

As a Deer Park resident, local business owner and community activist (Deer Park Neighbors), I'll get straight to the point. The termination of the Kildeer Police contract by the Village of Deer Park is wrong, on its face and fundamentally.

Fundamentally, a change in the most important (and most expensive) on the village budget requires complete transparency. On its face, the termination seems to me to be a technical exit; I'll leave that to lawyers, but can't help wondering, who'll want to shake hands with Deer Park in the future?

President Kellermann has said this is not about the money. I think it is. And possibly, just a little bit, about trumping the previous administration. Deer Park has overpaid for police services, but not been short-changed on coverage.

Deer Park was careless to agree to a strict 50/50 split on police. Read the minutes; at the last moment, one trustee insisted on a fixed, annual 5% escalator instead of adjusting our payments to a periodic review of actual expenses.

That's been a costly mistake. I'll leave it to others to do that math. But I can count to nine. That's how many officers are being "laid off" (read "fired"). In their place, five new squad cars will be purchased and branded "Village of Deer Park," driven by Lake County Sheriff's officers.

Is it a done deal? The termination appears to be final. The new contract must be ratified by the Lake County Board. That can take place as soon as Nov. 8, just one week before the new force is to hit the road.

Believe me, I know that the current trustees feel the heat; something that might have ruffled their sense of fairness becomes a very different matter when they sit on the other side of the podium. The buck stops there.

But in an administration whose watchword has been transparency, there's no excuse for Deer Park's relying on last Friday's one-paragraph news brief to notify us that we were about to give up our police force. For failing to post the agenda documents until the day of the meeting. For neglecting to broadcast a Connect-CTY. For never scheduling an Open Forum on police?

When did the purported lack of service become an emergency? This is year three of a five-year agreement. In fact, the department has been short four or five officers, due to medical or military leave. (You may remember when Officer Hoover returned to a hero's welcome from his deployment to Afghanistan.)

And when did it become a big secret? Since we started covering Deer Park in 2006, this has been the tightest shutdown of both data and gossip. A little less grape vine may be a good thing. But many public meetings had already referenced the desire to "get out of" or "break" the police agreement.

More important, the newly appointed Chief Lou Rossi clearly demonstrated to this board, by his own independent audit, that we were receiving our contracted service, and then

some. How could the right amount of work be done with too few people? The same way you and I do two people's work for one salary.

What few understand is the actual execution of shared police services. It's not a chessboard, one car on this side of Rand Road, another there, one officer to write tickets, another to chase purse snatchers. It's a complex, sophisticated system of routing, response and backup. I know, because I went on a ride along with our police. It changed everything I thought I knew about policing. Has even one of our sitting trustees done that?

Can security be metered out like dividing jellybeans among kindergartners? If you call 9-1-1, do you want to hear, "Sorry, the cops were in Deer Park yesterday at this time, your turn's tomorrow." You cannot boil down police accountability to taking attendance.

And in any case, the police department doesn't set the rates or send the invoice. (Remember when the force gave up a one-year cost of living increase to make the numbers work for Deer Park? Did you know that increase was help back far longer?)

So I say, whether it's too few officers or too many dollars, put a price tag on it, and if Kildeer can't pay back the difference today, spread the rebate out over the remainder of the contract.

But don't throw out the baby with the bath water. And if that water is muddy, clean it up.

Deer Parkers are not the only ones with a problem; Kildeer residents may well see their own coverage reduced, with an unthinkable layoff of more than half the officers.

This in no way disrespects the Lake County Sheriff's department or their work. Of course, only time—not promises—will demonstrate response times and bottom lines.

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