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BOROUGH OF WOODBURY HEIGHTS

Dear Borough of Woodbury Heights Residents,

As Mayor, on behalf of the Borough Council, I'd like to take this opportunity to update the residents of the Borough as to the status of our Police department and the future of the Borough providing public safety services going forward.

For over a year now, the City of Woodbury Police Department, led by Chief Thomas Ryan, has been providing limited public safety services, including the total oversight for police administration in the Woodbury Heights Police Department, as well as supplemental patrols as part of an emergency shared services agreement that was predicated on numerous critical matters affecting the Police Department, including significant police turnover, retirements, and administrative leave. The City of Woodbury has been a tremendous ally during this difficult time by graciously agreeing to a temporary shared service agreement for the supervision and oversight of the Borough Police Department and the Borough's officers without seeking any compensation for those critical services. The City was also able to provide shift coverages for the shifts that the Borough simply did not have enough manpower to cover, while only charging the Borough the costs of the officer. This temporary agreement has been extended multiple times throughout the past year for the Borough to examine its operations, as well as the future of the Police Department.

During this period, the remaining officers of the Borough of Woodbury Heights Police Department continued to serve the residents of Woodbury Heights under the leadership of Chief Ryan, along with the City of Woodbury Police to fulfill our public safety needs of the town and Chief Ryan, as well as the Officers of the City of Woodbury did so admirably. Also, during this time, the Borough explored its options to either appoint new leadership and re-build the Police Department staffing or consider a permanent shared service agreement and disband the Woodbury Heights Police Department.

Additionally, during a recent review of the Borough Police Department's operations, the Gloucester County Prosecutor's Office made the Borough aware of numerous concerns with the Borough Police Department that revealed deficiencies in procedures; the Police Department building and various other items that quickly became a fiscal concern, as well as a public safety concern.

Based on the review of the Police Department operations by the Prosecutor's Office, as well as myself and the Borough Council, and in consideration of the tremendous personnel and fiscal challenges of rebuilding a small town police force, and the continued higher rate of turnover in a small town department, the Borough believes it is in the best interests of the public to officially enter into and formalize a shared services agreement with the City of Woodbury to ensure the long term public safety of the Borough and its residents.

The primary goal of elected officials privileged to serve the residents of the Borough of Woodbury Heights is to maintain and enhance the services offered by the municipality while finding economic efficiencies. Most shared service agreements begin with much hesitation as there are questions about the services that will be received. Woodbury Heights has been in a unique position to evaluate the City of Woodbury's Police Department for the past year through the temporary agreement for supervision and covered patrols. These services have been exemplary and would only be enhanced once the shared services agreement takes effect.

A full-time shared service agreement will not only provide for full-time police coverage, but the Borough shall also have an Officer patrolling the Borough at all times 24/7. The shared services agreement shall also provide for services the Borough simply is not able to provide with its limited tax base and limited resources, which will now be provided to the Borough by the City of Woodbury.

The City of Woodbury is the longest accredited police department in Gloucester County and ranked in the top 1% of departments throughout the State. A shared service agreement will provide for the sharing of 34 full time police officers, including bi-lingual officers, officers assigned to housing and tenant issues, full time detectives, K-9 Officers, and bicycle patrols.

The agreement will also allow for the Borough to be added to the camera system that the City was able to procure through Project NOLA to provide additional security, as well as being assured of a state-of-the-art police station with an evidence system that is maintained by an officer that is fully assigned to the same. The Borough residents will also be able to utilize the Woodbury Police Department's website to report crimes, file complaints, request housing checks, make anonymous tips or view the crime log.

The current officers in the Borough's department will be offered the opportunity to join the City's police department and be assured back-up on shift and additional opportunities for advancement and specialized training that will only provide for their increased safety and the safety of the Borough residents.

The Borough Council will be entering into a shared service agreement with the City of Woodbury for full-time police services in the upcoming month. While this shared service agreement will enhance the public safety features for the town, it will also stabilize the ever-growing costs of the municipality and provide savings in the years to come that will mitigate against the higher tax increases that are projected in the future to maintain the infrastructure of the Borough.

I applaud the efforts and diligence that Borough Council has put into finding this solution and I formally welcome Chief Tom Ryan and the Woodbury City Police Department to the Borough of Woodbury Heights. The Borough Council and I would also like to recognize and personally thank the Officers of the Borough Police Department, past and present, who have selflessly served the Borough of Woodbury Heights and its residents since the inception of the part-time department in 1961. The department remained part-time until the appointment of the first full-time Officers in 1977. In 1984, Chief Thomas P. Reilly made the department a full-time 24 hour, 7 days a week operation manned by full-time Officers who have proudly and courageously served the Borough to the present date.



BOROUGH OF WOODBURY HEIGHTS
WILLIAM C. PACKER, MAYOR