erik Euvrard
Paul Nelson

Funding Suggestions For Added Police Staffing

As mentioned in the opening statement – the FWAC recommends adding two positions to the staffing level of the Police Department.

These two positions are recommended to be added as one position in the FY14 budget and one position in the FY16 budget. The reason for this staffing increase over a three-year period is to allow for a smoother financial integration within the budget process.

You will notice we have not dictated where these added positions should take place. The Chief has indicated various options concerning placement. The committee feels the actual implementation of these added positions should be his decision, as he best knows where the most effective use of this added personnel would be.

Concerning the actual funding options the committee recommends the following possibilities:

We believe a small amount of re-prioritized funds from various areas can accomplish the needed funding (approximately \$50,000 per position).

After review it is noted that of the currently constructed municipal budget there is approximately 2 million dollars of discretionary spending within the 18 million dollar -budget framework.

We suggest a review of all-discretionary spending during the next budget process be made to evaluate its need and place within the budget.

We suggest all future municipal job vacancies be reviewed to determine the need for replacement and consideration of job consolidation.

We suggest a review of all current programs to determine their value in terms usefulness and prioritize all programs as they relate to citizen benefits.

We suggest a comprehensive review of the FY14 Police Department budget be taken to extract any funding that may be able to be used for added personnel.

Apply savings from (retired) management positions over the next 5 years. Please note that over the next 5 years all management positions (3 Sergeant positions, 1 Lieutenant position and the Chief position) will all likely require replacement. As such – as patrol staff move up to these positions, the incoming personnel will be hired at a lower replacement cost (no Quinn Bill for example) resulting in a potential savings estimated to be between \$64,000 and \$95,000, depending on various factors regarding the replacement of the management staff.

On an annual basis the town averages approximately \$600,000 in “Free Cash” yearly – we suggest consideration of a small segment of this amount could be used to begin the funding process.

We suggest a review take place concerning our retirement system in the area of insurance benefits paid to our retirees who have had prior service in other communities. There is a process where we can bill-back the state along with other cities and towns for the proportionate cost of health insurance benefits paid to Athol retirees based on years of credible service with the other entities. This new law is a part of the recent health insurance reform bill passed by the legislature.

Likewise, there is a potential savings with a program called OBRA, for employees ineligible for town retirement benefits. In Massachusetts the state run vehicle which we belong to is called the SMART Plan. The SMART Plan is an IRS designated 457B savings plan where by instead of paying into Social Security, a deferred compensation plan, having a defined contribution is maintained by the individual, with no matching funds from the Town.

It is also suggested a comprehensive review take place concerning our health benefits for our employees (both active and retired). There may be significant savings in this area – of which a small portion could be used to help fund these added positions.

All municipal fee structures should be reviewed yearly to ensure we are "in-line" with towns in our area. These fees must be "fair" and should reflect the value of the service being provided.

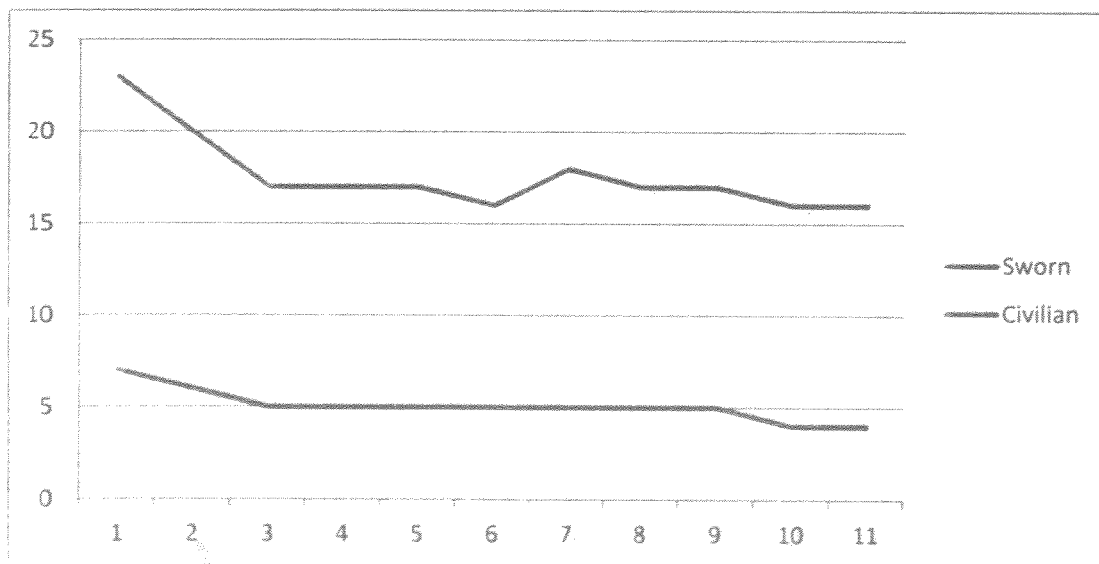
It is the FWAC's opinion that we have in place, within the current budget framework, the needed funding requirements if we determine that public safety is a major priority. The key first step in this process will be the decision by the Selectboard as the leaders of our town, to make this staffing issue a major priority.

