



Gorham Police Department Organizational Assessment

March 11, 2015

Executive Summary

With the retirement of Chief Shepard, the Town Manager wanted an objective understanding the current and future issues and needs of the department, the challenges a new chief will face, and a description of the ideal next chief, which the Manager will use in the recruitment process.

Over a period of two weeks, Dacri & Associates interviewed 42 Gorham staff, residents and Councilors in order to get an objective overview of the Police Department. Specifically, we met all members of the Police Department, the Fire Chief, School Superintendent, High School Principal, Public Works Director, three residents, the Director of the Cumberland County Dispatch center, two members of the Family Crisis Center, and all Town Councilors.

The overall perception of the Police Department was split. Although the internal respondents highlighted significant issues with morale and leadership, external respondents were predominately positive, with the exception of one external agency that expressed concerns regarding domestic violence issues within the department and the process of investigating these claims.

While there was not a universal consensus among those interviewed, we were able to conclude the following:

- Gorham is a rapidly growing bedroom community of Portland
- Nearly all interviewed enjoyed living and/or working in Gorham
- Gorham was described as both an ideal place to live and work
- Growth has brought significant challenges to the town, stressing infrastructure and budgets
 - The community is becoming more diverse; the university brings younger people to town; as a bedroom community families and retirees are attracted to Gorham; its older population poses challenges for the police
 - Traffic continues to increase, putting strains on both police and rescue
 - The increased demand for services must be balanced by fiscal issues
 - Like most growing communities, crime has increased (drugs, domestic violence, cyber crime, burglary, etc.)

- The Police Department is viewed positively in the community; people feel safe
- Other town departments and County Dispatch have excellent working relations with Police
- The Police Department lacks clear, written strategic direction
- No mission statement or departmental values are evident
- Expectations and accountability standards for staff are not in place
- Performance standards have not been developed for each employee and performance appraisals are not being done
- Internally, the Police staff is generally engaged, but morale is poor
- With the retirement of Chief Shepard and the naming of Lt. Sanborn as Acting Chief, the department has been divided over whether the recruitment process should be open to external candidates or whether to hire Lt. Sanborn
- While no formal headcount was taken by Dacri & Associates, most Police Department staff interviewed believe the town should look to the outside for their next chief
- Most staff agree that the morale issues in the department began before Sanborn was named Acting Chief; many noted, however, that Sanborn has not made any improvements
- Lt. Sanborn has a very good professional reputation with residents and department heads
- The staff, County Dispatch Director and some of the Councilors believe the department is operating with insufficient staff; no one suggested that staffing has put any officer or members of the community at risk
- Many in the staff believe there has been insufficient training and equipment beyond the minimum required
- No formal succession plan is in place; Lt. Sanborn was “designated” as the likely successor to the Chief, but no formal development plan was in place to prepare him or any other employees for succession
- Supervisors lack formal training in management
- All agreed that the new facility will be a major improvement and morale builder

Based on these findings, we recommend:

1. Develop a process to communicate the results of this study. Staff, Councilors, department heads and residents wanted to know the results and what the Town Manager plans to do with this study.
2. Further analysis of the findings should follow. Conduct focus groups with staff to get additional objective data around employee responses, clarification to their meanings and help in finding the root causes to any problems identified. Develop an action plan.
3. Develop a formal candidate profile of the ideal new chief.
4. Formalize a candidate interview process. A number of inquiries were made as to how this would be structured.

5. Conduct an open search process for your next chief. Invite Lt. Sanborn to become a candidate.
6. Develop an action plan to immediately address the issues of staffing levels, morale, training, equipment and the K-9.
7. Provide staff with ongoing training in addressing alcohol and drug abuse; mental health issues, including suicide prevention; elderly issues; and student/school concerns.
8. Determine why few qualified women and minorities do not apply for open positions in the department.
9. Develop a formal strategic plan for the department that is consistent with the needs of the town.
10. Develop a formal performance management program for the department. Include a succession planning process and mentoring program.
11. Develop a communication program to update staff. Consider different methodologies to regularly update the community. Better utilize social media.
12. Procedures should be developed to ensure that internal investigations are properly handled, objective and transparent.

Feedback from Individual and Group Interviews

Outlined below is the feedback I received during the interviews. I have tried to capture the comments made and in some cases provided direct quotes.

