Keep Masontown Police: the case against disbanding

What the public record shows about response times, crime, cost, State Police staffing, and what happened in towns that gave up their police, ahead of the November 14 town hall and the November 24 council vote.

Compiled November 11, 2026 from public records and news reports. Every figure links to its source below.

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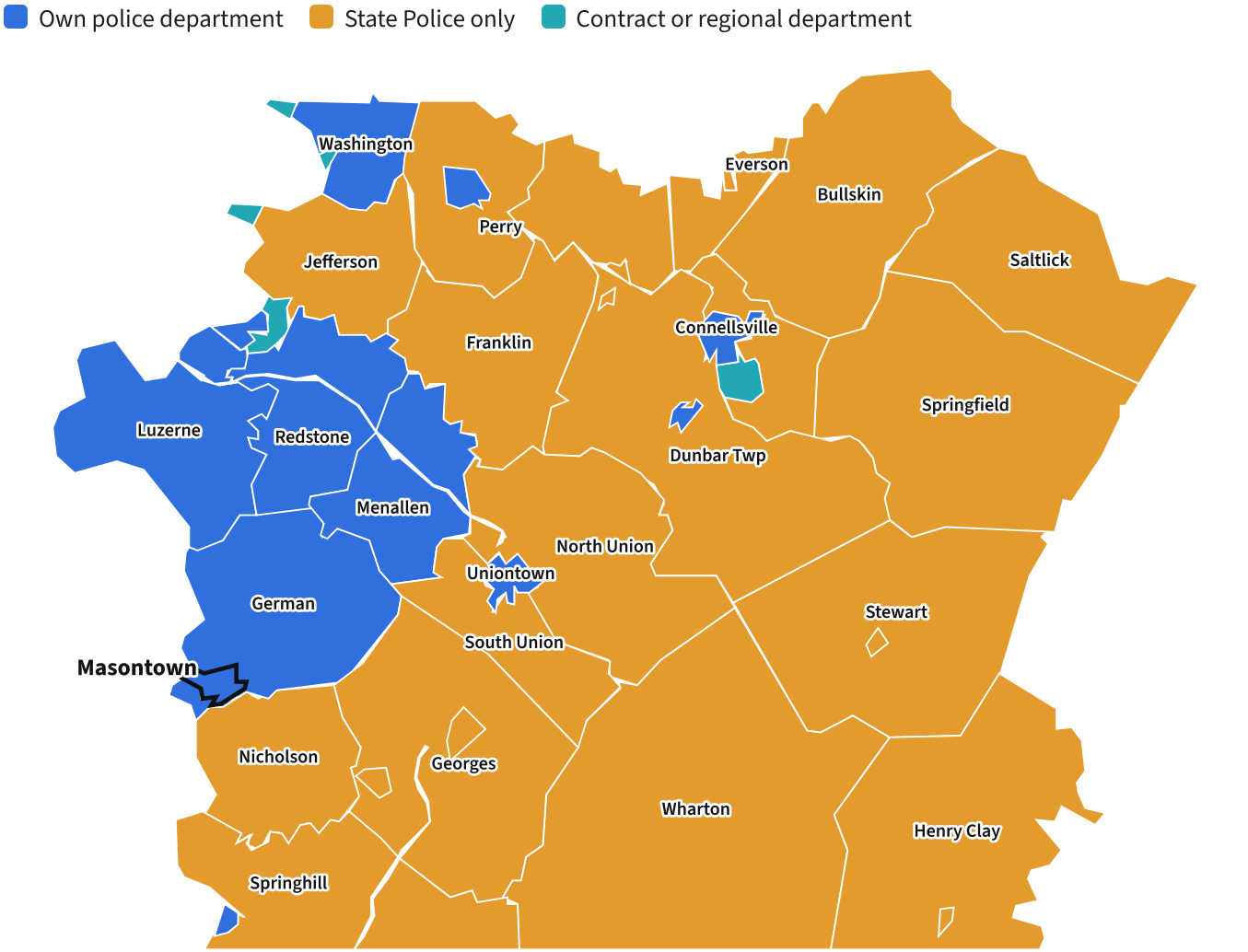
Town hall talking points

Town hall	Saturday, November 14, 2026, 4:00 PM
Final council vote	Tuesday, November 24, 2026
What is proposed	An ordinance to dissolve the Masontown Police Department (2 full-time and 4 to 6 part-time officers) and rely on the Pennsylvania State Police

