

## SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER

On February 29, 2008, the Colts Neck Township Committee was first contacted by Freehold Regional High School District Superintendent, Dr. James Wasser, about the possibility of placing a School Resource Officer (SRO) at Colts Neck High School (CNHS). According to Dr. Wasser, three Regional High Schools—Howell, Manalapan and Marlboro—have an SRO, while Colts Neck, Freehold Borough and Freehold Township do not. Dr. Wasser further advised that the Regional District would provide \$20,000 to offset the costs of such an officer, with a commitment of only one year.

Since February, the Colts Neck Township Committee has been reviewing the SRO position and doing its due diligence to determine whether or not to proceed with this position, as proposed by the Regional School Board.

This review has included presentations or comments by Dr. Wasser; Regional Board Member, Chris Placitella; Colts Neck High School Principal, Keith Land; Retired Lt. Colonel, James Sfayer; and members of the CNHS PTO. The Township Committee has also reviewed various documents outlining the concept and duties of an SRO; met with Colts Neck Police Chief, Kevin Sauter; and listened very carefully to Township residents both in favor and opposed to this position.

The Township Committee has also listened to sentiments voiced by CNHS students at Student Government Day. The Township Committee has further directed the Township Administrator to conduct a random survey of area high schools to determine which schools do and which do not have an SRO. This survey revealed that about 50 percent of area high schools have an SRO. Some expressed that current negotiations were underway about establishing fairer cost sharing arrangements.

After reviewing all comments, documents and basic facts in this regard, the Township Committee has decided not to proceed with the SRO position as currently proposed by the Regional Board of Education at this time.

Residents are advised of the following reasons in support of this decision:

- As residents are aware, there are currently two security guards employed at CNHS and the Colts Neck Police do a walk through of the school every day. There are, on average, 100 police calls initiated during the school

year, or less than one per day. The Colts Neck Police Department responds very quickly to emergency calls, when needed. This level of service seems to have worked well for the last several years.

- The funding proposed by the Regional School Board is not even close to equitable. A one year only funding offer of \$20,000 indicates both a lack of commitment and the low priority given this position by the Regional Board of Education. A senior Township police officer would cost the Township over \$100,000 per year, while even a second year officer would cost over \$65,000, based on 2009 salaries and benefits. Of course, these figures would increase every year thereafter. This is not equitable funding.
- Colts Neck has some 627 students out of a total student enrollment of 1,742 (or 36%) at the High School, yet Colts Neck taxpayers would be required to pay the full cost of an SRO. This is not equitable funding.
- Colts Neck residents already pay over ten percent of the total Regional budget, while having just over five percent of the total regional student population. Adding another unfair tax burden to Colts Neck taxpayers is not equitable funding.

In many ways, the Township Committee believes those in favor of this position are at the wrong place. The actual need, benefits and duties of an SRO beyond the current level of services at the High School needs to be more thoroughly documented and demonstrated by the Regional Board of Education. Equally important, the Regional Board must prove its commitment to an SRO by entering into much more serious discussions about an equitable and multi-year cost sharing arrangement with its constituent towns. Should these basic issues be satisfied by the Regional Board, the Colts Neck Township Committee remains open minded to future discussions.

Thank you very much.

