As I write my final report to the citizens of Lancaster, I can not help but to reflect upon my 37 years of service to this community. After much thought and deliberation, I have decided to retire from my position as your police chief, effective in June. I believe it was Mark Twain who said, “Find a job you love, and you’ll never work a day in your life”. Those words could not have been more fitting or more accurate when I describe my time here in Lancaster. I truly have loved being born and raised here and having the privilege to work for this police department. I came here almost directly after graduating Nashoba Regional High School and was appointed as a patrolman on December 21, 1984 by the Board of Selectmen. Ten years later in 1994 I was promoted to Sergeant and 20 years after that I was appointed as your police chief. Every step along the way has been an honor for me and I will truly miss coming to this building every day. I have been blessed to be a part of this community and I will take away a million wonderful memories.

2020 has been a year of unprecedented developments in law enforcement. It has been a struggle during these trying times to keep officers moral positive when it seems like our entire nation was joining the anti-police crusade. Couple that with COVID-19 restrictions, long hours of work, an increase in mental health related call volumes and it is a difficult and stressful work environment. Many officers across our country have struggled with these circumstances. Sick
time and health related problems have plagued our profession during this year. Many officers have left policing altogether across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Those that could retire, did so. Others changed to different professions to get out from under the law enforcement stigma. Our own elected officials at the State level hurried to pass legislation that completely dismantled the community policing philosophy and created a system that is nearly unsustainable. It will take years to implement properly and funding that has yet to be understood or allocated. Every police chief in the Commonwealth agreed that Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) were long overdue for Massachusetts. However, the manner in which these laws were passed were poorly planned and rushed without the time necessary to think them through or understand the ramifications. We have not even begun to scratch the surface on the magnitude in how these will affect municipalities as we move forward.

That being said, I would also like to say that despite the trends nationwide, and at our own Statehouse, things are different here. The residents of Lancaster have been nothing but overwhelmingly supportive during these unusual times. We have received so many letters of encouragement and support at our station over this past year. When times were at their overall worst, our residents were at their best. It is the reason we all enjoy working here and why none of us contemplated a career change or leaving this community.

Your police department underwent some major changes when the COVID-19 virus hit. We saw a nearly closed station environment here with only emergency and previously made appointments being allowed inside. Officers were required to wear masks and other protective equipment whenever contact was made with the public. We had numerous times where our station was completely closed while Serve Pro came in to deep clean the public areas of the building. Chief Hanson and his Firefighters played a pivotal role in keeping our police officers safe on countless exposures. It was crucial to not allow this virus to overwhelm the public safety elements of our town and we took every precaution necessary to ensure we remained on the job and available to our community.

The amount of License to Carry Applications we processed were unprecedented compared to previous years. We saw a shortage everywhere of firearms and ammunition at every supply store as our nation stockpiled everything they could purchase. These shortages have carried into 2021 and currently there is no end in sight.

Officers training all went to in house, as academies across Massachusetts closed their doors. We began bringing trainers into the building to conduct crucial police training as we were still mandated to complete in service training curriculum and keep all certifications current. I am happy to report at the time of this writing that every police officer in Lancaster is current in every training requirement and has also received numerous hours of de-escalation training in addition to all other requirements.
Officer Gary Henderson engaged in de-escalating training. Although deadly force is authorized the officer negotiates a peaceful resolve.

Officer Milletti starts a training scenario during de-escalation training.
Although the times called for everyone to social distance and stay apart, your police department and fire department joined forces numerous times to do parades and bring spirit to our community. We participated in many birthday and holiday celebrations!
Xmas Parade. Rick Piermarini of Ricky’s Towing donated his time and a flatbed to the Parade

The Police and Fire Chief prepare for the Christmas Parade
The Grinch and Santa took a moment to pose with Parade attendees!
We couldn’t resist the opportunity to “lock up” our Grinch and protect everyone’s Christmas!
Due to restrictions and safety precautions we also had to reduce the size of our typical Memorial Day Parade. Although no spectators were allowed to participate, nothing was going to stop the Lancaster Veterans on this day of remembrance! We were proud to be able to assist them in honoring the fallen.
Although we were seriously limited this year on how much contact we could have in the public, when we heard that the Lafferty Family was doing a fund raiser to help the Lancaster Fire Department, we were all in! Helping our brothers and sisters at LFD is reward enough, but when get refreshing lemonade too, it’s a win/win!!!
The face of your officers has certainly changed this year. It is a look that is necessary for everyone’s safety. Although no one likes wearing a mask in public, it is probably the single most important factor in stopping the spread of COVID-19.

Our calls for service in Lancaster continue to rise each year. This year we saw a drastic spike in mental health calls, overdoses and domestic complaints. We feel confident that many of these issues we are facing are directly related to the ripple effect the virus has caused. Many people have lost their jobs, their income and their security. It is a scary and uncertain time and those conditions often lead to the calls for service we are currently experiencing.

Due to many people working from home our traffic rates have been significantly reduced. This in turn, coupled with strict speed and traffic enforcement, has drastically reduced our accident rates. This is great news for auto insurance rates for Lancaster. This year we have
experienced only 161 accidents compared to 205 in 2019. This nearly 22% reduction should translate into insurance savings for all of our residents. Although our traffic citations were reduced this year much of that reduction has occurred because fewer people are using our roads. We continue to prioritize speeding and traffic complaints in Lancaster. If you are experiencing any of these issues on your street, please do not hesitate to give us a call. We will work with you to help get these problems rectified.

This year your officers arrested 110 people in Lancaster and issued 18 arrest warrants through the Clinton District Court. We served 28 Domestic Protection Orders in 2020 which was up significantly over the 16 the previous year. We had 506 reported offenses of other crimes in Town, 82 of which were felonies. We also answered 300 calls for service that were non-crime related (disabled motorist, missing persons, runaways, etc). Whenever your officers are not responding to calls for service or investigating previous calls, they are doing traffic enforcement. Lancaster currently has 75 road miles in town and there are typically two officers assigned to each tour of duty. Our calls for service come through the Nashoba Valley Regional Communication Center on Devens. As well as answering police related calls for service your officers also go on every Fire and Ambulance call as First Responders.

In closing I would like to thank the Lancaster Board of Selectmen, our Town Administrator Orlando Pacheco, and the Finance Committee for their unwavering support of public safety. To Chief Michael Hanson and Superintendent Kevin Bartlett, it has been an absolute pleasure serving our community with you both. Thank you for everything you’ve done over the past seven years to assist the police department. I would also like to recognize and thank my Administrative Assistant Robin Zagwyn for keeping things running smoothly in our building. My Command Staff of Sergeants who keep each tour working seamlessly and my patrol officers who do the boots on the ground workload. Lastly, I would like to thank my Lieutenant Everett Moody. We have agreed since day one on how to run a police department and shared a deep commitment to the community policing philosophy. I am only able to leave my department because of the confidence I have in you to continue on everything we started.

Respectfully,

Edwin H. Burgwinkel

Chief of Police