

Mayor: Tim Smith

Ward 1: Timothy Hawkins

Ward 2: James Pelkey

Ward 3: Marie Besette

Ward 4: Michael McCarthy



Ward 5: Kate Laddison

Ward 6: Chad Spooner

Clerk/Treasurer: Curry Galloway

City Manager: Dominic Cloud

Like many others, I was shocked to learn of the accusations against Zachary Pigeon. On behalf of the St. Albans City Council I wish to convey our compassion for the alleged victim and a commitment to double down on our efforts to improve our police department. These allegations did not occur in the line of duty, but it is concerning to myself and the City Council that he could make it through our selection process. With that said, I stand by the Police Department; our officers are top notch individuals with deep commitments to our community.

Most candidates do not make it through our process. In addition to typical items like a resume, multiple interviews, and a thorough background check, it involves the following:

- Detailed personal history and questionnaire;
- Psychological test that screens for psychopathic tendencies;
- Interviews with individuals who have professional and personal relationships with the candidate;
- Polygraph that is administered by the State Police and asks invasive questions designed to test veracity and uncover lapses in judgment;
- Physical fitness test;
- Police Academy entrance exam;
- 21 week residential program at the Police Academy.

This process eliminates most of the general population. Anybody with high school or college drug experiences, DUIs, a bar fight, domestic unrest, perverse tendencies, and problems with anger management cannot be a police officer. Sometimes I wonder if we're screening out candidates with the empathy and life experience that could be good officers. And its deeply frustrating that a candidate can survive our recruitment gauntlet, only to embarrass the department with these allegations. Even with a hiring process that is far more rigorous than most, we will never know everything about everyone. We have had some tough months recently with some high profile mistakes by a few officers, but we cannot forget the other 27 who continue to do a tough job well.

Our department is not unique in this regard. All police departments struggle to find the balance between finding enough officers when unemployment is at historic lows; weeding out those who should not have a badge and a gun; and attracting candidates who can deploy the right mix of de-escalation techniques and physical force depending on the conditions. Our department, the State Police, and other municipal departments all follow similar protocols and standards. But the Pigeon allegations, on the heels of excessive force complaints, indicate that we need to take a look at the processes we use for recruiting, selecting, and training our officers. We owe it to the officers and the community as a whole to be humble enough to ask for help when we need it.

We ask a lot of our Chief and his team and they have delivered. They have transformed the department. What was once a small organization with insufficient resources to be effective in the face of the opiate epidemic and facing unsustainable cost increases, is now a regional police department that has decreased both drug crimes and the cost of services. The St. Albans Police Department is now recognized as a statewide leader in innovative and effective policing.

Now it's time to apply the same focus to our officer recruitment, selection, and training process that we have applied to the opiate crisis. Some of this work has already begun with new policies, training, and staffing related to de-escalation techniques and use of force. The Pigeon allegations indicate that we also need to increase the effectiveness of our recruitment and selection programs and ensure we are providing the training that reflects our values.

It's a tall order, and one where we will need some help from outside experts. I have asked the City Manager to assemble a team that can help us with this challenge. The department has enough on their plate with the day-to-day operations and this is an area where we can benefit from an outside perspective. Officer recruitment is a big piece of the puzzle, but I am also interested in continuing to make progress on community policing, on-going training for de-escalation and use of force, and strengthening the image of the department.

The City Council is committed to this effort and we need to be humble enough to ask for help to make sure our recruitment, selection, and management systems reflect our community values.

Tim Smith  
Mayor, City of St. Albans