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Keego explores options for law enforcement

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Police officers in Keego Harbor might be trading in blue uniforms for brown.

"Every possibility is on the table," Keego Harbor Mayor Sid Rubin said. "Talks are preliminary. We have to see what kind of response we get."

Former police chief Dennis Watkins left the city for another job months ago. Local officers applied for the job, but a volunteer panel of three area police chiefs advised Keego that none of the applicants was ready to take over the department,

The city is now seeking outside candidates and exploring the possibility of forging a partnership with an outside law enforcement agency.

"Right now, it is smart for every community to look at shared services," Keego Harbor City Councilman Robert Kalman said.

The city has a couple of options - merging its department of six full-time employees with another municipality or contracting with Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard.

"We never go in and seek business," Bouchard said. "We only respond if a community asks. We are typically 12 to 20 percent cheaper because we don't have all the overhead."

The sheriff's department provides services to 14 municipalities. With nearly 70,000 residents, the city of Rochester Hills has 60 deputies assigned to patrol its streets. On the other hand, Royal Oak Township's 2,662 citizens are served by four deputies, one of whom is a detective sergeant.

Mike McCabe, Oakland County undersheriff, said the county is able to save local governments money because it has central dispatch, records and command staff. As long as Keego Harbor's current officers pass a background check and other minimum requirements, they would be offered jobs should the city contract with the sheriff's department.

Bouchard said a community has never gone back to having its own police department because local communities are able to pick and choose the services they want.

"If a deputy isn't working out, we will arrange a transfer," he said. "That option isn't typically available to a local department."

The last community to contract the sheriff's department was Oxford Township seven years ago.