

From the Office of the Sheriff: “We must start making the hard choices”

Regardless of which side of the current budget debate you are on, the bottom line is government, law enforcement specifically, must change its business model. We can no longer afford to do things because “it has always been done like that!” Our challenge is many people in positions of authority do not want to initiate the conversation required to generate fiscal change for fear of alienating themselves from others. Leaders lead by making tough choices, not necessarily the popular choices. Leaders must act now so 2012 budgets reflect a responsive yet lean level of services. We can do this in a variety of ways.

What can be done to control costs, share resources, and reduce expenditures while maintaining essential services? I would like to start the conversation of contracting - “to shrink by drawing together”. For years I have been a strong proponent of one agency contracting through another, eliminating one. The most successful example of this in Dodge County is the Township of Emmet/Lebanon Police Department. Both townships had their own part-time law enforcement agency, double overhead, two squads, two chiefs ...you get the picture. These townships recognized the savings and ease in contracting, and the Township of Lebanon contracted with the Township of Emmet for enhanced law enforcement services. Could the Township of Beaver Dam contract with the City of Beaver Dam? Brownsville/Lomira? Mayville/Theresa? These changes save money as well as generate revenue to others, a win-win if done right.

We can also consolidate, “unite into one”. The same scenario worked in Neosho, Rubicon, and Ashippun. Three municipalities who put their heads together and consolidated into one law enforcement agency saving overhead and tax dollars. There are several municipalities who could easily consolidate services or contract with a neighboring municipality, but the conversations rarely gain traction. Could Reeseville PD join into one with Lowell PD or the City of Fox Lake and the Township of Fox Lake? I will go out on a limb and say that 40 joint patrol hours shared within two communities is better than 20 hours in each as an individual agency. We can do this and provide a higher level of service to the community.

We have several agencies in Dodge County who are well suited for contracting or consolidation; we must start the conversation. How about sharing management teams? Does every small community need a Police Chief or can two share one, saving each community tens of thousands of dollars? The fewer law enforcement agencies you have the more continuity you will have in law enforcement operations. Today we have 21 law enforcement agencies in the county and none have the ability to share access with their records information/management system, which is the next step – a countywide central records management system. I have a vision for this in 2013, but we must look at consolidation and contracting first. Twenty-one different sets of policies and procedures, 21 variations of management, 21 different ways of doing business – CRAZY!!!

It’s time for the tough choices. Throughout the State of Wisconsin law enforcement has facilitated these conversations for years. Here in Dodge County there has been some success but we have a ways to go. We must start in earnest and not be swayed by a few nays or the fact that it will take some hard work. Saving money is hard work and as leaders of our communities, it is our charter to do the difficult work, make the tough decisions, and prepare our communities for tomorrow. Thanks for listening tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us.