

**SANDSTONE CITY COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING – NORTH PINE AREA GOVERNMENT CENTER  
March 28, 2022, 2:00 p.m.**

**CALL TO ORDER:** 2:00 p.m.

**ROLL CALL:**

Council Members present: Pete Spartz, Val Palmer, Julena Rahier, Randy Riley

Council Members absent: Cassie Gaede

Staff present: Administrator Kathy George

Others present: Sheriff Jeff Nelson, County Board Members Matt Ludwig & Steve Hallan, County Administrator David Minke, Jen Yocum-Stans with the *Pine County Courier*

**SPECIAL ITEMS OF BUSINESS:**

Law Enforcement Contract

The City Council initiated this meeting with County officials to start a conversation about the Law Enforcement Contract the City has with the County. For 2022, the City pays the County \$154,700 to provide law enforcement services within the City boundaries, beyond that which is customarily and regularly provided to the City. Services include routine patrolling within the community, interaction with members of the residential and commercial communities, investigations of all state statute and city ordinance violations, support and assistance to other public service agencies (such as ambulance and fire department).

Mayor Spartz began by stating that the City is not dissatisfied in any way with the services provided by the Sheriff's Department. The Council is interested in having an open conversation with the County as the City struggles with the high tax burden in the City. He stated that the City has no intention of creating its own police department.

Sheriff Nelson explained that the Sandstone car/Deputy generally stays in the Sandstone area and will provide limited response to calls outside the area. If gone on an extended call, backup is brought in. The Deputy works a 10-hour shift, with a flexible start time from 3:00 – 5:00 p.m., and has every other weekend off. Council Members asked if the Deputy could stop in at businesses more often. The Deputy does attempt to attend City Council meetings, but is sometimes tied up with a call.

Hinckley and Pine City contract with the County for 7-day coverage. Sandstone contracts for 5-day coverage. The Sheriff's goal is to have 4 Deputies covering the County, with the 3 contract Deputies on overnights, 3 Deputies covering the County at large, and 1 Sargeant on duty who can fill in. There can be gaps for sick leave and vacation. There can also be extra Deputies available during the day who work administration and investigations and can provide backup, if needed. The Department is fully staffed with 37 sworn officers (including the 3 contract Deputies). If the contracts are eliminated, the Sheriff would have 32 officers. Sheriff Nelson noted that the contract

Deputy position is bid out every 6 months. The Sandstone Deputy will be changing in May.

Mayor Spartz discussed appearances and perception, asking what are the Sandstone taxpayers paying for. Sheriff Nelson stated that he's not sure what he can deliver on a "part-time" basis (50 hours a week – Sandstone's contract). Mayor Spartz suggested a higher level of visibility and interaction. Evenings are the most important times to have the contract Deputies on duty; 5:00 – 10:00 p.m. seems to be the high-volume time (except on weekends).

In response to the question of what happens if the City doesn't contract for extra hours, the following comments were made:

- Deputies will make random passes through town
- Deputies will continue to respond to 911 calls
- with the Sheriff's office in town, Sandstone will have an advantage of Deputies likely being nearby
- Without the City's funds, the Deputy position could be eliminated and Sandstone would have to rely on response from the broader area
- Other areas (nearby townships, cities) receive the benefit of the extra Sandstone car as well
- 3 Deputies in the County would rotate; generally, there is 1 Deputy covering the north, 1 Deputy covering the middle, and 1 Deputy covering the south; a float car works backup
- Response time suffers

County Board members were informed that the City supports the County fully funding the Sheriff's Department; as the expense is spread throughout the Pine County tax base. This has been a conversation the County Board has discussed in the past. Sheriff Nelson stated that higher users should have "more skin in the game". Areas with a higher concentration of people have an obligation to their residents to ensure safety.

It was asked if it would make a difference if the Sandstone Deputy never left town; however, all agreed it doesn't make sense for that to be mandatory as Deputies often provide backup for each other. Would it help if the "city" car were painted a different color and had "Sandstone" written on it? But then if that car is seen elsewhere people will complain.

Sheriff Nelson stated that the benefits of having the contract hours includes faster response time and familiarity with town. He feels that the cities have gotten by with pretty cheap law enforcement services.

Council Members asked the County Board Members to take a serious look at funding the Sheriff's Department. Efforts can be made to get citizens engaged to contact the County. Attending County Board meetings was encouraged. Lobby for legislation to increase aid for law enforcement could also be beneficial.

The current contract is through December 31, 2023. If either party chooses to terminate the agreement, written notice must be provided no later than September 15<sup>th</sup> to allow for budget revisions for the following year.

**ADJOURN**

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

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Peter Spartz, Mayor

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Kathy George, Administrator