

# Budgets for Police Services: A Review of 177 Vermont Towns

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Randolph Vermont Police Station. Unlike most towns in Vermont, Randolph spent less in FY 20 than they did in FY 2019 on police services. (Photo Courtesy, Randolph Police Department Facebook Page).

**Legislative Intern Policy Center in collaboration with VT Digger**

<https://legislativeinternshipcenter.com/>

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Around the country there is an upsurge of interest in police budgets and police behavior.

In Vermont, recent news stories have examined police budgets and policing in St. Albans, Brattleboro, Bennington, Burlington, Hinesburg, Charlotte, Stowe, Dover, Waterbury and Randolph among other places. Policing in the state is provided through the Vermont State Police, through county Sheriff's Departments and by town police departments.

As the country re-examines the role of police and policing in society we were curious how much Vermont spends for policing at the town level. Much of the conversation seems aimed at more urban areas. But what about small rural towns?

How much are Vermont towns spending? Who is spending the most? Who is spending the least? How much are towns spending per capita? Are budgets increasing over time? How much are towns spending as a percent of their general fund budget?

These are some of the questions we set out to answer in a research project into town level police service spending in Vermont conducted in collaboration with VT Digger.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report includes 177 towns ranging in size from 344 (Whiting) to 42,500 (Burlington).

Some towns spend very little on police services, e.g. less than \$1000 in total (Peru, Peacham and Worcester). Another 24 towns spend more than \$1 million, led by Burlington and Rutland.

Biggest spenders are generally the biggest towns, but not always. There are some fairly large towns that spend less on average than their peers, such as Charlotte, Westford, Underhill, Derby and Highgate.

Total spending on police services for the 177 towns in fiscal year 2020 was about \$96 million.

On average, town residents are spending about \$176 per capita for police services at the town level. This ranges from above \$400 per person in several towns/cities (e.g. Burlington, Dover, Ludlow, Newport) to under \$10 in dozens of small towns. Ten towns with more than 3,000 people spend less than \$50 per capita. On average, towns spend about 15.3 percent of their general fund budget on police services.

### **Police services spending increases**

Comparing FY 2019 with FY 2020 finds that most towns in Vermont saw an increase in their police services spending. On average, police budgets rose about 3.8% between Fiscal Year 2019 and FY 2020.

Given national and state conversations about the appropriate resources for police services and the re-allocation of those funds to other services, what will happen with FY 2021 budgets we don't yet know.

There are a few towns that have recently cut their police budgets. The merger of the town of Waterbury with Waterbury Village eliminated the Villages' police department -- see this [story in the Waterbury Roundabout](#). In Randolph, the town voted to cut the police department, according to this [article in the Valley News](#). And in Burlington, the City Council voted to reduce the BPD police force by 30% through attrition over time. Many other conversations are underway, see for example this story from Hinesburg, which [recently voted to increase their police budget](#) and add another officer.

Future research should examine these trends in Vermont, investigating whether police services budgets continue to rise or funding is being re-allocated to other town services.

## METHODS

Because of Vermont's local government form of government, each town in Vermont prepares a town budget that is voted on and approved by the town's residents. This information is usually contained in the Town Report, posted on each town's website.

Student researchers with the [Legislative Policy Intern Service Center](#) examined town websites to find that data, looking for funding allocated to police services, for FY 2019 and FY 2020 and for total general fund spending. In some cases, the researchers emailed and called town officials.

### **A few caveats as readers review this data:**

Because FY 2020 is not quite complete some FY 2020 budgets might be different when the final numbers are in. In some cases, contracts with the Vermont State Police and the County Sherriff's office may not show up as a readily findable line item in a town budget document.

Some towns get revenue back in the form of traffic tickets and that may not be reflected in all of these numbers. Note, our intention was to capture what a town said they were spending on police services based on the publicly available information in their town reports.

In many of Vermont's smallest towns the information on their websites is hard to find – therefore a number of towns are not included here. Most of those towns spend almost nothing on police services at the town level – which is not to say police services are not being provided by the Vermont State Police or County Sherriff.

When looking through budget documents for more than 180 towns, mistakes can be made. Our information is meant to be completely accessible. We have listed the town documents and websites that we are drawing from, as well as the student researcher who is responsible. In several cases we were unable to find the data on a town website and received the information from a town official.

And lastly of course, one or two year budget documents may not reflect long-term town trends.

**We welcome changes or comments – please send them to either Katie or Jon at Katie Wynn <[kwynn@uvm.edu](mailto:kwynn@uvm.edu)>; Jonathan Barthe <[Jonathan.Barthe@uvm.edu](mailto:Jonathan.Barthe@uvm.edu)>**

Town population numbers were taken from the US Census American Community Survey five year rolling average, year 2018. Any questions **please contact Ford at <[Francis.Harrington@uvm.edu](mailto:Francis.Harrington@uvm.edu)>**

## ABOUT US

This is a project of the [Legislative Intern Policy Center](#) at the University of Vermont, a student powered internship service providing policy research and communications services for Vermont legislators. This report and data set was prepared in collaboration with VT Digger and data reporter Erin Petenko. Any errors are our responsibility.

### **A number of student researchers contributed to this report:**

Katie Wynn, Jon Barthe, Ford Harrington, Rutvik Patel, Yosef Borsykowsky, Laura Meyer, Stella Cunningham, Andrew Jerome, Sara Molho, Aidan Seipke and Louis Augeri. Thanks also to economist Stephanie Seguino and House Rep. Selene Colburn for advice and support.

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