Report critical of Gilmanton police chief’s leadership

Assessment:

Municipal Resources Inc. completed the study in response to ongoing disputes between police chief and selectmen.

By BEA LEWIS

Union Leader Correspondent

GILMANTON — An operational assessment of the Gilmanton Police Department has been finished and a redacted version has been released to the public.

The redacted version of the 70-page report completed in March by Municipal Resources Inc. of Meredith, was posted on the town’s website last week. In a letter accompanying the report, Town Administrator Patrick Bore said MRI would give a presentation on its findings during the selectmen’s meeting Monday and take questions from the public and the board.

In February 2018, Chief Matt Currier sued the town to bar selectmen from imposing a series of directives on staffing levels, lengths of shifts, use of cruisers and when officers might travel out of town. Currier said selectmen were exceeding their authority and trying to micromanage.

Among the deficiencies identified in the report were Currier’s failure to conduct background checks of prospect officers, instead accepting the outcomes of investigations conducted by a candidate’s prior police department.

“MRI concludes that these findings are extremely problematic, not in adherence to existing Gilmanton directives or rules of the NH Police Standard and Training Council and create significant risk exposure for the Town of Gilmanton. In MRI’s opinion, a comprehensive, well documented background investigation is the single most important component of a selection and hiring process.”

The report further faults Currier for denying selectmen unrestricted access to the completed background reports.

Currier said he didn’t wish to comment when contacted prior to the meeting.

“We prefer to continue a constructive dialogue directly with the town on moving forward from here,” said Currier’s Attorney Ed Philpot of Laconia.

In his lawsuit, Currier claimed providing selectmen with the background checks would subject confidential employee information to possible release.

Philpot says the directives selectmen want to impose are “politically motivated” and told the judge that Selectman Marshall Bishop, who is named in the suit, has a long and acrimonious history involving a
lawsuit with the chief’s parents, Brett and Brenda Currier.

On Dec. 20, the couple filed a $3 million lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Concord, alleging selectmen and other town officials have slandered them.

At issue in Chief Currier’s suit are state laws that effectively separate a municipality’s legislative and executive powers once a police chief is appointed.

In granting Chief Currier a temporary restraining order, a judge said selectmen retain the power of the purse and the authority to appoint officers, and that police may enforce the laws “free from arbitrary political differences.”

Philpot filed a motion for contempt after the town’s law firm contracted with MRI to do the assessment, arguing that by initiating the study, selectmen were sidestepping the court order.

In December the parties agreed to a 60-day cooling off period and the chief said he would cooperate with MRI.

Selectmen pledged that they would not attempt to enforce the directives. Currier agreed to follow department policies.

The town administrator’s letter says selectmen asked that the report be disclosed and encouraged residents to read it.

In redacting the report, Bore said, town counsel focused on sensitive personnel information and the disclosure of information which could jeopardize officer safety or be used to evade law enforcement efforts.