

The negotiations between the City of St. Croix Falls and the Village of Osceola regarding the potential combination of their police departments have encountered challenges. The St. Croix Falls City Council met on July 29, 2024, and discussed the unease felt about the merger, despite recognizing potential long-term benefits. The City proposed a structure of 11 officers for the combined department, aiming for efficiency and budget savings. However, the inclusion of a lieutenant position by Osceola's Board was unacceptable to St. Croix Falls, leading to a stalemate.

The St. Croix Falls City Council has decided to pause negotiations due to differences in department structure, unpreparedness for integration, and pending state funding. They have proposed an alternative solution, which can be considered until August 31, 2024. If this proposal is not accepted, the current interlocal agreement will terminate on September 30, 2024, requiring Osceola to find alternative law enforcement arrangements. The City of St. Croix Falls remains committed to mutual aid despite the potential end of the agreement.

Conceptual Proposal Summary:

Date: August 2, 2024

Subject: Proposal for Law Enforcement Services for the Village of Osceola under the City of St. Croix Falls Police Department

- 1. Service Provision: The City of St. Croix Falls will provide law enforcement services to the Village of Osceola, managed by the St. Croix Falls Police Chief and overseen by the St. Croix Falls Mayor and City Council.**
- 2. Co-brand Identity: A unified identity will be created, co-branding both municipalities under a name like "St. Croix Valley Police Department," while officially operating as the St. Croix Falls Police Department.**
- 3. Officer Hiring: Existing Osceola officers will be hired laterally under the St. Croix Falls labor contract, likely resulting in pay increases. They will be trained in St. Croix Falls' procedures and assigned ranks and duties by the Chief of Police.**
- 4. Service Contract: A comprehensive service contract will be developed, including budget creation, service provision, equipment maintenance and purchase, vehicle maintenance and replacement, storage, workspace, and training.**
- 5. Advisory Committee: An advisory committee will be established, with members chosen by the Osceola Village Board and including a St. Croix Falls City Council liaison. This committee will meet as needed to address issues, make recommendations, and advocate for Osceola.**



710 Highway 35, South
St. Croix Falls, WI 54024
(715) 483-3929 telephone
(715) 483-1618 fax
www.cityofstcroixfalls.com

August 2, 2024

Mr. Devin Swanberg
Village Administrator
Village of Osceola
P.O. Box 217
310 Chieftain Street
Osceola, WI 54020

RE: Potential Combined Police Department

Dear Devin:

I wanted to give you an update regarding the negotiations from the City of St. Croix Falls, but getting feedback from everyone has been challenging, so I apologize that this is delayed.

The City Council met on Monday, July 29, 2024, and was given an update on the negotiations for the potential combination of our two police departments. I have shared with you some of the uneasiness they have felt about the combining from the council, yet there was a sense that it could be an overall positive move and beneficial budgetarily and organizationally long term. The council and mayor feel strongly that the St. Croix Falls Police Department is a well-run, healthy organization, which has found its success via the leadership of the Police Chief with oversight from the City Council. Much of their apprehension has been letting go of the oversight of the department.

Entering into negotiations, the City of St. Croix Falls was upfront with its intentions that the structure of a combined department would include 11 officers, including a police chief, two sergeants, and an investigator as the most efficient way to deliver the police services and the coverage required by the two communities.

This was demonstrated through the proposed schedule and budget breakdown presented by the City from the beginning of the negotiations. The objective of this structure is to create efficiency and maintain coverage with the appropriate number of officers in the work rotation since one of the main goals of combining departments is to create budget savings.

I understood from our discussion last week that the Village of Osceola Board is committed to a lieutenant position in a combined department, which was reiterated by the board during the special meeting on July 18, 2024. This was not acceptable to the St. Croix Falls City Council and appears to create a stalemate.

At Monday's meeting, the consensus was that the St. Croix Falls City Council is no longer comfortable with the direction the negotiations have taken. They have been kept updated on the negotiations and have approved progress as presented, however, they see the recent changes to agreed-upon items as demands, not negotiations. Further, they see demands as a signal that future agreements should be viewed as fluid, and they are not comfortable with that outcome.

