

# A Proposal to Add a Police Officer

At first blush, the idea of adding a police officer may seem counter-intuitive. Canton's population has not grown since 2011 and our town doesn't appear to be a hotbed of crime. So what's driving this proposal? The following questions and answers should explain why the Town is asking for a new police officer:

## ***Why does Canton need an additional police officer?***

While Canton's population has remained constant since 2011, calls for police service have increased by 51% (10,759 police calls in 2011; 16,285 police calls in 2020). The increase in calls aligns with an increase number of activities in town, a broader scope of police responsibilities and greater public expectations for police service.

Here are the details:

Town Activity - The bike trail, Shops, farmers market, river tubing and special events in Collinsville are bringing a lot more visitors to Canton than we saw in 2011. With the increase in visitors, Canton police have seen an increase in car, bicycle, boat, trail and pedestrian traffic. With the increase in traffic there has been a corresponding increase in accidents, thefts, medical emergencies and rescues in remote areas. Police officers are usually the first to respond to these situations.

Responsibilities – Policing today encompasses far more than traffic stops and accident response. Cybercrime, domestic abuse, financial fraud, hate crimes, narcotics sales and sexual assault are some of the cases that Canton police address. These serious crimes require officers to collect data and conduct interviews to determine probable cause and, if necessary, prepare warrants for search and/or arrest.

River and trail rescues have become more frequent, involving patrol officers on bicycles and FAA certified officers to pilot a police drone to speed access to remote areas. Canton police have used these devices for river emergencies, fatal accident investigations, search warrant operations and school safety exercises.

Several neighborhoods want solutions to speeding, erratic operation, cell-phone use and other violations on town roads. Addressing these concerns involves a team effort by the police and the neighborhood to collect and analyze data, implement an enforcement plan, assess its effectiveness and develop next steps.

Canton police perform administrative processes and background checks for pistol permits applicants, solicitors and school staff. Officers participate in emergency management planning/response, school safety meetings, Code Red Drills, communication with residents and safety training for school and town staff.

Beyond Canton, our police department is part of the Capitol Region Emergency Blue Plan and a member of the North Central Municipal Compact, a nine town alliance that runs the North Central Emergency Service Team, Hostage Rescue Unit and Accident Reconstruction Squad.

The combination of these responsibilities has made policing in 2021 very different than it was in 2011. There is no sign that these responsibilities will be reduced in the years ahead.

Greater Expectations - Today's public expects more from its police officers than it did in 2011. These expectations were heightened when frightening videos of police malpractice emerged from communities across the country. The push for greater sensitivity in policing and de-escalation of tense situations became the basis for new legislation. Connecticut's police accountability law establishes new mandates for police policies, practices, personnel testing and department accreditation. The number and extent of changes to police practice have made training - already a major focus in the department - an even greater focus. The Town expects this heightened level of training to continue for the foreseeable future.

### ***Canton's Staffing Shortfall***

In 2001, the Town authorized 13 police officers for patrol staffing: 4 sergeants, 8 patrol officers, and one detective. This authorization has not changed. Instead, the Canton Police department has found ways to deliver quality police service, even as the number and complexity of calls increased, without additions to staff. This spring, several factors combined to render this strategy more difficult to accomplish:

- Retirement & Recruitment - Several Canton Police officers are at or nearing the age of retirement. This fact came into sharp focus when one officer went on military leave and the detective announced his retirement this spring. An assessment of overall staffing uncovered more troubling trends: statewide, an increasing number of officers are leaving the profession and fewer individuals are seeking law enforcement as a career. Local police leadership sees this pressure as an impediment to retaining current staff and attracting new officers.
- Minimum Staffing - Maintaining a minimum level of staff 24/7 has become a major issue in the Canton Police Department. For some time, the department has seen major police efforts, such as high visibility community policing, school safety/education programs and narcotics investigations, fall to the wayside because of the volume of emergency response calls.

Making the situation more difficult, police are now required to deploy two-officers from start to resolution of certain calls. When a two officer call is received, additional calls for service will be delayed. Over time, this has reduced the extent and quality of investigative efforts, limited our ability to respond to requests for mutual aid, makes it more difficult to implement new programs and hinders officers from following-up on past cases.

