



MEMO

TO: Mayor Hoy and City Councilors

THROUGH: Keith Stahley
City Manager

FROM: Trevor Womack

DATE: October 25, 2023

SUBJECT: **Police Vacancies and Staffing**

In response to questions and discussion during the September 18, 2023, *City Council Work Session: Revised FY 2024 Budget*, I am providing an overview of police officer vacancies and staffing.

Vacancy Rate

Vacant positions are a normal factor in operating larger municipal police departments. With 200 police officer positions (all ranks) authorized in the FY 24 Budget, we anticipate regular vacancies as unexpected separations occur. Vacancies fluctuate based on the constant ebb and flow of separations and new hires.

A “normal” and tolerable vacancy rate is 5% or less, the equivalent of 10 or fewer sworn vacancies. This year, we are experiencing a 10% vacancy rate. This higher-than-normal rate is temporary, driven by increased attrition and decreased career interest—something being experienced by police agencies throughout Oregon and across the nation. However, we have increased our hiring rate which has allowed us to fill vacant police officer positions more quickly as they occur. Only three have remained vacant for more than six months. We anticipate reduced attrition and a lower vacancy rate next year.

Hiring Process

Vacancies must be present for active hiring to occur. The hiring process for a Police Officer takes 3-5 months, including background investigations and required evaluations. An opening must exist at the time of the eventual job offer. Cutting vacant positions or implementing “hiring freezes” interrupts this lengthy process and slows the system. Ramping the system back up takes months. Any pause in hiring quickly results in more vacancies due to normal attrition.

Eliminating Vacant Positions

Eliminating police positions, regardless of whether vacant or filled, will result in:

- Permanent service reductions by elimination of additional specialized positions, such as community policing officers and illegal narcotics investigators.
- Increased workload on existing staff which may increase attrition and vacancies and jeopardize officer safety.
- Reduced ability to implement findings and recommendations from the recent Community Engagement Assessment and Independent Staffing Analysis.

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Managing the Workload

With a high vacancy rate, the remaining workload is temporarily distributed and managed using overtime, deploying staff through longer 12-hour shifts, and underfilling specialized positions to ensure core patrol emergency service levels are met. For example, in anticipation of filling vacant positions, we have left several investigative positions unfilled this year to provide adequate patrol staffing. If vacancies are unfunded, those specialized positions must be permanently cut.

Patrol Shift Schedule

An efficiency measure recommended in the recent Independent Staffing Analysis involved consideration of moving from a 10-hour to a 12-hour patrol shift schedule. In collaboration with Salem Police Employee Union (SPEU), the Department instituted a 1-year, 12-hour shift pilot. That pilot is nearing completion and officers have overwhelmingly elected to return to 10-hour shifts for 2024. Work-life balance was a key factor in their desire to return to 10-hour shifts.