

From the Office of the Sheriff:

The topic of my last column dealt with dispatch consolidation. The word consolidation is becoming a popular term. It is becoming necessary for organizations to look at consolidating as a way to continue to provide affordable services while resources are constrained. I think in the next 3-5 years, citizens will see law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and other service departments consolidate.

An alternative to consolidation has been contracting. Law enforcement has been at the forefront, and has been contracting for years. Simply stated, contracting is a mechanism that allows towns, villages, and counties to contract with another municipality to provide law enforcement services for their citizens. This can provide a significant costs savings to the tax payer. Generally, contracting can also provide a better educated, better trained, and properly managed law enforcement officer to the contracting municipality.

Dodge County has 21 law enforcement agencies; this is significant and creates challenges. Several are part-time which creates even more challenges. Twenty-one agencies means 21 Chiefs, 21 different policy and procedure manuals, 21 various information management systems, 21 capital expense budgets, and 21 various standards on how business is conducted. Many of these part-time agencies are very active and run very professionally, others may not be. It is very common for the Sheriff's Dept. to receive a phone call from an upset crime victim who wants to know the status of their case only to find out we have no knowledge it was ever reported. More than likely the call was received by the part-time agency. With the limited hours they work, follow-up on criminal cases is difficult. Often this type of follow-up needs to be more immediate.

One may ask why there is a need for townships and villages to have their own law enforcement agency or an enhanced level of services? It is a matter of providing the necessary protection of people and property. The Sheriff's Dept. can only do so much with the resources we have. This requires these smaller municipalities to have their own agency so the necessary services can be provided. Many of these villages are now looking at the costs associated with having their own. They are seeking an alternative means to providing enhanced services without the hassle of buying squads, carrying insurance, maintaining offices, or just the overall management of the department. The answer is in contracting.

This is not new to Dodge County. Currently the Townships of Rubicon and Ashippun contract with the Village of Neosho for law enforcement services. It is working out very well. Recently the county board approved the Sheriff's Dept. contracting with the Township of Hustisford. It is a start of what I hope continues, until we can par the county down to around 15 law enforcement agencies.

The costs savings come from eliminating the manning and equipping of your own force as well as all the necessary upgrades necessary to remain ahead of the game. Consolidating two small jurisdictions into one will eliminate many of the expensive redundancies. For the Sheriff's Department, contracting is a means of generating revenues in an effort to increase our force to the level that it should be and providing a more uniform law enforcement service county-wide. As budgets get tighter and citizens require a higher level of service, consolidation will become more and more popular. Thanks for listening, tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us.