To fill service gaps, Canton Police have resorted to overtime. Of course there are consequences for using overtime to cover service gaps over a long period of time: fatigue, absenteeism, impaired judgment and low morale.

- Training - After the Connecticut Legislature passed the police accountability bill last summer, state administrative staff adapted regulations to meet the new mandates. Complying with the regulations requires a marked increase in training, which has a profound effect on daily staffing. Officers in training are not available to respond to police calls, putting pressure on other officers to cover the trainees' shifts. Large departments have more personnel to fill shifts for officers taking classes than lean departments, such as Canton, that have a smaller pool of officers.

***What will another officer cost?***

In accordance with the Town’s current contract with the police union, the salary, background check, training, uniforms and equipment for a new police officer would be \$91,016. These costs are listed below:

Base Salary (assumes a new recruit)	\$67,350
FICA (7.5%)	5,051
Police Academy Training	2,000
Polygraph Exam	250
Psychological Exam	375
Physical/Medical Exam	1,290
Uniforms	1,000
Service weapon and ammunition	900
Anticipated overtime for field training	4,800
Vehicle costs/fuel	3,000
Patrol overtime (average)	5,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$91,016</b>

The current request is for \$46,294 or approximately half of the figure above since costs will not be incurred until the second half of the current fiscal year. On-going costs are estimated to be \$80,301

***Why wasn't the additional officer included in the 2021-22 Town budget?***

The 2021-22 Town budget was developed in December 2020 and January 2021. At that time, it was assumed that the pandemic would not extend beyond the summer, the axe factory would not be developed, and new mandates arising from police accountability legislation would not significantly strain staffing in the police department.

The addition of a police officer was one of nearly \$4 million in requests for the 2021-22 Town budget. Precious few of these requests made it to the final Town budget approved on May 12. Based on the assumptions above, the Board of Selectmen determined that the new police officer was not an urgent need at the time. These assumptions need to be readdressed.'

Development

In the fall of 2020, it looked as if the commercial construction boom in Canton was largely complete. Aldi’s had been built, 5 Cherry Brook was underway, 9-15 Albany Turnpike was in trouble, and the axe factory was under contract to a developer who was having difficulty attracting financial resources to move forward. By late spring 2021, the development picture had changed dramatically.

Today, the axe factory is under contract to an experienced developer with a workable plan and the financial resources to see it through to completion. Businesses that will have to relocate from the axe factory during redevelopment are now considering properties throughout town, which could transform

them as well. Additional development is expected in Canton Village where Mikado changed hands and is about to be renovated.

While these developments drive economic activity, they also increase calls for police services. There was no way to know that any of these projects were more than wish list items when the Board of Selectmen presented its budget request on March 8, 2021.

### Staffing Pressures

The retirement of the detective shortly after another officer went on military leave uncovered more troubling trends at the Canton Police Department:

- An increasing number of officers are leaving the profession and fewer individuals are seeking law enforcement as a career. This creates a more competitive environment for police officers, making it difficult to attract and retain personnel.
- Final rules that implement police accountability legislation continue to evolve and are more demanding of staff time than previously thought. Meeting these mandates will impact daily staffing due to more extensive training and more requests for coverage while officers are in training.
- Canton tries to hire a combination of experienced officers and new recruits. Both present challenges in that experienced officers are in high demand while new recruits take a year or more to find, get trained at the state academy and then acclimated to Canton.

The request for a new police officer is an attempt to start the recruitment process now in anticipation of the new officer arriving on duty more than a year from now.

### ***What is the timing for the new officer?***

As mentioned above, the new officer would be a new recruit. Selecting the candidate, running him or her through the required background check and psychological examination, then training at the police academy and finally acclimating to Canton's Police Department is expected to take a year. Given the tight market for police personnel, the town believes it is in our long term interest to start this process now.

The Town's plan is to schedule the new officer into the evening shift to cover more active days for calls which are Wednesday through Sunday.