



Public Safety & Transportation Committee Report

City of Newton **In City Council**

Thursday, May 18, 2023

Present: Councilors Downs (Chair), Oliver, Lucas, Malakie, Bowman and Grossman

Absent: Councilors Lipof and Markiewicz

Also present: Councilors Wright, Albright and Greenberg

City staff: Superintendent George McMains and Matthew Tocchio, IT Director, Newton Police Department; Chief Greg Gentile and Assistant Chief Mike Bianchi, Newton Fire Department; Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer; Perry Rosenfield, Senior Financial Analyst; Connor Roach, Senior Financial Analyst and Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer

Others present: NewTV

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YKfHxIrTOk>

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#164-23

Appropriate \$1,500,000 for Fire Rescue Overtime

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend the sum of one million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000) from June 30, 2022 Certified Free Cash to Acct # 0121022-513010 Fire Rescue Overtime.

Action:

Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0

Note:

Chief Gentile and Ms. Lemieux joined the Committee.

Chief Gentile stated that this appropriation is for Fire Rescue Overtime to cover manning for the apparatus for the remainder of the fiscal year. Overtime happens when NFD responds to fires or other emergencies, but the bulk of this overtime request will be for minimum manning to staff the fire apparatus (engines, trucks, etc). There are three engine companies which require six personnel for nine months of the year and four personnel in January, February and March. Ladder companies and rescue companies need four personnel year-round. When NFD is fully staffed, we have four personnel assigned to each company. However, when someone is not working, whether short term, vacation, illness, long term injury or long-term sickness, that creates a vacancy on the apparatus for that shift, and that is filled with overtime.

Currently, the department has nine vacancies, which is why the overtime number is so high. It is challenging to fully staff the department. We can't know when someone will retire and when vacancies will be created. It can take up to 14 months to fill a vacancy from the time we know of an opening until a recruit is fully trained. The department has taken some steps to reduce vacancies. For example, the department has begun the interview process and the hiring process earlier. This fiscal year, we have a 5% increase in vacation time. We attribute that increase to the carryover of vacation time that was not taken in the height of the pandemic. We have seen a decrease in sick time, approximately 8%. We have taken steps to reign in excessive sick time use, we hope that's going to be a downward trend moving forward. We have seen an increase in overtime also with assisting the Dispatch Center with fire personnel.

Committee members questions, answers and comments:

I noticed three vacancies listed in the budget book. I heard you say nine vacancies. Where are those remaining six vacancies?

Chief Gentile answered that there are three vacancies since the budget book was printed. Five people entered the academy and were set to graduate last week but only two graduated.

In your letter, you reference eleven vacancies. I heard you say nine vacancies. Is nine normal?

Chief Gentile answered yes, nine vacancies is normal, we are down because two graduated last week. Currently, there are six candidates in the Springfield Fire Academy, graduating on June 9. That will lower the total number of vacancies to three.

The two individuals who did not graduate, are they welcome to reapply to the academy?

Chief Gentile answered no, they have to go back on the Civil Service list, and begin a new hiring process.

Can we assume people not hired, leave money in the budget that eventually converts to free cash which then covers overtime costs?

Ms. Lemieux answered that for any of the vacancies, those are always only in the budget for a step one firefighter. But the shifts are filled by more senior firefighters on overtime, who are more expensive. The funds for new recruit time doesn't go to free cash, those funds are used to defray overtime costs. We are hoping in the fall, we will be able to have a substantive discussion on overtime and staffing. A summer project goal is to complete a solid analysis of what's the right breakeven point. Years ago, the department had two extra people on each platoon that would cover shifts when people took time off. That eliminated some overtime spending. There are two issues: One, What's the right number of firefighters to have? Two, How do we ever get to that number and stay close to it?

In the future, I would like to discuss overtime and vacancies. The department expends a large amount in overtime funds and have difficulty hiring. We do ourselves a disservice by not budgeting for overtime and accepting a certain vacancy rate.

Without further discussion, Councilor Lucas made a motion to approve this appropriation. Committee members agreed 6-0.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#188-23 Appropriate \$640,000 for the Newton Police IT Department

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend the sum of six hundred forty thousand dollars (\$640,000) from June 30, 2022 Certified Free Cash to a Newton Police Department Capital Account to fund several technology initiatives, including a Storage Area Network and significant technology infrastructure improvements.

