



Town of Bristol
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Police Services in Bristol

Where the townwide question stands, the timeline ahead, and why we are taking the time to get it right

October 9, 2026 (Rev 2). Prepared for the Selectboard meeting of October 12, 2026, and for Bristol residents.

THE QUESTION	PROPOSED TIMING	BEFORE ANY VOTE	NOT IN THIS GUIDE
What kind of police service does Bristol want, and who should pay for it?	A townwide decision by Australian ballot in March 2028, not March 2027	Gather the facts, hear from residents and officers, publish one set of numbers	Cost estimates, or any position on how to vote

How it works today

How police service works today, and who can change it

INSIDE THE POLICE DISTRICT

The village area

- Served by the Bristol Police Department
- Paid for by a separate District property tax
- About 41% of the Town's taxable property value
- District voters approve the police budget each March

OUTSIDE THE DISTRICT

The rest of Bristol

- Vermont State Police respond to most calls
- Some Bristol police services under contract, such as traffic patrol on Town roads and school checks
- No District police tax

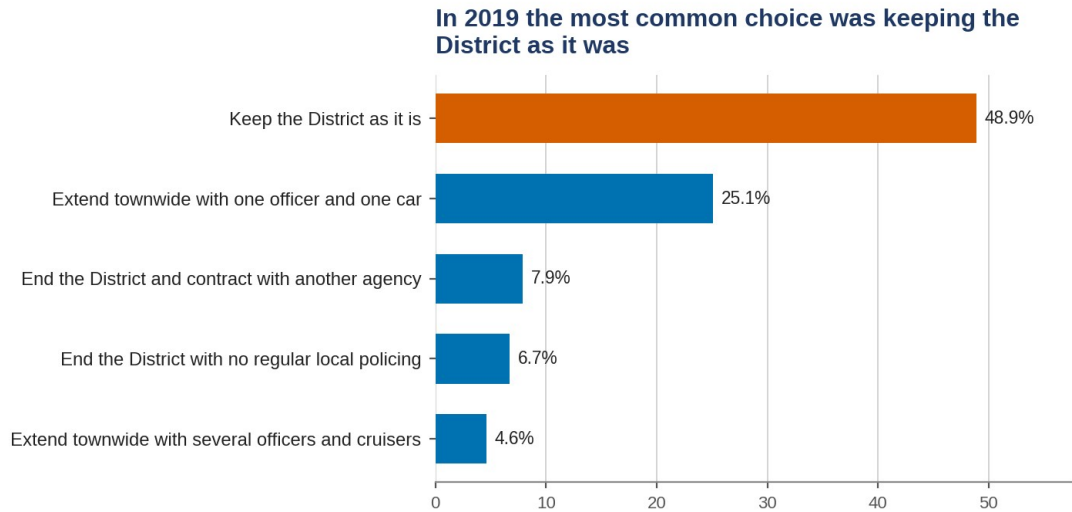
WHO CAN CHANGE IT (Town charter, section 108-701(d))

End the District: all Town voters, at a Town meeting warned for the purpose. The department becomes townwide and its cost moves into the Town's general budget.

Change the boundary: separate approval by voters inside the District and voters in the area being added or removed.

Cost figures will be published once the data is in hand, as one consistent set of numbers. Figures released early and then revised would only confuse things.

