



Everything Michigan

## Deputy force lagging in Scio Township

Posted by Tom Gantert | The Ann Arbor News October 02, 2008 12:05PM

In Scio Township, few claim they have enough officers to adequately patrol a community of about 16,000.

But the \$136,503 question troubling officials - and townships and villages around Washtenaw County - is: "How do we pay for more?"

Since contracting with the county for five deputies, Scio Township officials have been trying to bolster their enforcement, most recently making plans to hire two additional deputies.

### Police-resident ratios

The chart below measures the ratio of sworn police officers for area communities. Ypsilanti Township and Scio Township contract with the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Department for deputies, while Pittsfield Township, Saline, Chelsea and Ann Arbor have their own police departments.

- **Scio Township:** Five officers, 15,759 population (1 officer per 3,152 people).
- **Ypsilanti Township:** 38 officers, 49,283 population (1 officer per 1,297 people).
- **Pittsfield Township:** 39 officers, 30,167 population (1 officer per 774 people).
- **Ann Arbor:** 149 officers, 114,024 population (1 officer per 765 people).
- **Ypsilanti:** 33 officers, 22,362 population (1 officer per 678 people).
- **Saline:** 15 officers, 8,817 population (1 officer per 588 people).
- **Chelsea:** 8 officers, 4,398 population (1 officer per 550 people).

*Source: News staff research*

But that isn't seen as a long-term solution, which leaves township officials struggling with the cost of protection - estimated at just over \$136,000 per deputy.

Township officials say a general rule of thumb in law enforcement is one police officer for every 1,000 residents. Scio is bucking that guideline with a ratio of 1 officer per 3,150 people.

County Commissioner Leah Gunn, D-Ann Arbor, said people should be concerned about the township's unwillingness to pay for more patrol services, which could be hazardous.

"Does that make for a safer county?," Gunn asked. "I don't know."

What's clear is that Scio Township residents are waiting longer for police to respond than residents in nearby communities.

Your house was broken into, but the intruder is gone? Need to file a police report after being bitten by a dog? The wait could be lengthy if the deputy is on another call.

In Scio Township, the average response time on calls for assistance was 17 minutes from Jan. 1 through Sept. 1. That's almost eight minutes longer than the response time in Dexter Township, Dexter Village and Webster Township, according to the Sheriff's Department.

U.S. Census figures from 2000 put the population in Scio Township at 15,759 residents.

Dexter, Dexter Township and Webster Township had a combined 12,784 residents. Those communities have joined together to contract for nine deputies, including one who serves the Dexter schools.

Despite having fewer deputies, Scio Township far outpaces those communities in calls for service.

Scio received 2,992 calls from Jan. 1 through Aug. 31. The three-community coalition received 1,778 calls during the same time.

And when a deputy needs backup, dispatchers call for the closest car to respond. The Sheriff's Department estimates that Dexter area deputies have spent an average of 15 minutes per day assisting in Scio Township since January, while Scio deputies spent an average of five minutes a day assisting in the Dexter area.

Scio Supervisor Charlie Nielsen, who was defeated in the August primary, said the disparity in police protection causes conflict with nearby communities.

"It is the reason some of our neighboring communities have some resentment," Nielsen said. "They are very much aware that their coverage gets used for Scio Township, and they are not pleased with that."

Dexter Village Manager Donna Dettling said there's been some movement toward a more equitable situation. She said the three-community coalition plans to cut back by one deputy, while Scio Township recently passed a resolution that it intends to add the two additional deputies.

"Part of the problem is ... it means they have to make that tough decision that 'I may have to raise taxes,'" Dettling said. "They don't realize the burden it places on the other communities who pay for that."

But Scio Township residents have been reluctant to pay more for police protection. In 2006, residents voted down a proposed 1.945-mill police and fire tax by a 3-to-1 ratio.

The failed millage and increased costs forced the township to cut back from seven to five deputies last year.

A public safety committee discovered that neighboring jurisdictions didn't want to consider pooling resources because Scio Township has historically underfunded its public safety services.

"We have been told that until we get our own house in order, collaboration is out of the question," the committee's report stated.

Now, voters are being asked to approve a new millage in November. The new 0.9-mill proposal covers fire safety and would raise just over \$1 million, township Manager Darrell Fecho said.

Fecho said the township could use millage funds on fire safety and divert general fund dollars to police protection for additional deputies.

Township resident Vincent Henry said he'll "reluctantly" vote for the fire millage.

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He's lived in Scio Township for more than 20 years and said he knows of some break-ins in the area. Henry said his three-bedroom house isn't fancy, but he pays \$7,000 a year in taxes.

"You walk around here, and you don't see any sign of police protection," he said. "Even to make their presence known or seen is somewhat important. We don't feel as safe."

Incoming Supervisor E. Spaulding Clark said the proposed millage likely wouldn't be needed for up to two years. He advocated first using \$1.2 million in a public safety funds for police services.

When that runs out, Clark said, another funding source would be needed.

Thomas Hanson, a trustee candidate who won in the primary, said he believes the best approach is a "dedicated fund" like a millage. One possibility is a special assessment district combined with a reduction in the general fund millage, Hanson said.

"We are at the point in Scio Township, if we don't get some more money, there won't be anyone here locally to pick up the phone," Trustee Chuck Ream said. "We will all have to get guns and dogs instead of policemen, and we will have to get hoses and generators instead of firefighters. ... It doesn't come for free."



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