

Councilman proposes town retake PD operations at Fourth Precinct

By DAVID AMBRO

Claiming Town of Smithtown taxpayers are being shortchanged with respect to police protection—paying more in property taxes than comes back to the town—Councilman Thomas McCarthy this week proposed that the Smithtown Town Board consider “taking back the Fourth Precinct.”

Mr. McCarthy made his proposal during the workshop meeting of the Smithtown Town Board Tuesday, February 9. “It’s not fair that Smithtown residents are footing the bill for the rest of Suffolk County,” Councilman McCarthy said.

“It’s not going to happen,” replied Smithtown Supervisor Patrick Vecchio. “You’re not getting the Fourth Precinct back.”

The Supervisor said it is something that has come up from time to time and the Suffolk County Charter created the county police department and that the towns signed on with the understanding that town departments will not be reestablished.

Nonetheless, Councilman McCarthy pressed on. He alleged that Suffolk County has already violated the County Charter with respect to police protection and he accused County Executive Steve Levy with failing to provide the Fourth Precinct with adequate funding. He suggested that the Town Board consider filing a lawsuit against the county which will seek to reclaim the Fourth Precinct.



“It’s not going to happen... You’re not getting the Fourth Precinct back.”

-Patrick Vecchio
Town Supervisor
on McCarthy proposal
to retake local police force

During an interview in his office at Smithtown Town Hall Monday, February 8 Councilman McCarthy said the property taxpayers in Smithtown pay \$47,815,511 for the Suffolk County Police Department yet only \$24 million comes back to the Fourth Precinct, which has patrol responsibility in Smithtown. In the meantime, he said that because the county police are being shortchanged here, the Town of Smithtown Department of Public Safety has been forced to take on more of the law enforcement function of the police department.

“The Town Department of Public Safety is like the fourth-and-a-half precinct right now, and if the Fourth Precinct was provided with adequate resources we would not have to augment police services the way that we are doing right now,” Mr.

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Councilman charges that Smithtown is being shortchanged on police service

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McCarthy said.

Mr. McCarthy said in the wake of the death of an 11-year-old girl on Main Street in downtown Smithtown November 24, 2009 the Town Department of Public Safety has begun speeding enforcement patrols in the downtown. He also said Department of Public Safety officers have been heavily involved in the investigation of drug dealing cases in an effort to combat the heroin problem in Smithtown. Both of those operations, Mr. McCarthy said, should be the responsibility of the Suffolk County Police Department and because the Department of Public Safety has had to take on those functions it becomes an additional expense to town taxpayers.

"The Fourth Precinct gets less than half the amount than Smithtown pays for police protection, and I don't think it's fair," Councilman McCarthy said. "The Smithtown taxpayers should have 100 percent of their money used for police protection in Smithtown and not have it spread throughout Suffolk County."

The Suffolk County Police Department was formed in 1960 by a consolidation of town police departments in the five western towns of Suffolk County: Smithtown, Huntington, Islip, Brookhaven and

Babylon. Mr. McCarthy said that he thinks it is time to revisit the subject to explore the possibility of going back to a town police force using the exists personnel now at the Fourth Precinct.

Mr. McCarthy said that he has spoken to officers from the Fourth Precinct and they have told him they need additional sector cars and detectives to adequately address the downtown traffic concerns and the heroin problem.

"The money should be coming to Smithtown and the people of Smithtown should get the law enforcement we deserve from the Fourth Precinct," Mr. McCarthy said. "The residents should get dollar for dollar what they pay back to the Fourth Precinct. That will allow the Fourth Precinct to do the type of job the Inspector would like to do if he had the right budget. I'm not saying anything derogatory about the police officers. They do a great job. It's just that we need more of them and our money that is spread all over Suffolk County is not coming back to the Fourth Precinct. I don't think that is what the expectation was when they created the Suffolk County Police Department from the town police departments."

Suffolk County Police Commissioner Richard Dormer, responding to a

request to County Executive Steve Levy's press office for a comment, said the amount of taxes that each town pays to the police department is based on the assessed value within the town. He said that each precinct is provided with equal coverage based on population, and that beyond that forces are deployed based on where the need arises. "That is what policing is anywhere in the country, not just Suffolk County," Commissioner Dormer said.

Commissioner Dormer said the people of Suffolk County are being well served presently by the police department. He said since 2004 all crimes are down 20 percent and that since 2008 major crimes are down 8.3 percent. "The Suffolk County Police Department is doing a great job of keeping people safe," he said. "Overall, residents are getting their money's worth in police protection."

As to the specific concerns raised by Mr. McCarthy about traffic problems on Main Street in downtown Smithtown and the heroin epidemic plaguing Smithtown, Commissioner Dormer said that there has been a direct response on both fronts by the police. He said in the wake of the tragic November 24 pedestrian fatality on Main Street Fourth Precinct Inspector James Rhoads ordered stepped up

enforcement on Main Street. "Traffic is always an issue and we pay attention to it," he said.

As for the heroin epidemic, Commissioner Dormer said it is an epidemic Suffolk County wide that was identified by the police department in 2004. He said the department responded with the creation of a heroin task force which includes a joint effort between Suffolk, Nassau and New York City police forces and the United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and in cooperation with the District Attorney's office.

According to Commissioner Dormer extra officers and detectives have been assigned to the heroin investigation with the mission of taking down dealers on a regional basis. He said that he speaks about the heroin situation often with District Attorney Thomas Spota, who is committed to prosecuting drug dealers to the full extent of the law.

Commissioner Dormer said that there is also an education component to the police department's anti-heroin program. In addition, he said that County Executive Levy has been proactive in trying to improve drug treatment offerings for heroin addicts.

"We have jumped in to this since day one," he said about the heroin epidemic. "We are not ignoring it."