



# CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS

*By Chief Stan Bell and Earla J. Haggerty*

There are times when silence is the best answer to illogical or irrational accusations and opinions, but this is not one of those times. The recent attack on the quality and credibility of the Clinton Police Department (CPD) is baseless and without merit. In fact, to let the accusations stand without protest jeopardizes public safety and law enforcement protection for all the citizens of Clinton. As town manager I must speak against that which would hinder safety, growth and prosperity for our community and diminish the investment citizens have already made in the professionalism of the Clinton Police Department. Chief Bell and I offer below irrefutable evidence taken directly from Clinton's 2018 law enforcement incident log. The Clinton Police Department is an integral part of the fabric of our community and to malign the character of this department and the integrity of the officers that protect and serve this community is unconscionable in the face of the evidence provided below.

It is hard to form an accurate understanding of the level of crime that might be happening in the Town of Clinton if you have not seen evidence that it actually exists. And, because effective policing methods are not always highly visible it's easy to conclude there is very little criminal activity in our town. Thus, over time we are lulled into a false sense of community security. In fact, some would have you believe that Clinton is so quiet and pristine as to not even need a police presence. However, before you add your name to a petition to eliminate the Clinton Police Department perhaps you should give careful consideration to the policing statistics that three full-time and four part-time officers handled during 2018. A factual review of the 9,716 incidents recorded in the incident log bears ample evidence this community should appreciate a local law enforcement presence dedicated to protecting business, homes and families.

The first thing people think about when you mention a police department is speeding tickets or motor vehicle violations - only 1,716 or 20% of the calls were for motor vehicle violations and 87% of those stops were given warnings instead of citations, which means 1,493 individuals did NOT get a citation - leaving only 224 citations written. Motor vehicle incidents are not usually criminal in nature unless they reveal drug or alcohol related offenses of which there were - 42. Keeping our roadways safe and free from drunk drivers is taken seriously and is a critical part of community policing. Of the 92 accidents with property damage or personal injury it is also good to know that someone is coming to help in a short response time—not from two counties away.

Our officers are often the first responders on scene in a medical call because it takes Fire & Rescue a few more minutes to respond. Several times during 2018 Clinton police officers were first on the scene and initiated CPR until Fire & Rescue arrived providing critical minutes of care. Incidentally, in 2018 Fire & Rescue reported 450 in-town medical incidents which were supported with a police response 210 times. The reason the police department is so important at these calls is not only traffic control and scene support, but the quickest response time is critical when life is hanging in the balance. If the uninformed critics had their way the cost would be calculated in lives not dollars.

We all hear the horrific stories on local news channels about violent crimes against women and children in other communities, not thinking it could be happening in Clinton as well. There were 98 incidents of domestic violence and abuse, assault, aggravated assault, threatening, family disturbances last year. Add to these cases another 11 incidents of sexual misconduct or abuse of a child or an adult - two of these incidents rose to the level of adult rape. While unrelated to the incidents mentioned above it is worth noting that public record reveals there are 9 registered sex offenders currently living in Clinton which CPD monitor according to the law.

An officer's oath to serve and protect is evidenced by the number of incidents involving the protection of property, both real estate and personal which, in Clinton were threatened by 114 incidents of theft, burglary, breaking and entering, larceny, fraud & forgery, bad checks, extortion, shoplifting, criminal trespass, criminal mischief and, in one case arson. It should be noted, however, that aside from the criminal cases mentioned above officers protected real estate property by making 28 residential house checks on vacationing residents at their request and as a matter of routine 11 property checks for businesses were performed every day. Clinton business owners have expressed their gratitude for the perimeter checks and the constant surveillance of business properties.

There are many more statistics to be shared supporting the benefit of having a local police presence that will quickly come to our aid when we call. Sometimes it's not about crime but assistance, like 911 calls for motorist assistance, assisting in the search for 8 missing persons, or making well-being checks on the elderly or mental health cases. Petitioners may favor coverage by the Maine State Police (MSP) but the truth is community policing policies of assisting motorists and well-being checks are all incidents the Maine State Police are not going to be available for and most of the above criminal activity mentioned will not have a short response time but rather will be serviced on a first come first served basis.

While we are mentioning MSP, the Morning Sentinel article on August 30<sup>th</sup> quoted a citizen saying "...there's state troopers in this town every day..." inferring Troopers provide law enforcement in Clinton – they do not. The fact is in the last several years the professional relationship between the two law enforcement agencies has greatly improved to a level of mutual respect and it should be understood that a Trooper's presence at the CPD does not indicate he is in Clinton to do Clinton PD's job. In fact, the CPD has become a trusted partner in area law enforcement and Troopers often visit CPD as a way-station – a quiet space to complete reports and make phone calls. It's a bonus that their cruisers also serve as a deterrent.

A great deal has been said by petitioners about the time CPD spends out of town, but they fail to mention the Board of Selectmen, the governing body of the town, have approved mutual aid agreements with area police departments in surrounding communities that obligates Clinton officers to respond to emergency requests for aid and assistance. The petitioners also fail to mention that the 400 sq. ft. space the CPD currently occupies does not allow for critical and mandated law enforcement procedures and Winslow and Fairfield PD's are generous enough to provide those services to Clinton at no charge. Clinton travels to Waterville for Court, Augusta for the District attorney's office, Jail, and all Lab testing services at the State Police Crime lab. Conducting business as a Police Department no longer means staying in Clinton and not crossing the town line.

This article bears witness to the residents of Clinton there is more than enough reason to support and appreciate the Clinton Police Department for its vigilant and professional service. The elimination of this department with it's up-close and personal policies would be a great detriment to the quality of life in the Town of Clinton.

## ***Clinton Police Department***

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\* Clinton Police Department created by the authority of the Clinton Town Charter—Section 4.01 (a)