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Police department costs dominate Long Island village budgets

December 19, 2016 By John Asbury john.asbury@newsday.com



An Old Westbury police vehicle on May 19, 2015, in Old Westbury. The highest compensated village official in 2015 on Long Island was former Old Westbury Police Inspector Dennis McCavera, who retired that year. (Credit: Howard Schnapp)

Long Island's 97 villages paid \$339.3 million in payroll costs in 2015, including \$23 million in overtime, with police costs dominating the budgets of those with their own departments.

The 31 villages with police departments spent nearly \$135.5 million, or about 40 percent of their 2015 payrolls, on police costs, according to a Newsday review of records. Police salaries also led municipal payrolls in total overtime costs, at \$13.5 million.

Records show that all but nine of the top 300 highest-paid village employees Islandwide are police officers. Across Long Island, in total payroll in 2015, village officials paid 8,834 police and civilian employees \$339.3 million.

Newsday reported last year, based on the 87 villages that responded to requests for payroll information, that total payrolls in 2014 were \$289.81 million. Thirty police departments that responded reported 2014 payrolls of \$128.7 million, making up 44 percent of all village payrolls, with \$11.7 million in overtime.

This year, all 97 villages responded to payroll requests. Valley Stream and Ocean Beach provided incomplete data and their salaries were compiled using state Civil Service figures.

Last week, Newsday reported that an analysis of 13 Long Island towns and its two cities — Long Beach and Glen Cove — showed that overtime rose 17 percent to more than \$40 million. Town and city payrolls increased by 3 percent, with local governments spending a combined \$747 million on 20,388 employees.

Tim Hoefer, executive director of the fiscally conservative Empire Center for Public Policy, said it is up to taxpayers to review payroll figures and to place a priority on police spending.

"Police costs on Long Island and in the Hudson Valley are the highest in the state and local cops in New York are the best paid in the country, if not the world," Hoefer said. "The more they get paid,

the further they get from the fiscal realities of the municipalities that pay them.”

Nassau County PBA President James Carver said the villages with their own departments do so for better services and individual attention.

“The money earned by police in Long Island is appropriate for the cost of living on Long Island,” Carver said. “The services provided here are second to none. Every community has professional police forces and you get what you pay for. Residents are getting their money’s worth.”

The highest compensated village official in 2015 on Long Island was former Old Westbury Police Inspector Dennis McCavera, who retired that year. He collected \$713,700 in total compensation in 2015. In 2014, Old Westbury paid retired Police Chief Daniel Duggan more than \$1 million in total compensation.

Five other police chiefs, lieutenants and sergeants who retired in 2015 — from Amityville, Sands Point, Lynbrook and Old Westbury —received \$420,000 to \$565,000 in total compensation.

The highest-paid active employee among village officials in 2015 was Old Brookville Police Chief Richard A. Smith, who received \$403,000 in total compensation.

The top civilian earner who retired in 2015 was former Garden City Building Superintendent Michael D. Filippon, whose total compensation was \$362,905 in salary and retirement benefits.

Top salaries also went to village administrators. Old Westbury Administrator Kenneth Callahan was paid \$218,607 and Garden City Administrator Ralph Suozzi \$191,901.

Hempstead led village payrolls on Long Island with \$36.9 million paid to nearly 600 village employees and police officers in 2015. The village also had the highest police payroll, at \$21.1 million, while leading all other police departments in overtime with more than \$3 million.

Hempstead has the largest village police force with 197 officers and police employees, making it the third-largest police department on Long Island behind Nassau and Suffolk County.

Hempstead Mayor Wayne Hall also led village elected officials with a \$139,209 base salary, followed by Freeport Mayor Robert Kennedy, who was paid \$120,359 and also oversees a utility.

Hall said the village’s payroll leads Long Island because of its large police force. The police department is still down about 10 to 12 positions, leading to the \$3 million in overtime, Hall said.

He said the village has been working to limit spending in the police department by offering early retirement packages and hiring younger officers.

“Overtime has to come from covering missing shifts,” Hall said.

Rockville Centre led Long Island villages in civilian overtime with \$1.1 million in 2015. The village also paid its police force \$1.1 million in overtime. Village Administrator Kathleen Murray said the village works to minimize overtime costs.

“We keep our staffing levels as lean as possible and look for innovative ways to reduce costs without impacting services,” Murray said.

The payrolls of several Long Island villages went almost entirely to police salaries. Officials at these villages did not return calls for comment.

The Village of Old Brookville, for example, employs 35 full-time employees, who are all police officers except for the village clerk. The village contracts out all other employees, who are not listed on the village payroll.

Old Brookville's 34-member police department was paid \$4.9 million in 2015. The department covers five surrounding villages: Upper Brookville, Brookville, Matinecock, Cove Neck and Mill Neck. In Oyster Bay Cove, the village paid 14 police officers \$2.1 million and four part-time employees \$133,000.

The eight-member police force of Centre Island was paid more than \$1 million while seven part-time employees received a total of \$156,747.

Records show that Old Brookville police responded to 28 property crimes in 2015. Oyster Bay Cove recorded two robberies and 16 property crimes. Centre Island police responded to one burglary. The Village of Kensington's seven-member police force was paid \$931,519 and did not respond to any violent or property crimes categorized by the state, according to crime statistics.

Kensington Mayor Susan Lopatkin said the village has had its own force since 1922. The village did a study about contracting with Nassau County but rejected the idea.

"The extra cost was not significant enough to justify the reduced level of police coverage," she said. "Our police department is integrated with the community, our officers know all the residents, and the residents know the police. They patrol regularly, they respond immediately and most importantly, they keep our community safe."