View of Gorham

Council Feedback

- Used to be a farm community and but is now experiencing rapid growth
- 13th biggest community in state (same as Waterville)
- Bedroom community
- Trying to balance cost with services
- Well run and respected police department
- Hear few complaints about the Police Department
- Property taxes are reasonable
- Need to balance needs of young and older residents
- Great place to live

Resident Feedback

- Need to manage growth
- Excellent schools
- Safe
- Growing community

View of Police Department

Acting Police Chief's Feedback

- Staff is very intelligent
- Talented officers
- Made some good hires
- Some long term staff need motivation
- Need additional staff in patrol, special enforcement team and community relations program
- Department does not reflect community (23 officers with only one female and one minority)
- Difficult to address paperwork with only a Chief and one Lt.
- Need a deputy chief
- Good relationship with union

Police Department Feedback

- Good department and good team
- Quality supervisors
- Good reputation amongst other police departments
- Staff treats residents well and with respect
- Employees are engaged and like working for the Gorham Police Department
- Easy to come to work
- Need to tap into individual's interest and talents

- Pay, retirement and time off are good
- Individuals are attracted to department and ultimately stay due to excellent pay
- Professional staff
- Response time is good
- Need a systematic approach to things
- Internal investigations lack transparency
- Nepotism exists
- Department lacks leadership
- Frustrated by the “do more with nothing” mentality
- Need a great chief to pull department together
- Reactionary
- Department lacks accountability, communications and camaraderie
- Stagnant
- Front end of building can be a safety concern
- Facility falling down, not clean; driveway not plowed well in winter
- Frustrating
- Contentious
- Lacks focus
- Always fighting for resources
- Favoritism exists
- Inconsistent application of rules

Council Feedback

- The Police Department has lots of issues without enough time and staff
- DARE program well received
- Police have a good reputation in town
- Handle traffic and parking issues well
- Understaffed by 4 according to Cumberland County standards (could use a detective, 2 patrol officers and a community relations officer)
- Staff is promotable
- Council has different perspectives on Police Department morale (some think good, others think staff divided)

Resident Feedback

- Feel safe
- Positive attitude about police department

Cumberland County Dispatch

- Very well run department
- Good staff
- Involved in the community (Community Care program; Yellow Dot; vehicle lock out)
- High traffic enforcement
- Police Department willing to share resources (Blood techs)
- Offer intox to others agencies
- Created a foundation for training

Police Department's Relations With Other Departments

Fire

- Positive working relationship

- Some of the police are members of the fire department and some of the fire staff are reserve police officers which enhances the working relationship
- The leadership works hard to work together on joint projects

School

- Strong partnership with police
- Teachers and admin have respect and trust in the Police Department
- Kids supportive of police
- The police have a subtle visibility (there when you need them)
- Do a lot of training with police
- SRO for 6th-12th grade is stretched
- School police are the school's allies

Public Works

- Good relationship with police

Cumberland County Dispatch

- Works well with department
- Transition to County Dispatch went well because of Chief's support (some in police feel the transition has not gone well; department has lost controls and it has added work)

Traits of Ideal Next Police Chief

Town Department Heads Feedback

- Open minded
- Willing to look beyond the police department
- Views public safety as a whole
- Must be about serving the community and public
- Good communicator
- Public speaking before community groups
- High moral standards
- Secure in own skin
- Confident
- Competent
- Willing to partner
- Works well with others
- Articulate
- Loyal
- Someone who will stay with department for 10 years
- Good listener
- Supports values of families
- Sense of humor
- A cop's-cop
- Can see the big picture
- Sees beyond reactions
- Advocate for resources
- Moral compass
- Takes school issues seriously
- Respects students
- Passion for innovation
- Willing to try new things
- Supports staff
- Provides guidance
- Involves employees in decisions
- Recognizes employees
- Creates a department mission
- Mentors staff
- No ties to current employees
- Invests in people and facilities
- Addresses weak performers
- Advocate for staff
- Can work with the Council
- Effective communicator to community
- Politically astute on local issues

Council Feedback

- Calm force (not a politician)
- Strong leader
- Answers Council's questions or finds someone who can
- Receptive and available to public
- Problem solver
- Face of the police department
- Intelligent
- Well spoken
- Calm
- Handles difficult tasks with ease
- Someone like Chief Shepard
- Has a big department perspective
- Career oriented
- Fiscally responsible
- Balances law and order with constitutional liberties
- Integrates self into community
- Media savvy
- An out of the box thinker
- Charismatic
- Empowers and engages staff
- Psychologically sound

Resident Feedback

- Good administrator
- Reachable
- Connected to the community
- Attends council meetings
- Prefers that he/she lives in town
- Team player
- Can make unpopular decisions
- Can explain decisions
- Visible in town, in and out of uniform
- Maintains our small town feel
- Trust
- Listener
- Selfless leadership
- Unassuming
- Reserved
- Caring
- Acts in terms of "us"
- Confident
- Decisive
- Problem solver
- Collaborative
- Handles critical situations
- Good instincts

Police Feedback

- Leads by example
- Has integrity
- Willing to listen
- Open to different ideas
- Well organized
- Sets priorities
- Understands budgets
- Prepares for future
- Well spoken and trained
- Presence in the community
- Cares
- Motivator
- Brings people together
- Common goals
- Professional
- Accessible
- Listens
- Keeps on top of his supervisors
- Advocate for department
- Values people
- Follows through to the finish
- Sets an example
- Fair and open minded
- Conducts ride-alongs with staff
- Understands the chain of command
- Supports officers
- Maintains transparency