Action: Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0

Note: Superintendent McMains and Mr. Tocchio joined the Committee.

Superintendent McMains explained the breakdown of \$640,000.

\$375,000 is for a new Data Center and network infrastructure replacement. The data center is a very antiquated system and needs replacement. \$265,000 is for tablets for police cruisers. Tablets are typically replaced every five years. Part of our plan is to incorporate tablet renewal into our police cruiser budget.

Mr. Tocchio explained that the old data center serves the Police and Fire Departments and EMS. It is one piece of hardware without redundancy. If we have a failure, our Dispatch Center would be blind to everything from CAD, EMD, to notifying firefighters that are not on call that there is a fire. NPD needs a new redundant Data Center with a secure network. The department is not in compliance with certain Criminal Justice Information Systems.

The \$375K appropriation would allow us to create a network for the Police Department and a joint network for the Police and Fire Departments that would share the Data Center. The new equipment will last approximately five to six years, and add security from cybersecurity threats.

Cruiser tablets are used 24/7; they need to be better quality than consumer-grade tablets. The current tablets shut down when their cruiser is off, because the batteries are dead. You can no longer get parts for these tablets.

Committee members questions and answers:

Once replaced, what will happen to the current tablets?

Mr. Tocchio answered that the current tablets will be recycled and no longer used.

Without further discussion, Councilor Lucas made a motion to approve this appropriation. Committee members agreed 6-0.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#189-23

Appropriate \$250,000 for Police Patrol Overtime

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend the sum of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) of June 30, 2022 Certified Free Cash to Acct 0120103-513010 Police Patrol Overtime.

Action:

Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0

Note:

Superintendent McMains and Ms. Lemieux joined the Committee.

Superintended McMains stated that the appropriation would cover overtime expenses for FY23, ending July 31, 2023. NPD has a Lieutenant vacancy and a significant number of officers out injured on duty-- approximately ten over the year.

The Lieutenant vacancy has been difficult to fill due to civil service, and NPD has had to pay overtime to cover the post.

Part of the appropriation covers vacant crossing guard posts. The morning shift isn't an issue, because those posts start after patrol officers begin their shift. However, in the afternoon, officers who cover school posts without a crossing guard are forced to work an extra hour.

Part of the appropriation is to cover dispatch positions when we are below minimum staffing in the Dispatch Center.

Committee members questions, answers, suggestions, and comments:

The department has had vacant crossing guard positions for over a year. What is the department doing to recruit eleven vacant crossing guards?

Superintendent McMains answered that he is working with the Human Resources Department for assistance and placing ads. The department has posted on Facebook, Instagram, and other social media apps. Crossing guard turnover is immense and it remains a constant battle to fill positions. Crossing guards work 7 ½ hours per week; it does not appeal to people; the post does not have insurance benefits. Ms. Lemieux added crossing guards are part of a union that had not settled a contract since June 30, 2018. We settled this year through FY24. Currently crossing guard pay is about 15%, higher than it was in September 2022. Without a contract, there wasn't anything we could do about raising salaries.

Are crossing guards covered by workman's comp or a different insurance, if injured on the job?

Ms. Lemieux answered that crossing guards are not covered by worker's comp. In the past, the city has paid some deductibles or out-of-pocket costs.

Could parents be used to cover crossing guard posts?

Superintendent McMains answered that there has been discussion with the Human Resources Department on per diem crossing guards. Hopefully, it will come to fruition.

People may feel that if they aren't covered if injured on the job, they are putting themselves at unnecessary risk.

Per diem style crossing guards is the most movement I've heard in being creative and trying to fill these positions. We are missing the mark on how to structure these positions.

We have heard in the past, concerns about recruiting and filling positions. What is your outlook moving forward with the police profession. Where are we now and where are we headed?

Please continue working with the Human Resources Department to fill crossing guard vacancies.

Without further discussion, Councilor Bowman made a motion to approve this appropriation. The committee agreed 6-0.

The Committee adjourned at 9:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andreae Downs, Chair