The St. Croix Falls City Council has decided to pause further discussion and negotiation of a combined department for the following reasons:

- Differences in the structure of the department.
Combining departments is a significant step in integrating administrative, budgeting, and organizational culture and it does not feel that the organizations are ready for this to occur.
- Potential funding from the State has not been finalized, and we may miss a significant opportunity to offset financial costs if we act prematurely.

Mayor Anderson and the council have discussed an alternative proposal that could integrate much of the work we have done to date in negotiations, but organizationally make things much less complicated and streamlined. I know, and they understand that it may not be popular with the Village of Osceola, but they offer it as a solution for you to consider. This proposal can be considered through August 31, 2024, and we are available to answer any questions. See the attached conceptual proposal draft.

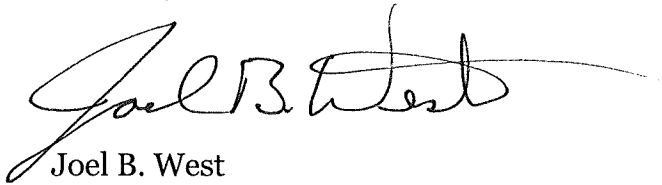
Should the Village decide to accept the proposal, we will work with our attorney to formalize a finalized agreement. Although there will be a lot of work to complete, I believe we could move forward faster than a combined department.

Alternatively, if the Village decides not to accept our proposal, the City of St. Croix Falls fully supports that decision; however, our existing City interlocal agreement would then terminate on September 30, 2024. Whether you decide to rebuild your department or reengage with the Polk County Sheriff, we sincerely hope that Osceola will maintain a safe and healthy law enforcement presence in the Village.

That being said, the current intergovernmental agreement was predicated on our two departments moving towards a combined department, and not as a permanent staffing solution to cover shifts. To maintain our department efficiently, we will need to review an exit strategy to disengage from the agreement within a reasonable amount of time. We will of course be available for mutual aid, per our existing mutual aid agreement.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel B. West". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joel B. West
City Administrator

Cc Mayor Kirk Anderson and City Council Members
Erin Murphy, Police Chief

Conceptual Proposal

August 2, 2024

Re: Proposal to provide Law Enforcement Services for the Village of Osceola under the City of St. Croix Falls Police Department.

1. The City of St. Croix Falls proposes to provide comprehensive law enforcement services in the Village of Osceola, Wisconsin under the authority of the City of St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin, and the management of St. Croix Falls Police Chief and being overseen by the St. Croix Falls Mayor and City Council.
2. To create unity between the two municipalities, the City of St. Croix Falls proposes to create a co-brand identity (similar to a D.B.A. for business) that identifies the Village of Osceola and the City of St. Croix Falls together, while officially “doing business as” the City of St. Croix Falls Police Department.
Example – St. Croix Valley Police Department.
3. The City of St. Croix Falls proposes to laterally hire existing officers from the Village of Osceola, Wisconsin Police Department under its existing labor contract, which would in most cases provide a pay increase to officers and allow them to negotiate together in 2025. Officers would be employees of the City of St. Croix Falls Police Department and their incoming ranks and assignments will be assigned by the Chief of Police. All new officers will go through a course on St. Croix Falls’ Standard Operating Procedures, policies, and protocols.
4. The City of St. Croix Falls proposes to utilize the previous documentation submitted to create a comprehensive service contract that will authorize the creation of an annual budget for services which will determine the services provided, schedules, maintenance of existing and purchase of new equipment, vehicle maintenance, ownership, and replacement, storage, workspace, training, etc.
5. To ensure an ongoing healthy relationship with the Village of Osceola, the City of St. Croix Falls proposes creating an advisory committee whose members are determined by the Village Board, consisting of one St. Croix Falls City Council member who would act as a liaison to the City of St. Croix Falls. They would meet as needed to advocate for the Village of Osceola, discuss any existing or potential issues, and make recommendations, and/or requests.

Note: This is a conceptual framework and proposal for discussion only.