

Budgets for Police Services: 140 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 and Randolph among other places.

In Vermont, policing is provided through the Vermont State Police, through county Sherriff'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 Phase 1 of a two-phase research project into town level police service spending in Vermont conducted in collaboration with VT Digger.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report includes 140 towns ranging in size from 344 (Whiting) to 42,500 (Burlington).

Some towns spend very little on police services, e.g. less than \$1000 (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 140 towns in fiscal year 2020 was about \$95 million. Note that FY 2020 is just coming to an end so these numbers could change. And some towns use a different fiscal year.

When you look at per capita spending, a different list emerges. This calculation was done using the FY 2020 proposed police services budget/divided by the number of total people in town, according to the American Community Survey five year rolling average, year 2018. About 26 towns expected to spend more than \$200 per capita on police services in 2020.

On the other end of the spectrum about 90 towns proposed spending less than \$100 per capita in Fiscal Year 2020. While many of those are small towns that contract for services or rely on the Vermont State Police, there are some larger Vermont towns that are spending very little. Ten towns with populations above 3000 proposed spending less than \$50 per capita in FY 2020.

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.

Student researchers with the Legislative Policy Intern Service Center went to each town website to find that data, looking for funding allocated to police services, for FY 2019 and FY 2020 and for total general fund spending.

This report is a DRAFT report. It is our intention to continue to work with towns to ensure these numbers are up to date and accurate. It is worth noting a number of caveats as readers review this data.

Because FY 2020 is not quite complete some FY 2020 budgets might be different when 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. However, our intention was to capture what a town said they were spending on police services based on town budget documents.

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 in another way. But our focus was town level spending.

When looking through budget documents for more than 140 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.

We welcome changes or comments – please send them to either Katie or Jon at Katie Wynn <kwynn@uvm.edu>; Jonathan Barthe <Jonathan.Barthe@uvm.edu>

Town population numbers were taken from the US Census American Community Survey five year rolling average, year 2018. Any questions or comments about these numbers please contact Ford at Ford Harrington <Francis.Harrington@uvm.edu>

ABOUT US

This is a project of the [Legislative Intern Policy Center](https://legislativeinternshipcenter.com/) at the University of Vermont, a student powered internship service providing policy research and communications services for Vermont legislators, in collaboration with VT Digger.

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A number of student researchers contributed to this report.

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