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Sheriff proposes unorganized territories deputy

Posted by [Ben Hanstein](#) • November 15, 2016 •



Franklin County commissioners, from left to right: Commissioner Gary McGrane of Jay, Commissioner Clyde Barker of Strong and Commissioner Charlie Webster of Farmington.

FARMINGTON - The Franklin County commissioners will hold a public hearing on the proposed 2017-18 unorganized territories budget next month. Amidst the typically-flat budget will be a proposal to add a deputy position specifically assigned to the U.T.'s collection of plantations, townships and de-organized towns.

Sheriff Scott Nichols has proposed adding a deputy position that would be funded out of the U.T. budget. That deputy would spend his or her shift in the U.T. in a bid to reduce response times and create a more visible police presence. The additional position would cost \$100,000 in the first year, including the deputy's salary, benefits and cruiser, with that cost decreasing to roughly \$69,000 annually until the cruiser needed to be replaced.

The proposal would not directly increase the Franklin County budget, which funds the FCSO and its existing nine deputy positions. The U.T. budget is approved by commissioners and then the state's fiscal administrator, who presents the budget to the state Legislature. Budgeted services in the U.T., including fire protection, ambulance services and road work, is paid for by U.T. residents.

Nichols noted that a similar arrangement is utilized in Somerset County, allowing a deputy to patrol that county's U.T. "Anything we can do to help the people up there," Nichols said, "I'm all in."

The FCSO currently patrols the U.T. and northern part of the county on a bi-weekly basis, regularly exchanging patrol schedules with Maine State Police. A trooper patrols the southern part of the county while the FCSO is patrolling the northern section, and vice versa. Organized towns with a police force, such as Wilton, Jay or Farmington, are not regularly patrolled, although FCSO units do respond to calls when requested.

Nichols recorded 282 calls for service in the U.T. in the past year. Simply having an additional deputy on the road could be a deterrent, Nichols said, using a recent burglary at a Chesterville store as an example. The sheriff said that the suspects fled the store mid-break-in after a deputy passed by.

"One of the greatest things we can do for deterrence is have a presence," Lt. David Rackliffe said.

District Attorney Andrew Robinson spoke in favor of lowering response times in the context of domestic violence cases, where an emergency service call is oftentimes made as situations are escalating. Currently, Nichols estimated, it can take 20 to 25 minutes for deputies to respond to a call in the U.T., depending on patrol positioning.

Commissioners had varying reactions to the proposal. Commissioner Clyde Barker of Strong, a former deputy whose district includes most of the county's U.T., said he was in favor of the proposal.

Commissioner Gary McGrane of Jay said he wanted a greater FCSO presence in the southern part of the county, where there are more people, rather than the north, where there are fewer. He also said he was concerned about the request growing into additional positions and patrols over the next few years. McGrane suggested removing the request for the funding from the 2017-18 U.T. budget.

Commissioner Charlie Webster of Farmington said that he wanted to hear from U.T. residents. He said he was willing to leave the funding request in the budget, but would listen to U.T. residents concerns about the impact on their taxes or interested in an additional patrol. He recommended holding the public hearing on the U.T. budget somewhere more central to the northern part of the county, rather than Farmington.

The public hearing has been scheduled for Dec. 12 at the Stratton Community Center on Dec. 12 at 6 p.m. Meanwhile, Nichols and County Clerk Julie Magoon will meet with the U.T. fiscal administrator to discuss the issue.



Left to right is Register of Probate Joyce Morton, Terry Brann of Wilton, and Registrar Susan Black. Brann was elected as the District 1 Commissioner at last week's election and will be assuming those duties in January 2017.

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10 Responses »

1. *Townie*

November 15, 2016 • 1:26 pm

Welcome to the police state circa 2016.

2. *Concerned citizen*

November 16, 2016 • 4:32 am

Bad idea... we don't need more police in the UT s..we live here for a reason.. see ya in Stratton at the next meeting.. we like our taxes lower and the quiet way of living. Leave us alone

3. *Scott Taylor*

November 16, 2016 • 6:07 am

I agree with commissioner McGrane on this one, put the cops where the majority of the population is. A large percentage of the people who live in the UTs live there to get away from bigger municipalities and therefore bigger government. It was their choice to live/move there.

4. *Yeppers*

November 16, 2016 • 6:13 am

Living in a part of the UT, this is interesting to me. I would support an additional deputy, but wonder how effective a single vehicle covering such a widely spaced area could be. It isn't as if the assorted townships, plantations and de-organized towns are all connected or easily traversed. It seems possible that the response times will be worse if the department counts on the single UT deputy to handle things across the county. Also, adding a single deputy to theoretically cover the area would really only offer additional coverage for a short portion of the day- maybe a pass or two for each main road. It might be wiser to simply add another position to the department with compartmentalizing their patrols.

5. *Pinetree*

November 16, 2016 • 6:33 am

IF they do this, why don't governments think ahead? Take the anticipated cost of the next new cruiser and divide it by the number of years it should be before it's needed, put that into an account only for that use and BINGO, it's there when it needed instead of getting whacked at that time.

6. *Hadenuf*

November 16, 2016 • 11:27 am

If my memory serves me right, the FCSD doesn't patrol UT areas every day anyway. They share it with the State Police. So when you have an emergency in an UT area, you might get the Maine State Police or the FCSD. Unless this process has changed in the last 6 months, it's still the same. I'm fine with the way things are right now. It's working, don't fix what's not broken. If you are unhappy with the coverage up here in the woods. Move back to the city. Next thing will be Ambulances, not enough to cover this area.

7. *Joshua Bell*

November 16, 2016 • 5:46 pm

I would like to see how many calls are from the UT areas and see if it really justifies having another officer, and not just a way to spend more money like government likes to do at times. Even if they can

pay for it out of the TIF.

8. *hold the phone...*

November 16, 2016 • 7:48 pm

why not get the current deputies off main roads for more than a fleeting second? Maple street, Riverside, and West Kingfield Road residents in Kingfield have been more than vocal about speeding vehicles and all we see is a quick "in and out" maybe once per week. what is the hold up for them to take the 30 minutes they sit (sometimes 2 of them side-by-side) at the turnout by the cemetery, Jordans, Trantens, or across from Nostalgia and maybe go sit on some of these secondary town roads? DAILY they would haul someone back to farmington. its time to start writing tickets and setting a real example.

9. *ringer*

November 17, 2016 • 4:53 pm

Let me start by saying that I support Sheriff Nichols. He is a good man, and he's doing a great job. Having said that, I respectfully disagree with this proposal. It has everything to do with funding, and going after a previously untapped revenue resource, and nothing at all to do with increased patrolling presence in the Unorganized Territories. I hope the necessary parties see through this.

10. *George*

November 18, 2016 • 7:51 am

282 calls in one year from the U.T. doesn't seem like enough to warrant a dedicated officer (that's less than 1 per day) and given deputy cannot be available 24/7/365 it seems unlikely that it would make a significant impact; however adding an additional deputy to the overall coverage staff would make much more sense, and provide the ability 'be a presence' in other areas of the state as well as the U.T.

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