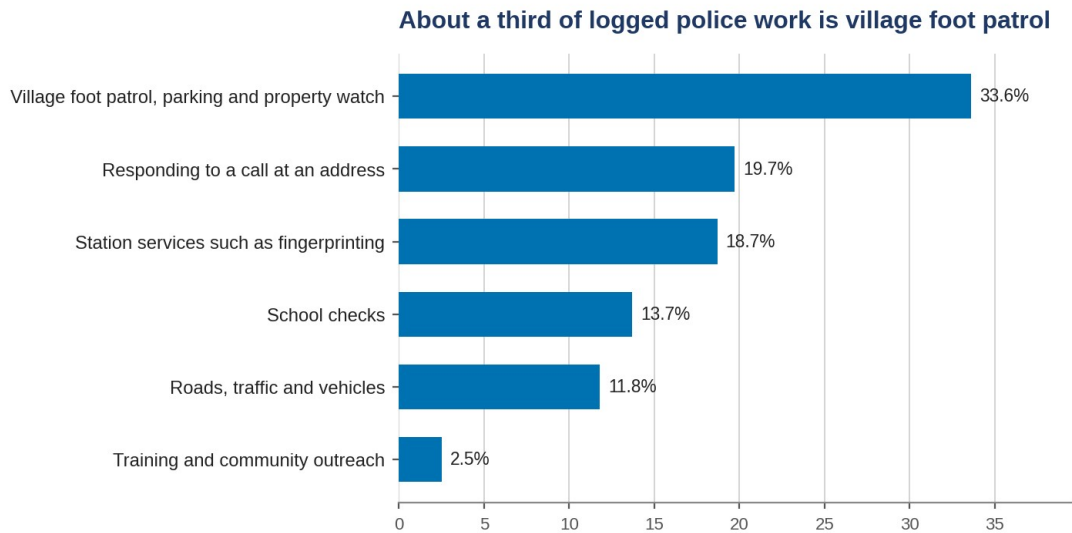
Bristol has asked this before



Share of 521 people who answered a voluntary 2019 survey. In a 2012 survey of 1,139 voters, 50.6% favored townwide expansion, 21.8% opposed it and 27.7% were undecided.
Source: Addison Independent, October 17 and October 28, 2019

Both surveys were voluntary, so they show who chose to answer rather than the whole town. The most recent is seven years old. What matters now is what people think today.

What the work looks like today



9,727 calls logged 2022 to 2025 (2025 through December 12). The log records what each call was, not where it happened, so it cannot yet show how much work falls inside or outside the District.
Source: Bristol Police Department call records. Call types grouped by Town staff.

Until calls carry a location, no one can say how much of today's work serves people inside the District and how much serves those outside it. That is the first piece of data the plan calls for.

What we heard in review

The Selectboard received a draft plan on October 1. Review of that draft changed its direction.

What we heard in review of the draft plan: five themes

Points raised in review of the October 1 draft. Not attributed to any individual.

1 Take the time

- Not enough time to do this well before March 2027
- Use the year for a full set of facts

2 Let more people decide

- Use the Australian ballot so voters who can't attend Town Meeting have a say
- Be clear the 2027 vote only sets how the decision is made

3 Be honest about cost

- Don't promise savings
- Costs outside the District would rise. Costs inside may not fall.

4 Widen the choices

- There are at least four directions, not two
- Residents may suggest others

5 Listen first

- Ask what services people need and what they would support
- Hear from the officers
- Show the work at Town Meeting. Expect some frustration.

Where the themes point: a vote in 2028, after a year of facts and resident input

Four directions on the table

Four directions Bristol could take, each a different kind of police service

None is recommended in this guide. Residents may suggest others.

1. Keep the current District

Police service stays a village district, paid for by District taxpayers. State Police and contracted services cover the rest of town.

We would need to know

Can the District staff and fund a quality department on its own?

2. Focused local service

A small local department with set hours and defined types of calls. State Police handle calls outside them.

We would need to know

Which services matter most, and what response is acceptable outside covered hours?

3. Shared service

Partner with a neighboring department or the Sheriff, keeping a small local presence.

We would need to know

Is a willing partner available, and who would set local priorities?

4. Townwide department

End the District and serve the whole town, likely with more officers and possibly a new facility.

We would need to know

What staffing, space and cost would it take, and would voters across Bristol support it?

What it takes to keep a quality department

Whichever direction Bristol chooses, it has to recruit and keep good officers, and departments across Vermont compete for the same small pool of certified officers. Keeping the department staffed is a separate effort from the townwide decision, and it continues now.

Recruiting and keeping officers: where Bristol stands

Qualitative comparison with the departments Bristol hires against. No pay or cost figures.

Starting pay	GAP	Below most departments Bristol competes with for officers
Credit for experience	GAP	Less credit for years served elsewhere than most departments give
Hiring incentive	GAP	None. Most competing departments now offer one.
Time off early in a career	LIMITED	One week of vacation in year one, two weeks through year five
Career path	LIMITED	One rank, sergeant, between officer and chief
Staffing depth	LIMITED	A small team covers every day of the week, so each vacancy means more overtime
Retirement	COMPARABLE	Vermont's municipal retirement system, used by many towns
Wellness	INCLUDED	Paid days for mental health check-ups
Health insurance	STRENGTH	The Town pays most of the premium and funds a health savings account
Disability and life insurance	STRENGTH	The Town pays the full premium

GAP trails competing departments. LIMITED is a weak point for a small department. STRENGTH is paid in full or in large part by the Town.
Source: Town review of the police agreement and regional departments, October 2026.

