

## **Police Merger Study Could Be Done By Fall**

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MEDFORD -- A study weighing the benefits of merging the Medford and Medford Lakes police departments could be completed by the fall, according to municipal officials and the company commissioned to do the study.

Consultants from Millville-based Salmon Ventures have met with police officials twice since the end of May, touring both municipalities and reviewing data, including call volume and crime statistics that will be used to determine what costs could be saved by merging the two departments.

Mayor Paul Weiss said he expects an eight- to 10-week turnaround time on the study, meaning a report could be completed by late summer or early fall.

Public hearings will be held in both towns before a final report is issued, and Weiss said he expects to survey residents, as well.

Salmon CEO Kim Schalek Downs said that report could be released by October, but cautioned that deadline could change.

"Things are moving very smoothly so far," she said.

A series of public meetings will also be held on the issue before a final report is issued, officials have said.

The two municipalities will pay Salmon about \$29,500 for the study. The state Department of Community Affairs recently gave Medford Lakes a \$26,550 shared-services grant that would offset about 90 percent of that cost.

Weiss said the borough is reaching out to the DCA for the additional 10 percent -- about \$2,950 -- but said he's confident the two municipalities can cover the remainder if necessary.

Officials began looking at consolidation in January, when Medford approached Medford Lakes with a plan to absorb the borough's eight-member force.

But residents vehemently opposed that plan, and in March, council rejected it in favor of the feasibility study.

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