It is our hope that the information presented will be used to validate the seriousness of this issue and used as a "blueprint" to address this matter within the budget framework without any added cost to the taxpayers of Athol.

Athol Police Department

Staffing Levels - Full Time Personnel 2001 to 2011

Year	Sworn	Civilian	Total
2001	23	7	30
2002	20	6	26
2003	17	5	22
2004	17	5	22
2005	17	5	22
2006	16	5	21
2007	18	5	23
2008	17	5	22
2009	17	5	22
2010	16	4	20
2011	16	4	20



Reduction in Sworn Personnel

30.43%

Reduction in Civilian Personnel

42.86%

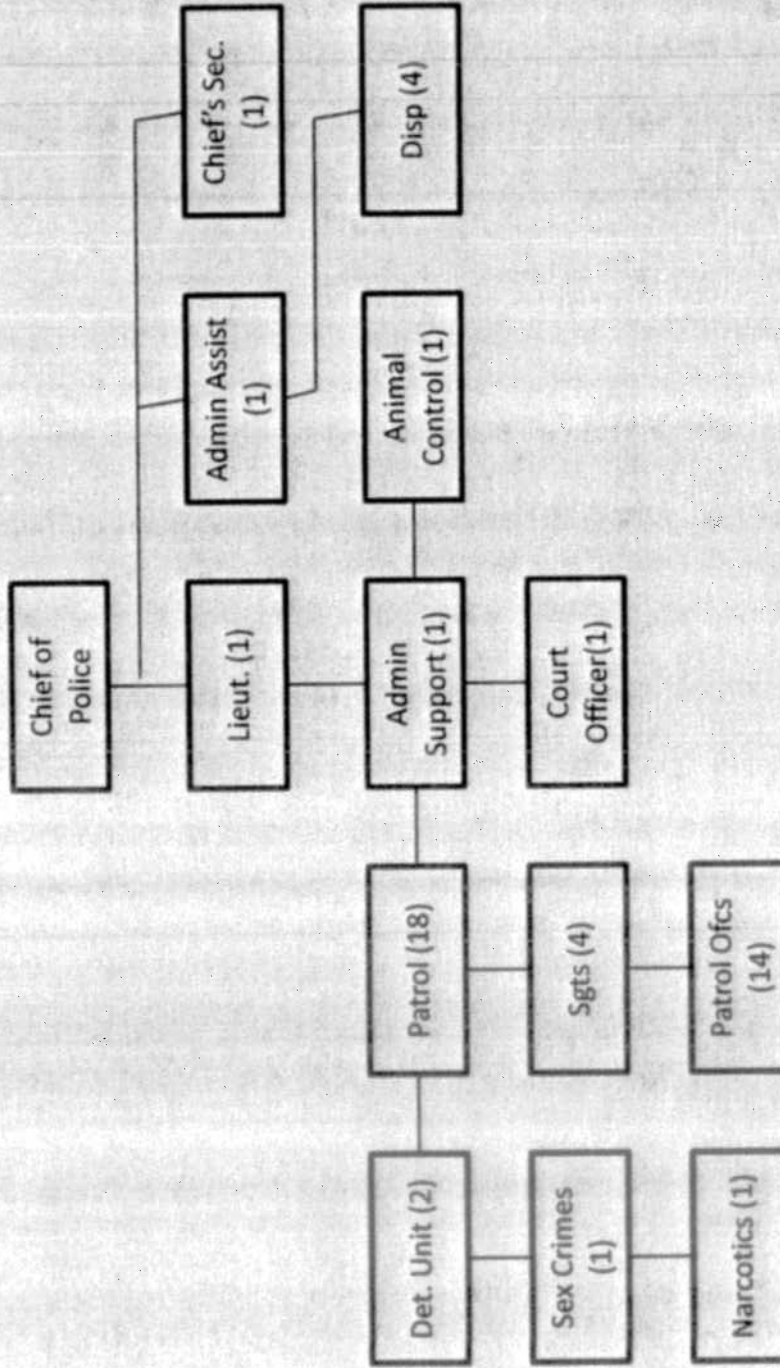
Total Personnel Reduction

33.33%



Athol Police Department

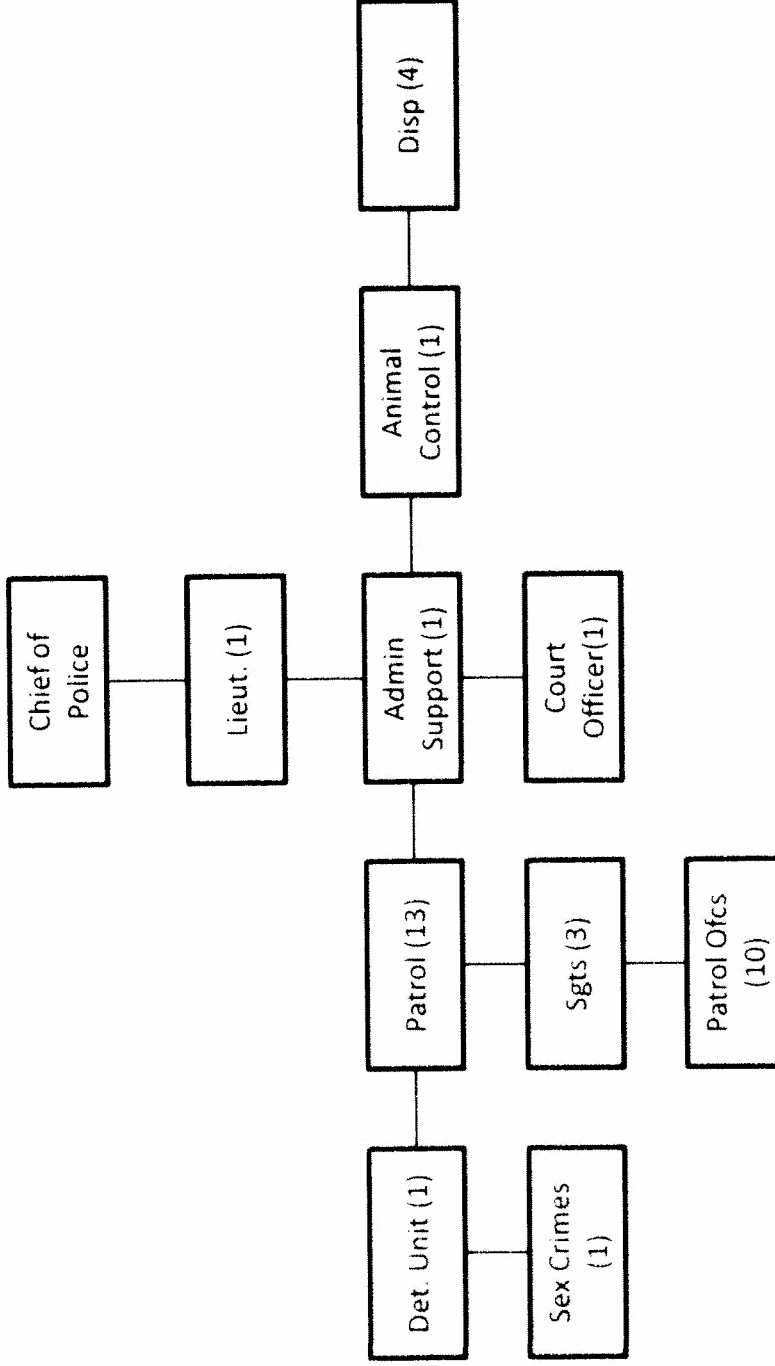
Staffing Chart - 2001





Athol Police Department

Staffing Chart - 2011



Athol Police Department

Effects of Staffing Shortages

- Officer Morale

- Increased work load with fewer officers
- Increased stress due to being over worked
- Burnout caused by too much mandatory overtime
- Increased citizens complaint
- Lower productivity
- Increased absentee rate

- Officer Safety

- Fewer officers available for backup at volatile scenes
- Less attention to detail / safety issues due to stress levels and fatigue
- Officers overwhelmed with other obligations pay less attention to detail
- Health issues brought on by overwork and increased stress

- Public Safety (most important)

- Staffing reduced to a point where very little proactive and/or preventative work is being done
