

SOUTHAMPTON

Report cites police excess

Analysis of department finds few controls on overtime spending

BY VERA CHINESE
vera.chinese@newsday.com

The Southampton Village Police Department has few controls on overtime spending and receives no “tangible impact” from the officer it assigned to a regional drug task force, according to a newly released department operations report.

The 66-page report commissioned by the village said the department “provides quality policing” for the village, but outlined several areas for improvement including overtime spending, shift schedule management and the department’s off-duty employment policy. It will be up to the five-member village board to decide which recommendations to implement and how.

“We clearly need to improve our village police department by curtailing all the waste, nepotism and mismanagement,” said Village Mayor Jesse Warren. “That will make our village even safer.”

The village paid the consulting firm owned by Edmund Hartnett, a former New York Police Department deputy chief and former Commissioner of the Yonkers Police Department, \$40,000 to complete the report. The study, released Friday, is separate from the state-mandated police reform initiative and looked at spending and management in the 33-member department.

Chief Thomas Cummings said in a statement that it is “clear that some conclusions

reached in the report are simply wrong,” but said a report from an experienced professional like Hartnett “should and will be accepted as a constructive process.” He declined to elaborate.

Southampton Village hired Chief Cumming’s son, Thomas Cummings Jr., as a police officer in 2019, despite a village ethics code that bars an employee from supervising a relative.

PBA president Michael Horstman in a statement said the report was a “clear attempt by the Mayor to distract the voters” during an election year.

Warren and the PBA have clashed before with the union passing a vote of no confidence against the mayor last summer. Signs reading “Save Our Police Southampton Village in Crisis” popped up in the village last week.

An analysis of overtime “re-

vealed excessive expenses and few controls in place,” the report states. The village police department spent \$459,000 on overtime in 2020 or 7.4% of its budget, which is higher than the 5% the report recommends as a best practice.

The highest overtime spending was for communications and for officers on the Suffolk County District Attorney’s East End Drug Task Force. The study recommends village officials consider discontinuing membership on the task force.

“There were seemingly no violent crimes solved, no wanted suspects located, no local gangs dismantled, no tangible impact on local drug conditions and no apparent impact on the local opioid crisis,” the study states.

The officer assigned to the task force, who the report does not name, incurred 724 hours doing that work and earned more than \$80,000 in overtime.

“There appeared to be no oversight on these expenses and the investigator had essentially a ‘blank check’ to work overtime,” the report states.

The report criticizes the department’s off-duty employment policy as vague and recommends that secondary off-duty employment be prohibited in the village, and if possible, throughout Southampton Town. East End police officer often work lucrative private security jobs for the Hamptons’ wealthy residents.

It also said the department’s canine unit “seems to be a luxury that the Village cannot afford” and recommended asking the local school district to share in the cost of a school resource officer.

The department should also strive for more diversity in hiring as the last 10 new recruits were all white males, according to the report.

BALDWIN

Officials announce \$10M grant for downtown revitalization

BY JOHN ASBURY
john.asbury@newsday.com

Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul and Long Island officials announced the distribution of \$10 million Tuesday for a series of projects to revitalize downtown Baldwin.

Hochul, joined by Hempstead Town Supervisor Don Clavin and Nassau County Executive Laura Curran, announced plans for the projects, including a series of affordable apartments, mixed-use retail developments centered around the Baldwin LIRR Station and redoing Merrick Road.

State officials are moving forward on the project with the Town of Hempstead and Nassau County after struggling for the past 20 years to redevelop the downtown corridor around the train station and along Grand Avenue. Grand Avenue has been dormant with several shuttered businesses for years, only made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This grant will be where the rubber meets the road,” Curran said. “Let’s not blow it and let’s get this done.”

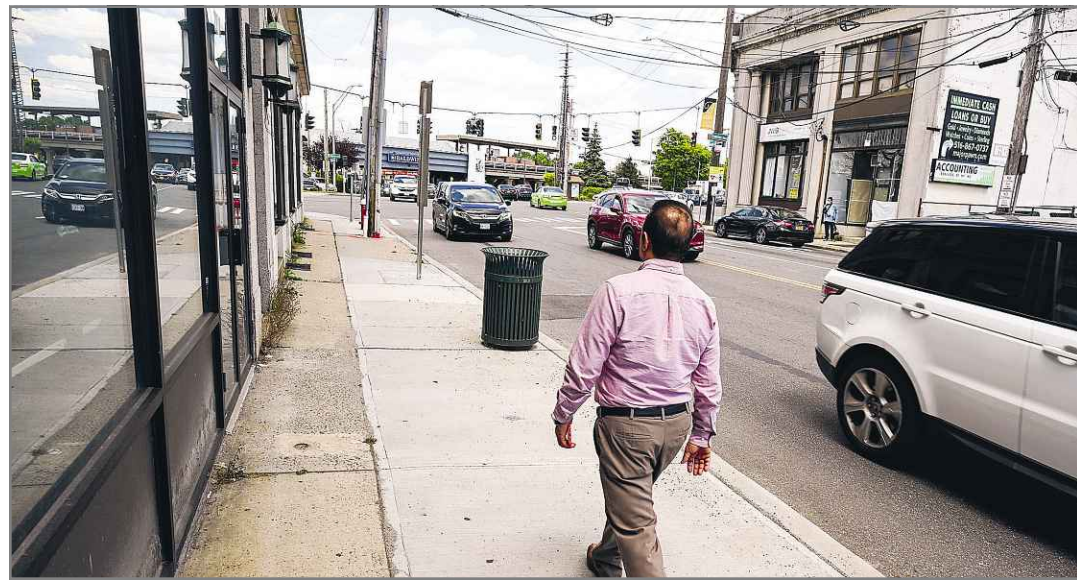
The governor’s office selected Baldwin to receive the \$10 million grant in an August 2019 competition with other communities. Previous Downtown Revitalization Initiative grants went to Westbury, Hicksville and Central Islip.

“We know we can do so much more when we’re rowing in the same direction and not fighting the currents,” Hochul said. “We need to see on the ground people roll up their sleeves, regardless of what part of the community they come from. We have to put Baldwin first. You told us what you want and shared your vision with us.”

The projects include \$2 million to redevelop a used car parking lot on Sunrise Highway into ground floor retail and restaurants with 200 upper level apartments and a pedestrian plaza.

Another project gives \$3.5 million to build a mixed-use seven-story building with 107 apartments and 24,000 square feet of commercial office space adjacent to the LIRR station.

Other plans include \$1 million to add 60 apartments and 7,800 square feet of commercial space



A state grant will help revamp downtown Baldwin around the LIRR train station and along Grand Avenue.

in three vacant buildings; \$850,000 to add four stories of affordable workforce housing at Baldwin Commons on Merrick Road and \$600,000 financial assistance to downtown property owners and small businesses.

The grant also calls for \$1.5 million to renovate Merrick Road to improve traffic and

pedestrian access between Harrison Avenue and Pershing Boulevard.

Clavin said the town’s grant came after numerous community meetings and working with the community to review 15 proposals.

“The people of Baldwin got it done during a pandemic,”

Clavin said. “Instead of losing \$10 million, they focused.”

State Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach) called it “a game changer for Baldwin.”

Association for A Better Long Island said the downtown grants made communities more consumer friendly and economically viable.