

From: [Brian Hines](#)
To: [CityRecorder](#)
Subject: Testimony for March 15 work session
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Please include this email in the public comments for the March 15 City Council work session on the Salem Police Department performance audit.

The consultants' report is nicely written and clearly laid out. But I've got some problems with it.

My main concern is on page 9:

Although a formal, detailed staffing analysis was not part of the scope of our assessment, we noted the number of sworn officers and the total number of SPD employees has not kept up with the growth of the city's population.

Well, I'd argue that not only wasn't a "formal, detailed staffing analysis" what the consulting firm was asked to do, there's no evidence that *any sort* of staffing analysis was requested by the City of Salem. Here's what the report says in that regard.

The City of Salem identified several community concerns involving the Salem Police Department (SPD). The City and the community want to understand how the SPD prepares for and interacts with unsheltered individuals and individuals experiencing behavioral health crises. Additionally, the City sought more information about the SPD's plans and responses to assemblies, permitted protests and demonstrations, and impromptu crowds.

Yet in several places through the report there are mentions of how a supposed lack of police officers makes it difficult for the Salem Police Department to perform various functions.

Logically, this makes no sense.

The report uses a very crude figure of police officers per 1,000 population as the basis for concluding that the SPD doesn't have enough officers.

This is akin to someone doing the same for dentists without asking some basic questions about the need for dentists in an area. Is the water supply fluoridated? What is the demand for various types of dental services?

I'm also reminded of how the State of Oregon reacted when I used my own money to buy a personal computer (Apple II+) in the 1980s to use in my work at the State Health Planning and Development Agency.

When I asked to have the agency purchase a personal computer, the State Information Technology folks said that centralized mainframe computers were what the state wanted agencies to use -- which turned out to be a stupendously shortsighted conclusion.

I mention this because determining how many police officers are needed in Salem depends on the desired future of the Salem Police Department, not the past.

In a Facebook comment on a post about the performance audit, Levi Herrera-Lopez made some excellent points.

In my opinion, the major findings of this report are that the SPD doesn't have a strategic plan; data collection is also very poor; SPD is not representative of the community so it needs to be more diverse; needs to improve it's relations with communities of color and the LGBTQ community; needs to improve; that their response to the protests was poor, specially in the beginning; and that the SRO [school resource officer] program was not following the national model, and was harmful to the relationship with the community. That's HUGE. So, people should engage still with City Council to make sure the report doesn't get dumbed down to "more police officers".

The performance audit makes dozens of specific recommendations regarding needed improvements in how the Salem Police Department functions.

So how is it that the consultants were able to conclude that the department needs more officers when so many inefficiencies and deficiencies are pointed out in their report?

Doesn't it make sense for the Salem Police Department to implement the report's recommendations, including development of a Strategic Plan, and only after that has been accomplished assess whether it has too few, too many, or just enough officers to carry out its mission?

Here's part of what the new Police Chief, Trevor Womack, said in a recent Salem City Club presentation -- an excerpt from my blog post about the talk.

Womack said that his assessment of the Salem Police Department (he's only been chief for about 90 days) will be informed by the performance audit requested by the City Council last year.

The questions he'll be asking include: What are we doing well? What could we do better? What should we stop doing?

He said that while it is likely the performance audit won't contain any surprises, there's value in having outside eyes take a look at the police department.

Womack will try to implement all of the performance audit recommendations.

Oa a related note, he said that a strategic plan will be worked on during the second half of 2021, with a completion date of January 2022.

He observed that sometimes process is more important than the outcome in such an effort. He'll be seeking input both from his officers and the community at large. Goals, objectives, and measurement

metrics will be part of the strategic plan.

Lastly, I found it strange that the performance audit report was so vague about a central concern of many people: whether Salem Police Department officers showed favoritism toward armed "militia" members during a curfew when Black Lives Matter protests were occurring in the downtown area.

The report says:

One stakeholder expressed concern that during a recent protest, some SPD officers told some protesters of color that they needed to leave the area but allowed protestors from alt-right movements to stay. They believe the police treated them differently because of their identity.

Latino community members echoed these concerns and expressed that SPD officers treat protesters from the Proud Boys and other white supremacist groups differently than protesters of color. We did not investigate these claims as part of our assessment; however, even the perception of this being true should concern the SPD.

Wow.

The consultants didn't investigate the claims of Proud Boy/white supremacist favoritism by Salem Police Department officers even though a video of this appearing to occur made national news and led to a lot of outrage here in Salem.

This deliberate oversight calls into question how rigorous the consultants were in assessing the performance of the SPD. And that mention of "even the perception of this being true" seems to show that the consultants didn't take seriously the concerns of people of color.

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