- Little or no police visibility (i.e. patrol, business checks, officer initiated activities)
- Mission of police is crime PREVENTION. We are currently primarily only reactive
- Crime and fear of crime / victimization increases.
- Many lesser crime go uninvestigated or under investigated due to time unavailability

Athol Police Department

Services Lost from Staffing Reductions

- ⊕ Full Time Narcotics Enforcement
- ⊕ Preventative Patrol
- ⊕ Directed Patrol (patrol in areas where specific problems have occurred)
- ⊕ Traffic Enforcement
- ⊕ Specialized Enforcement (OUI details, town by-law enforcement, etc)
- ⊕ Warrant Sweeps
- ⊕ Walking Beats
- ⊕ Bicycle Patrols
- ⊕ School Resource Officer
- ⊕ DARE
- ⊕ Community Policing Activities
- ⊕ Community Trainings

Athol Police Department

Projected Increase in Staffing Staffing Allocation

Current - 18 Sworn Officers

- 1 Chief.
- 1 Lieut.
- 3 Sergeants
- 1 Detective (sex crimes)
- 1 Court / Evidence Officer.
- 11 Patrol Officers (1 officer part time narcotics)

1 Additional Officer - 19 Sworn Officers

- 1 Chief
- 1 Lieut.
- 3 Sergeants
- 2 Detective (1 sex crimes / 1 narcotics) *
- 1 Court / Evidence Officer.
- 11 Patrol Officers

* *Adds a full time narcotics detective to the department which is sorely needed and increases the number of officers on patrol by removing the part time narcotics officer in favor of the full time narcotics detective.*

2 Additional Officers- 20 Sworn Officers