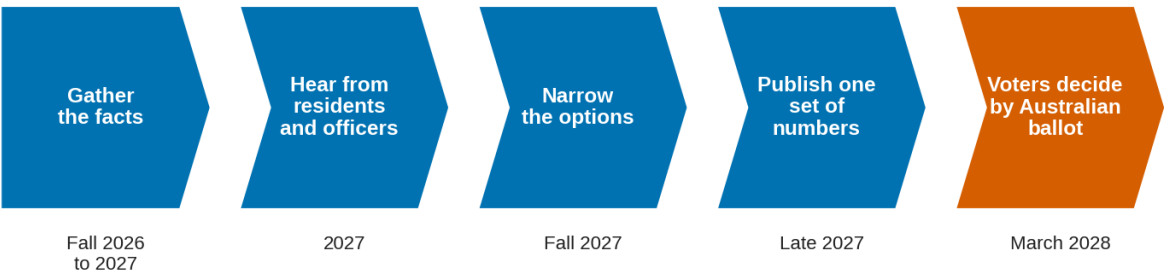
What we need to learn before anyone votes

Seven questions to answer before anyone votes

1	Where do calls happen? Call records tagged inside or outside the District	Starts fall 2026
2	What do residents consider essential? Community survey with rankings and trade-offs	2027
3	What would people support at different costs? The same survey, with cost levels built in	2027
4	What do officers think the work needs? Conversations with department staff	2027
5	What are the exact legal steps? Written questions to Town counsel	Fall 2026
6	Would a larger department need different space? Facility options, including space shared with other Town services	2027
7	What would each direction mean for households? One set of numbers on current grand lists, published once	Late 2027

From facts to a decision

The path runs from facts, to residents, to a decision, in that order



Selectboard checkpoints: Oct 12, 2026, discuss the plan. Nov 9, 2026, choose the timing.
March 2027, article on using the Australian ballot. Fall 2027, options and neutral ballot language.

The Town will look for grant funding to bring in an outside partner for the survey and community outreach.

Timing the vote

I'm recommending the Board take the time. A choice about the kind of service Bristol has will last for years, and it should rest on facts residents can see and check.

Three ways to time the vote. A Selectboard choice is proposed for November 9.

Color shows the trade-off: green helps an informed decision, amber is a cost, red is a weak point.

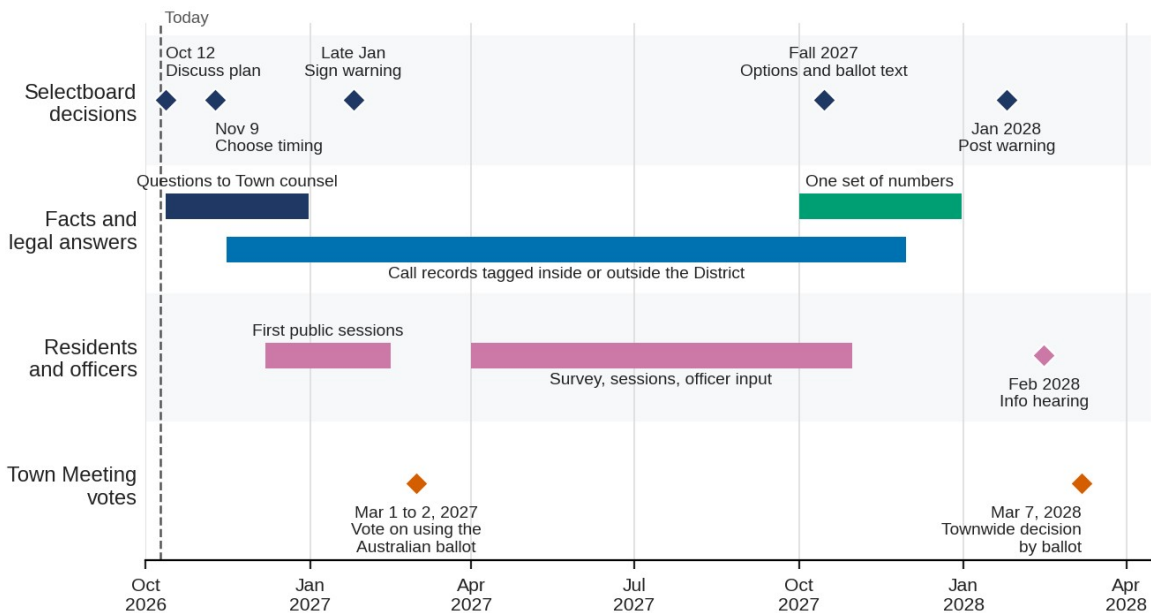
	A. March 2027 floor vote	B. March 2027 Australian ballot	C. March 2028 Australian ballot (proposed)
Who can take part	Those at the Monday floor meeting	All voters, polls open all day	All voters, polls open all day
Extra meeting needed	None	Special Town meeting by mid-December	None. The ballot is adopted at 2027 Town Meeting.
Call data in hand	A few months, location still being worked out	A few months, location still being worked out	A full year, tagged inside or outside
Resident input	Little before the warning is signed	Little before the warning is signed	Survey and sessions across town
Legal answers	Close to the warning deadline	Needed by December	Settled before any warning
Earliest change on tax bills	2028 to 2029 fiscal year	2028 to 2029 fiscal year	2029 to 2030 fiscal year, one year later