1. Speed: the chief puts local response at 1 to 3 minutes. The State Police station at Lemont Furnace is about 17 road miles from the borough building, and the chief estimates State Police response at 30 to 40 minutes.
2. Crime is real here: Masontown's reported violent crime rate was above the state rate in both 2024 (416 vs 251 per 100,000) and 2025 (320 vs 229), per FBI data.
3. Our officers close cases: every violent offense the department reported in 2024 and 2025 was cleared, against 53 to 57 percent statewide. Property crime clearance ran 67 to 74 percent, against about 24 percent statewide.
4. It is not an expensive department: about $485,000 a year works out to roughly $148 per resident, about half the 2023 state average of $285 for a municipal department.
5. Troopers are already stretched: 210 vacancies statewide, 83 percent of Fayette County's land already on State Police only, plus Uniontown overnights since December 2025 and Everson since September 2026.
6. We would lose services the State Police do not provide: local ordinances, parking, and code enforcement, and a known local officer.
7. We could lose money too: the borough would stop qualifying for its share of State Police traffic fines, and a pending bill (HB 2284) would bill State Police-only towns per resident.

8. Towns that tried it came back: German Township next door rebuilt its department in 2017, and its officer helped stop the 2018 shooting at the Masontown magistrate's office.
9. The ask: table the ordinance, release the January 2026 response-time records, and study a contract or regional option first.

Who polices Fayette County today



Coverage (PCCD, Aug 2026)	Municipalities	Share
Own police department	13	Includes Masontown and Everson
State Police only	24	665 sq mi (83% of land), 73,879 people (57%)
Contract or regional	5	Southwest Regional, Washington Twp, Connellsville, Brownsville

Masontown is outlined. Everson is drawn as State Police because its department was suspended in September 2026, after this layer was last updated. Masontown would become the largest borough in the county relying only on the State

Police: its 3,270 residents outnumber the largest current State Police-only borough, Fairchance (1,879).

1. Response times

Source	Local police	State Police
Masontown Chief O'Barto, January 2026 (KDKA, WTAE, WPXI)	1 to 3 minutes	30 to 40 minutes (his estimate)
Resident at the January 10, 2026 council meeting (Herald-Standard)	About 3 minutes to a home invasion	About 40 minutes (her account)
East Pittsburgh 911 records after it disbanded (WTAE, 2019)	8 min 42 s average	11 min 16 s average, about 30% slower
Armstrong County officials (City & State PA, 2025)	10 minutes or less (regional)	20 to 45 minutes
Drive from PSP Uniontown station to Masontown borough building	Not applicable	About 17 miles, about 28 minutes at normal speed

The drive estimate is an OpenStreetMap routing estimate; a trooper on patrol may be closer or farther. The state's own Joint State Government Commission reported in June 2026 that as local departments close, troopers patrol larger areas and "can frequently be spread thin or have longer response times."

Not yet public. No Fayette County 911 response-time data for Masontown has been published. The State Police handled Masontown's calls from January 5 to January 10, 2026, when council briefly laid off the department, so county dispatch records for that week would show the actual State Police response times here.

2. Crime, arrests, and calls

Per 100,000 residents	Masontown 2024	PA 2024	Masontown 2025	PA 2025
Violent offenses	416	251	320	229
Property offenses	993	1,466	864	1,360
Arrests	1,857	2,234	1,248	2,113

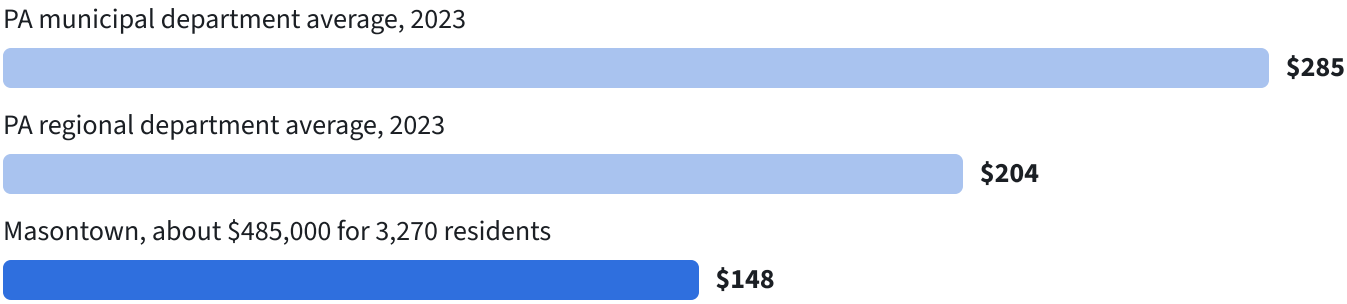
Share of offenses cleared	Masontown 2024	PA 2024	Masontown 2025	PA 2025
Violent	100% (13 of 13)	53%	100% (10 of 10)	57%
Property	74% (23 of 31)	23%	67% (18 of 27)	24%

