

Price County Law Enforcement Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: February 5, 2026

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Place: Courthouse County Board Room 101; 126 Cherry St; Phillips, WI 54555

Call to Order: Meeting called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Larry Palecek, Committee Chairperson.

Roll Call:

Members: Joe Baratka, Robert Kopisch, Larry Palecek, Dennis Wartgow

Members Excused: Patricia Stephan

Also Present: Brian Ernst, County Chairman; Robert Hahn, County Chief Deputy; Paula Houdek (remote), County Supervisor; Brian Schmidt, County Sheriff; Nick Trimner, County Administrator

Items For Discussion and Possible Action

1. **Public Comment:** Samantha Anderson, of Phillips, publicly commented on a non-agenda item.
Communications: None.
2. **Meeting Minutes – November 13, 2025:**
Motion Wartgow/Kopisch to approve the November 13, 2025, meeting minutes as presented.
Motion carried.
3. **Coroner – Department Report:** The Coroner's Report was presented and is on file. The Administration Committee will recommend the coroner's wages for the full board's consideration.
4. **District Attorney – Department Report:** There are no updates on recruitment or appointment from the Governor's Office for a Price County District Attorney (DA). There is currently an assistant DA.
5. **Clerk of Circuit Court – Department Report:** Higher than normal expenses are anticipated from the DA's Office. One case is looking to hire a special prosecutor. Another case may require hiring expensive translators. There is State legislation in the works for money to cover things like translation and additional costs that haven't been covered under the mandated service of the court system for a long time.
6. **Sheriff's Office – Department Report**
 - a. **New Ordinances**
 - i. **Dangerous Animal Household:** Proposal for a new ordinance entitled "Dangerous Animal Household," which would address the homeowners of animal(s) that are dangerous. The current ordinance addresses individual dangerous animals. The ordinance would have a citation amount, restriction requirements, a way to dispute the ordinance, and possible penalties. Discussion on whether the current ordinance for dangerous animals could be amended or if a new ordinance would be required.
Motion Kopisch/Wartgow to proceed with developing language to address the dangerous animal household issue and to incorporate it into the current ordinance.
Motion carried.
 - b. **Equipment Needs/Update:** The Sheriff's Department's tasers are approaching their end-of-life date, and parts needed for repair are only available second-hand from another agency or from resellers like eBay. The Sheriff currently uses taser twos and taser tens are the latest models available. Taser ten can be considered a firearm because it uses a primer, but it is a less-lethal firearm. Each taser is \$1,000; cost for taser ten equipment is \$80,000; total cost for tasers and the service agreement is around \$120,000. Looking at new tasers for the 2029 budget.
 - i. **Surplus Government Armor:** The Federal Government has a 1033 program through which the County can apply for military grade equipment to protect officers approaching

armed suspects. There is \$7,000 authorized for rifle armor in the Sheriff's 2026 budget, and the yearly cost for an MRAP, four-wheel drive, armored vehicle is \$250 plus maintenance. The department will continue researching the vehicle.

- c. **Staffing Update:** There is currently one deputy on deployment, one on maternity leave, one on medical leave, and there has been one open deputy position since October of 2025. There has been a decline in deputy applicants since roughly 2020. Discussion on incentivizing recruitment, reviewing deputy pay structure, and the current sponsorship program. There are two pending retirements in 2026.
- d. **Humane Officer / Animal Control:** The Price County Sheriff's Office Total Animal Control Law Incidents in 2025 were 437, 15% of the total law incidents, for 2025. Full report was presented and is on file.
- e. **K-9 Units:** Joe Janak, of the K-9 Unit, will retire in 2026, and Canine Dixon will retire as well. The Sheriff will select someone internally to fill and train for the position.
- f. **Rec Officer:** Full reports were presented and are on file for Boat Patrol, 2025; Snowmobile Patrol, 2024-2025 Season; and All-Terrain Vehicle Patrol, 2025. There were 123.5 total hours spent on Boat Patrol, 6 citations were issued, 20 warnings were issued, and there were 95 contacts/water safety inspections. There were 76.5 total hours spent on Snowmobile Patrol, 4 citations were issued, and 3 warnings were administered. There were 276 total hours spent on ATV Patrol, 16 citations were issued, and 21 warnings were administered.
- g. **Jail Update:** Clarification was presented in reference to misinformation spread about the Sheriff's Office holding an undocumented alien as an inmate in the Price County Jail. The individual is scheduled for a plea and sentencing hearing for his charges. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will not pick-up an individual like this until the case is adjudicated and the individual is released. ICE can issue a detainer requiring the Sheriff to hold the individual for 48 hours after his release, allowing time for ICE to pick up the individual. The Sheriff's Office is following the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution regarding Due Process of law; the Wisconsin Constitution; Wisconsin Statutes requiring bail bond be set to protect the victim; and the Victim's Bill of Rights, also found under Wisconsin Statutes, which protects the victim's right to have their case heard before a jury.
Due to a recent court ordered execution of judgement, property was seized, several abandoned vehicles were sent to auction and the impound lot is full. Some of the overfill went to the City of Phillips. Looking at expanding property for impound storage, as well as cameras, lights, and fences to secure the seized property. Legal counsel was consulted, ordinances and state statutes were followed, and paperwork was filed for the execution. Costs are recuperated from the auction process.
Discussion on the charges for the driver in the accident at Highway 111 and Highway 13. The attorney general is assisting with the prosecution on the case.

7. Committee Vouchers:

Motion Wartgow/Baratka to approve the Law Enforcement vouchers for \$38,321.92 in November 2025; \$52,971.96 in December 2025; and \$59,557.60 in January 2026; and to approve the COC, Coroner, DA vouchers for \$20,365.17 in November 2025; \$5,881.44 in December 2025; and \$14,327.01 in January 2026. Motion carried.

8. Date of Next Meeting: April 9, 2026. There will be no march meeting, unless necessary.

9. Adjourn: Meeting adjourned at 10:36 a.m. by Larry Palecek, Committee Chairperson.