- Can effectively use discipline
- Personable
- Engaging
- Utilizes team approach
- Holds people accountable
- Gets things done quickly
- Confident
- Has energy
- Does his homework
- Fights for department
- Interested in improving education of members
- Strong personality
- Deep thinker
- Business savvy
- Consults with staff about decisions

Traits To Avoid in Next Chief

Town Department Heads Feedback

- Egotistical
- Close minded
- Doesn't look beyond own department
- Arrogant
- Imbued with self-importance
- Background in a large, urban population
- Sees position as a stepping stone
- Focuses more on budgets than people
- Susceptible to political pressure
- Directive rather than collaborative
- Short sighted
- A good ole boy approach

Resident Feedback

- Comes from away and wants to initiate dramatic changes
- Wanting to spend a lot of dollars beyond town means
- Racist
- Has an attitude
- Big talker
- Someone who bulls ahead with no facts
- Makes knee jerk decisions
- Loves authority
- "My way or the highway"

Police Feedback

- Not open
- Doesn't listen
- Not a good fit
- Ignores morale
- Not approachable
- Stays in office all the time
- Not accessible
- Dictatorial
- Cocky

Council Feedback

- Looking for a retirement job
- Thinks he has all the answers
- Cocky
- Thinks he'll get everything he wants
- Doesn't get out into the community
- Doesn't understand the 5 districts
- Not willing to change with the town
- Tries to push his agenda without considering staff

Professional Experiences

Town Department Heads' Feedback

- Community policing
- Knowledge of communication centers and their functions
- Working relationships with schools

Council Feedback

- Worked with universities
- Worked with unions

Education/Experience

Town Department Heads' Feedback

- Degree in criminal justice
- Grad of police academy

Resident Feedback

- Degree (BA or AS)

Police Feedback

- BA
- Certifications
- Police academy
- Well rounded experience in patrol, specialties, detective and comes from a multifunctional police department
- Prior command experience

Council Feedback

- Mixed on need for degree or not
- Small and big town experience
- College town experience with resident facilities
- Understands growing community
- Grant writing

Immediate Challenges Facing New Chief

Town Deps' Feedback

- Budget not keeping up with the demands for services
- Town is the fastest growing community in Maine
- Building a new facility with the need to share resources
- Significant increase in crime and drugs
- Council that doesn't fully realize the extent of the issues (crime, drug overdoses, attempted suicides) facing the police
- Transition from a farm town to a bedroom community of Portland
- Divided town where people in the different sections of town do not understand the needs and impacts of the other sections
- Not creating a silo between Police Department, fire and schools
- Rising issues of mental health
- Need more police officers who can work with students

- Deal with school violence, preparing students & staff and conducting investigations replacing “Pooch” when he retires
- Dealing with multigenerational populations

County Dispatch Feedback

- Insufficient staffing to meet the needs of the town
- Need to add AVLs (vehicle locators), driver license locators, and in car document scanners

Council Feedback

- Fiscal issues
- Expansion of information regarding different crimes
- Growth
- Changing community
- Working with the university
- Traffic and growing crime
- Mental illness
- Infrastructure needs review
- Opening a new facility and operating while the facility is being built

Resident Feedback

- Must be comfortable with the university and the university community
- Dealing with the drugs and domestic violence
- Keep up with the complexities of policing
- Putting an SRO in every school

Police Feedback

- Fiscal issues
- Little Fall’s crime
- Rapid populating growth
- New facility
- Significant drug problem
- Need additional staff
- Rise in crime (domestic violence, OUI, burglary, drugs)
- Aging population
- Mental health issues
- Building bench strength within department

Priority of the New Chief

Town Department Head Feedback

- Building rapport and trust with the employees
- More outreach to community

Council Feedback

- Building a new facility
- Staffing issues
- Understanding the budget process
- Forging positive relations with Council

Police Feedback

- Improve morale
- Show leadership
- Better use of regional resources
- Training of staff beyond the minimum
- Get into new building
- Pay attention to night shift
- Hold staff accountable
- Address growing mental health issues

Department Morale

Police Department Feedback

- Mixed perspective on morale (some say good, most say poor)
- Relationship between admin and union is also mixed
- Department lacks common goals
- Minimal communication about the state of department business
- Little communications between shifts
- No performance appraisals or feedback on performance
- No fairness or consistency
- Minimal reaching out to the night shifts
- Department lacks consistency between shifts
- Lt has made little change since becoming Acting
- Problems in the department have existed for years
- Questions have been raised about the fairness and transparency of the internal investigation process
- Nepotism

Canine

- *School* would like to have the K-9 back with rising drug use and the threat of school violence; hampered by loss of the dog for searches and the inability to quickly access dog from the County
- *Police* would like to bring K-9 back
- *County Dispatch* believes need dog as County is not always able to provide a dog to town on a timely basis
- *Council* is mixed on the dog (some want its return, others concerned about the cost)