A recent example. In March 2026, Bradford voters turned down a plan to double the size of their department, 113 to 72. Reported concerns included the cost, an unclear plan, and whether some of the money would be better spent on mental health response. Some voters abstained because they felt they didn't have enough information.

The proposed timeline

Proposed timeline: facts and resident input come before a townwide vote in March 2028

Proposed to the Selectboard, which would set the timing on November 9. Later dates may shift.



If voters approve a change in March 2028, it would likely reach tax bills no earlier than the 2029 to 2030 fiscal year.

Key dates

When	What happens
Oct 12, 2026	Selectboard discusses this guide and the work plan
Nov 9, 2026	Selectboard chooses the timing of the vote (proposed date)
Mar 1 to 2, 2027	Town Meeting. Report on what has been learned. Vote on using the Australian ballot for this question.
Mar 7, 2028	Townwide decision by Australian ballot, if the Board chooses timing C

Common questions

Question	Answer
Is the Town delaying the decision?	No. The work starts now. Town Meeting in 2027 hears what has been learned and votes on how the decision will be made.
Will taxes go down inside the District?	That can't be promised. A townwide department would likely look different from today's. Households outside the District would pay more under any townwide option.
Why not vote by ballot in March 2027?	State law requires an earlier vote to adopt the Australian ballot for a question (17 V.S.A. 2680). Doing that in time would take a special Town meeting by mid-December, before the facts are in.
Does that article need a petition?	No. The Selectboard can warn it. Town counsel is being asked to confirm each legal step.

Question	Answer
What happens in the meantime?	Service continues as it is today, and District voters still approve the budget each March.
Is the Town taking a side?	No. State law requires a neutral warning and ballot (17 V.S.A. 2666). The Town's role is to gather information and explain it.

How to take part

- Attend Selectboard meetings. The topic will be on warned agendas, starting October 12.
- Come to a public session. At least one will be aimed at people who live outside the District.
- Answer the community survey when it is released, and encourage your neighbors to answer it too.
- Send questions or comments to townadmin@bristolvt.org or call (802) 453-2410, ext. 1.

The goal is to hear from as much of Bristol as possible, including people who don't usually come to meetings. I'll post updates as each step is completed.

Greg Faust

Town Administrator, Town of Bristol

Sources: Town charter, 24 V.S.A. Appendix, chapter 108, section 701 (1995 text on file); 17 V.S.A. sections 2666 and 2680. Town of Bristol 2026 Annual Meeting Warning. District FY2027 budget. FY2026 grand lists (District share 41.0 percent). Addison Independent, "Bristol asks residents about police coverage" (October 17, 2019) and "Bristol Police District Expansion Reshelfed" (October 2019). Valley News, "Bradford rejects police expansion" (March 2, 2026). Bristol Police Department call records, 2022 to 2025. Town review of the current labor agreement and regional departments, October 2026.