Clawson votes to keep city police force

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To applause from residents, the City of Clawson voted Tuesday night to keep its police department rather than turn policing over to the Oakland County Sheriff's Department.

The City Council has wrestled with the decision for almost 13 months. Contracting with the Sheriff's Department for services would have saved at least $300,000 a year, according to Finance Director Mark Pollock.

The unanimous decision guaranteed the jobs of the city's 10 patrol officers, seven command officers and police chief, said Jon Reinhardt, president of Clawson's Patrol Officers Association. The department also has a dispatcher and a service aide who takes care of animal control.

Stunned and elated, Officer Robert Schriber watched the decision on public-access television at the department. "When they said it tonight, we were all just floored," he said.

Schriber had feared he would lose his pension if he transferred to the Sheriff's Department.

Clawson Mayor Lisa Dwyer said the city probably would not have seen the $300,000 savings because of likely arbitration and lawsuits from police unions after the attempt to turn services over to the Sheriff's Department. There also would be recall attempts from residents upset by the thought of losing the department, she said.

Councilman Kurt Hack estimated the city would still save about $200,000 a year under contracts approved Tuesday for the patrol and command officers' unions. The unions do not have to ratify the contracts.

For the 2004-2005 budget year, the city set aside about $2 million for the Police Department, Pollock said. But the city's $67 million budget is stretched too thin because of cuts in state revenue sharing and higher-than-expected health care costs. The fund balance, which stood at about $670,000, has been wiped out.

"If we don't fix the costs, they could arrive at infinity," Pollock said.

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