**Why Consider a Regional Police Agreement?**

*August 3, 2022*

In February, Dalton’s Town Manager submitted a grant proposal to the state’s Community Compact program to explore regionalizing the police forces of Dalton and Hinsdale.

Why?

Several years ago, the state legislature decided on a major reform of police standards and training. The “Police Reform Act” required that all police officers receive the same training—full-time Police Academy work, with the elimination of the less demanding Academy program for potential officers who had little or no desire to be full-time police.

Police officers without this training cannot be certified, and so would not be able to exercise police powers. The program providing this training to part-time officers—the “Bridge Academy”—will end in FY 2024, and towns will no longer be able to use officers trained only through the part-time program.

This has meant that small towns need to prepare for paying officers who have had full-time training, whether or not they are full time, and need to provide compensation sufficient for them not to leave for better-paying positions.

In Hinsdale, Chief Rathbun saw what this would mean for that small town—the need to hire either full-time police at competitive wages, or part-time police who might leave at any time. She began a conversation with Dalton’s Chief Strout regarding possible collaboration, including the possibility of consolidating the two departments. Since this is a complex and partly political problem, hiring a third-party consultant seemed advisable, and Dalton Town Manager Tom Hutcheson sought grant funds to pay for a comprehensive study.

The proposal requested money for a staffing analysis; an inventory and analysis of comparable agreements; a series of meetings with departments and staff; community meetings; meetings with Select Boards; and a final report with options and recommendations.

When the results are available, both towns will be able to decide whether they want to accept any of the options presented. The towns could take one or more years to make a final decision, but the study will have identified factors involved, so everyone will have the necessary information.

If towns would like more immediate action, the study will be ready by the end of December, 2022, in time for FY 2024 budget deliberations.