Masontown PD made 58 arrests in 2024 and 39 in 2025. Preliminary 2026 data through August shows 55 arrests, 27 violent offenses, and 31 property offenses. Source: FBI Crime Data Explorer, agency PA0260500, refreshed October 2026.

- Counts are small, so rates swing from year to year; property crime runs below the state rate.
- Masontown's reporting was incomplete in 2021 to 2023, so those years are left out.
- Incidents the State Police handle inside the borough are counted under the State Police, not Masontown PD.
- Calls for service are not published anywhere; the department's monthly reports to council would show them.

> *"We have every type of crime that a major city has in our borough. We have homicides down to the smallest internet cryptocurrency cases."*
>
> Chief Thomas O'Barto, KDKA, January 2026

3. Cost, the stated reason, and lost services



Police cost per resident per year. State averages are from DCED; the Masontown figure divides the budget council cited by the 2020 population.

Police budget	About $485,000 a year (council president, January 2026)
Borough property tax	5.9264 mills, most of it going to police; the rest of the Albert Gallatin district averages 2.02 mills
Coverage funded	15 of the 21 weekly shifts needed for round-the-clock coverage; State Police Uniontown covers the rest
Stated goals	Cut 2027 property taxes 50 to 60 percent, eventually abolish them, and pay down about $3.9 million in authority and sewage debt

> *"We're spending $485,000. I want results. ... I don't feel $485,000 worth of value, and two traffic citations were written."*
>
> Council President John Stoffa, Herald-Standard and WTAE, January 2026

> *“This was not about money. Don't delude yourself to say it was, because it was funded, we have a surplus, we were moving forward.”*
>
> Chief Thomas O'Barto, WPXI, January 10, 2026

This is council's second try in 2026. The January layoff vote (6 to 1) was reversed 6 to 0 five days later after more than 60 residents packed the chamber and the District Attorney raised Sunshine Act concerns. On November 10, council advanced a dissolution ordinance over the District Attorney's objection.

Services the State Police do not provide

- Local ordinances: the State Police do not enforce them (Center for Rural Pennsylvania study; Shickshinny officials, 2014).
- Parking: troopers do not write local parking tickets (TribLIVE, citing a regionalization researcher).
- Code problems: German Township restarted its department partly to enforce ordinances on junk cars, high grass, and neglected properties.
- Community policing: officers who know the town (“we know who they call the bad eggs,” the chief told WTAE) and back up German Township under Masontown's mutual-aid ordinance.

4. State Police workload

Measure	Figure	Source
Troopers employed vs legal cap	More than 4,200 of 4,410	PSP spokesperson, Capital-Star, Aug 2026
Trooper vacancies statewide	210	PSP Lt. Col. King, House testimony, Aug 2026
PA jurisdictions on State Police only	1,313 of 2,558	Joint State Government Commission, June 2026
Municipalities added to full-time PSP since 2023	21	Capital-Star, Aug 2026
Growth 2001 to 2019	65 more towns, 38% more incidents	Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, via PSP testimony
Fayette State Police-only area	665 sq mi, 73,879 people	PCCD layer and Census, this report's map
Uniontown city overnight, 10:30 PM to 6:30 AM	PSP since Dec 2025	Herald-Standard, KDKA
Everson borough, full time	PSP Belle Vernon since Sept 2026	WPXI, Herald-Standard

The State Police do not publish how many troopers work out of the Uniontown station or how many are on a shift. In 2013 the state Office of Open Records ruled, on a request about this same Lemont Furnace barracks, that the number of

troopers assigned there must be released; at the time the agency acknowledged 16 vacancies there. A new Right-to-Know request can get the current figure.

