

COMMISSIONERS OF RIDGELY
MARCH 19, 2025
FY26 LAW ENFORCEMENT BUDGET WORKSHOP



The Commissioners of Ridgely met on the above date at 6:00 pm in the town hall for a FY26 Law Enforcement Budget Workshop. The following were in attendance: President John Buckle, Commissioner John Hurley, Commissioner Brad Sears, Director of Operations David Crist, Clerk-Treasurer Stephanie Berkey, Financial Assistant Gerald Sutton, Kelly Buckle, Nancy Sears, George Paugh, Debbie Bowden, Janet Phillips, Greg & Jennifer Nesselroad, Tyler Terry, Brenda Walls, Hannah Freeman, Barbie Utz, Chad Leister, Christine Eckrich, Anna Mansfield, Sue Cherry, Konner Metz, Heather Amador, Robin Martin, Norma Pinkney, Joanne Sisco, Ann Rossi-Gill, Clinton Gill, Rev Buddy Dunn, Lt. Paul.

Rev. Buddy Dunn of Faith Fellowship Church led the invocation.

President Buckle opened the meeting with the pledge of allegiance. He turned the meeting over to Commissioner Sears, who explained how the workshop would work, and the goal was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the FY26 law enforcement budget and its implications.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

Robin Martin said that she did not want to rehash the past and is thinking towards the future. She is concerned that we are not getting the service we are paying for and wants to know if that is being evaluated. She believes an open-panel discussion would be beneficial and wants the town to consider an ethics commission.

Christine Eckrich said that there has been a Ridgely police department since 1937. We went into the MOU with the county without any input from the residents and now we are double paying for service. If we are planning not to have a Ridgely police department, the money for the MOU should be used for infrastructure or a rainy-day fund used to bring more businesses into town.

Heather Amador asked the commissioners to refrain from a decision until after the election, consider the RPD a ballot issue, and ensure the 30-day cancellation stay in the current contract.

Anna Mansfield read the attached statement.

Commissioner Sears read the attached statements from Lokia Pierce, Clinton Gill, and Andy Hrobar.

REVIEW OF SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT FY 26 LAW ENFORCEMENT BUDGET

Commissioner Sears said the town has 3 options: forego a local law enforcement presence, continue with the Caroline County Sheriff's Office, or reestablish the Ridgely Police Department. Lt Paul reviewed the FY26 Sheriff's Office budget. Highlights include salary increases, operational expenses decrease, vehicle costs. Full FY26 budget of \$493,415 is attached.

REVIEW OF ESTIMATED RIDGELY POLICE DEPARTMENT BUDGET

Commissioner Sears reviewed the estimated budget for reestablishing the Ridgely Police Department, including salaries for five officers, overtime, and other operational expenses. He explained the costs associated with hiring a chief, lieutenant, and three officers, emphasizing the need for experienced personnel to avoid past issues. He discussed operational expenses such as uniforms, equipment, vehicle maintenance, and insurance, comparing them to previous budgets and the capital expenses required for reestablishing the department, including the purchase and upfitting of vehicles.

Comparison with Other Towns: Commissioner Sears compared the estimated budget for reestablishing the Ridgely Police Department with the budgets of other local towns with police departments from Denton, Greensboro, Federalsburg, and Centreville, highlighting differences in costs and staffing levels.

Cost Per Officer: Commissioner Sears calculated the average cost per officer for Ridgely and compared it to other towns, noting that Ridgely's estimated cost was within a reasonable range.

REVIEW OF LAW ENFORCEMENT BUDGET TAX IMPLICATIONS

Gerald Sutton discussed the likely tax implications of the various budget scenarios for reestablishing the Ridgely Police Department, explaining that reestablishing the Ridgely Police Department would require a significant increase in the property tax rate to cover the additional costs.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Anna Mansfield asked how we know the \$10,000 fuel budget for the Sheriff is only being spent in Ridgely. Do they use it when they do overtime in other towns. Commissioner Sears said that Sheriff Donny Baker had said that it is only for Ridgely and is less, because they are not covering the whole county.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Stephanie Berkey, CMC
Clerk-Treasurer