- 1 Chief
- 1 Lieut.
- 3 Sergeants
- 2 Detectives (1 sex crimes / 1 narcotics)
- 1 Court / Evidence Officers
- 12 Patrol Officers (1 officers part time school resource) *

* *Provides some resources to the schools who have been requesting the reinstatement of the school resource officer position for years. Add additional resource to patrol increasing the number officers on shift and minimally reducing overtime costs to back fill vacations / sick / etc.*

3 Additional Officers - 21 Sworn Officers

- 1 Chief
- 1 Lieut.
- 3 Sergeants
- 2 Detectives (1 sex crimes / 1 narcotics)
- 1 Court / Evidence Officer
- 1 School Resource Officer *
- 12 Patrol Officers

* *Doubles the resources provided to the schools while increasing staffing to the patrol function.*

*** Increasing staffing levels to the patrol function provides for some or all of the following:**

1. Potential cost savings in overtime for the reduced backfilling for vacation / sick /etc.
2. Increased opportunities for specialized patrols (i.e. walking beats, bike patrols, directed patrols, etc.)
3. Improved investigative efforts. With more officers on shift there will be more time to devote to investigations, possibly resulting in increased clearance rates.
4. Potential for increased proactive enforcement of motor vehicle laws and town by-laws.
5. More times to spend on issues that may seem less important (broken windows theory).
6. Increasing in community contact ("community policing" efforts).