> *"We anticipate having a large number of retirements at the beginning of next year, and we cannot fill those positions fast enough."*
>
> PSP Lt. Col. Christopher King, August 2026

5. Towns that tried it

Place	What happened	Outcome
German Township, Fayette (next door)	Disbanded in 1998; State Police for about 17 years, then Southwest Regional	Rebuilt its own department in 2017 with no tax increase; its officer stopped the 2018 Masontown magistrate office gunman alongside a wounded Masontown sergeant
Boswell, Somerset	About six years on State Police; council president said a break-in could wait "maybe a day"	Re-established its department in 2021 after crime rose
Shickshinny, Luzerne	10 months on State Police in 2014	Reinstated police; the mayor cited vandalism, break-ins, and meth
East Pittsburgh, Allegheny	Switched to State Police in Dec 2018	911 response time rose about 30%; officials discussed a regional force
Abbottstown, Adams	More than 20 years on State Police	Started a part-time local department in 2020 because residents asked for local coverage
Everson, Fayette	Suspended in Sept 2026 for lack of officers, not cost	Council says residents want police and is advertising to restaff
Sweden Township, Potter	Dropped police in 2024	Says State Police works well, but the barracks is less than a quarter mile away

The lesson. Once a department is gone, rebuilding takes years and hiring is hard: Everson could not find officers, and Councilwoman Nanette Cochrane warned in January that a disbanded department may be difficult to restore.

6. Alternatives to disbanding

- Contract with a neighbor, as Fayette City does with Washington Township and South Connellsville with Connellsville.
    - Masontown already has a 1990 mutual-aid ordinance with German Township, Uniontown, and Connellsville.

- Join or form a regional department. Southwest Regional already serves Belle Vernon and Newell.
    - DCED put regional departments at $204 per resident in 2023, about 30% below stand-alone departments.
- Ask DCED for a free regionalization feasibility study through its Governor's Center for Local Government Services.
    - Call 888-223-6837 or email RA-DCEDPublicSafety@pa.gov.
- PCCD Regional Policing Assistance Program: up to $200,000 to form a regional department, or $100,000 to join one.
    - Round 2 deadline January 7, 2027; Round 3 April 8, 2027, if funds remain.
- Reduce cost without dissolving: Councilwoman Cochrane suggested a smaller force and a smaller tax cut, or a ballot question.

7. Ripple effects

- Traffic fine revenue: State law shares State Police traffic fines with a town only if it has under 3,000 people or at least 40 hours a week of local police. With 3,270 residents and no police, Masontown would no longer qualify (42 Pa.C.S. 3571; PennDOT).
- A possible new bill: HB 2284 (Rep. Fleming, in committee since March 12, 2026) would charge State Police-only towns a per-resident fee. A town Masontown's size that keeps at least 80 hours of local patrol a week would be exempt. Earlier versions were proposed under Governors Ridge and Wolf.
- Local fines: citations written by borough officers bring revenue the State Police would not replace. The amount is not public.

No reliable source was found linking the loss of a local police department to homeowners insurance rates, property values, or business decisions in Pennsylvania, so this report makes no claim about them.

Data gaps and records requests

What is missing	How to get it
911 response times for Masontown, including State Police during January 5 to 10, 2026	Right-to-Know request to Fayette County for dispatch (CAD) logs with call, dispatch, and arrival times
Masontown PD calls for service, citations, and arrests, 2023 to 2026	Right-to-Know request to Masontown Borough for the monthly police reports given to council
Troopers assigned to the Uniontown station and current vacancies	Right-to-Know request to the State Police, citing the 2013 Open Records ruling on the same barracks
State Police incidents handled in Masontown and neighboring townships	Right-to-Know request to the State Police for incident counts by municipality
Line-item police budget, 2026 surplus, 2027 draft budget, fine and ordinance revenue	Right-to-Know request to Masontown Borough; DCED municipal annual audit reports

What is missing	How to get it
Effects on insurance, property values, and business	No study found; would need a local survey or insurer statements

Sources

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29. 42 Pa.C.S. 3571, Commonwealth portion of fines — PA General Assembly
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31. 2026-27 Regional Policing Assistance Program — PCCD, July 22, 2026
32. Police Services and regionalization help — PA DCED
33. Chapter A146: Intermunicipal Police Cooperation — Borough of Masontown code
34. Non-emergency police contacts (part-time departments backed by PSP) — Fayette County
35. Police Jurisdictions map — PCCD, Updated Aug 28, 2026
36. Fayette County municipal boundaries — PASDA, Feb 2026

This report draws only on public records, government data, and published news coverage. Map: PCCD Police Jurisdictions layer (Aug 28, 2026) and Fayette County GIS via PASDA (Feb 2026); for reference only, not a survey.