

Village of Paw Paw

Larry Nielsen, Village Manager
111 East Michigan Avenue, PO Box 179; Paw Paw, MI 49079
Phone: 269-657-3148 // Fax: 269-657-7544
Website: <http://www.pawpaw.net> // Email: l.nielsen@pawpaw.net

“Notes From Larry”

FROM: Larry Nielsen, Village Manager

Date: August 11, 2009

Regarding the Police Department Operational review. At the last Village Council meeting, the Village Council directed me to begin implementing some recommendations made in the police operations study. This is an issue wrought with emotion. It is an issue that affects personnel and their families. This is not a personal issue, but it is a budget issue. The vote was 6-1. The one explained his vote by commenting that while this is something that must be done, he didn't want to put the burden to act on just me as Village Manager. Managers often get portrayed as unfriendly to police. That may be because generally police departments are the largest expense a community has and managers always look to get the best bang for the taxpayers buck. (The Village's police department budget is \$789,994 this year). My concern is balancing the long term financial health of the Village with providing quality services to residents and businesses in the Village. Nothing more, nothing less.

The study wasn't an axe to grind. It wasn't to say the department and its employees are doing a bad job. Rather, it was done to get expert recommendations on ways to operate smartly and save money without impacting services. It did that. When recommendations are made to save as much as \$158,000, over some time, and still have a 'negligible impact on patrol and complaint services,' we must look at it. It is not personal, it's a budget matter. '

It is important since revenues are declining, the Village's savings is dwindling away, our current fiscal year is in the 'red' (deficit), the state's dismal economic outlook indicates we are looking at more cuts in our revenue, and we need to balance our budget in the coming years. State Shared Revenue, almost 20% of our budget is being reduced. We used to get about \$330,000 a year. An executive order earlier this year cut us about \$24,000 (on top of our \$78,000 deficit). And, more cuts are expected. Since Michigan is hurting big time some ideas being kicked around in Lansing say communities will take further and bigger cuts in revenue sharing. Those discussions say up to half may be cut. For Paw Paw that means we could lose up to \$165,000 dollars in this year and next.

We started this fiscal year budget looking at a \$500,000+ deficit in the general fund budget – the budget that funds 100% of the police department. We kept staffing in the Police department, while reducing staff elsewhere. We made a bunch of cuts and implemented some accounting changes to get close to a balanced budget. Every other department has been cut; DPS is down 5 employees from its recent heyday. We look at cuts large and small all the time.

When we were done with the cuts, we started this fiscal year with a 78,000 dollar debt in the General Fund. We have to have a balanced budget, so we took money from the 'fund balance' - the savings account built up over the past 150 years. Our savings are draining away and in a couple of years, without any further cuts, the Village will be out of money. This is no different than your household budget. No one can continue to take money out of their savings to make ends meet. At some point there isn't any money in savings to take.

We spend 37 cents of every general fund dollar on the police department. This year we budgeted \$789,994 for the police department. We spend \$259.24 for every man, woman and child in the village on the police department.

Of the 16 communities in the study only three communities had higher per capita costs. Only Clare, Chelsea and Milan spend more. In fact, the average per capita for all 16 departments is \$196.29 almost \$63 less per person than the Village. What do they do different to keep their costs under control? The study makes some recommendations.

Most everyone works at a place that has less people today than before. If you don't know that first hand, I'm sure you've read or heard about it – most are doing more with less. No department of government is immune from this reality. Even so, some argue that any reduction means we'll have fewer officers than we had before. Yet, this isn't about the raw number of officers on the department now compared to the raw number who served in years past. It's about how they are assigned, how they are trained, and what technology they use.

The report indicates some departments control their costs by using more part-time officers for road patrol and complaint work and having officers do their own reports and thus needing less support staff.

Some argue if the officers do their own reports they'll spend less time on road patrol. The report points out that, as a group, the 16 other departments are on the road more than our officers – as measured by annual miles driven. We drive 63,151 miles a year and the average of the other departments is 73,215 miles per year. Even those departments whose officers do their own reports average more miles driven (74,000+) in a year than our department.

For those departments that use part-time officers for patrol and complaint work, per capita costs – on an average – are less than what we spend. Some argued that can't be economical and cited Lowell, Corruna and Sparta who all use part-time officers supposedly as much as 4,000 to 8,000 hours a year. Yet, their per capita spending for their departments is less than ours. Throw in Chelsea, another they cited and which is one of three that spend more per capita than Paw Paw, and average them together and you find they spend 194.46 per person. We spend \$259.24 per person; \$67.78 per person more than those four.

The study also indicates we have 2.7 full time officers per 1,000 population while the average of the 16 communities is 1.7. This may indicate they do something different than we do. It may mean we are overrun with crime.

According to the report, we have 3 command officers when the average of the other 16 departments is 2. The study further indicates we generally schedule our command officers at non-peak times. Two are scheduled during the day being off at 3 pm and the other is scheduled in the afternoon & early evening. All three work M-F schedules. None work after 9 on Friday. None work on Friday night, Saturday, Saturday night, or any time on Sunday.

In the end, if we implement recommendation smartly and correctly the community will not notice a difference. We have excellent officers. Everyone is professional. Whatever the changes, I am certain each will continue to give 100%. They care about their careers and the community in which they work.

It's the economy and the budget situation that dictate we get smarter and try different approaches in protecting the Village. The complete report is online at pawpaw.net. Click on Administration, then click on the Rehmann Robson Police Operations Study heading.

Until Next time, I'm Larry Nielsen.