



Public Safety & Transportation Committee

Budget Report

City of Newton

In City Council

Thursday, May 2, 2024

Present: Councilors Grossman (Chair), Downs, Greenberg, Lucas, Wright, Block, Bixby and Lipof

Also present: Councilors Albright and Malakie

City staff: Chief Greg Gentile and Assistant Chief Mike Bianchi, Newton Fire Department; Chief John Carmichael, Police 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=0YJHINIOjOA>

Please Note: The following information may be found in detail in the Budget materials on the City's website at the following link:

<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/comptroller/budget>

DEPARTMENT BUDGET & CIP DISCUSSIONS:

Fire Department

Police Department

Referred to Finance and Appropriate Committees

- #8-24** **Submittal of the FY2025 to FY2029 Capital Improvement Plan**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting the Fiscal Years 2025 to 2029 Capital Improvement Plan pursuant to section 5-3 of the Newton City Charter.
- #194-24** **Submittal of the FY2025-FY2029 Supplemental Capital Improvement**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting the FY25 – FY29 Supplemental Capital Improvement Plan.
- #195-24** **Submittal of the FY25 Municipal/School Operating Budget**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR submitting in accordance with Section 5-1 of the City of Newton Charter the FY25 Municipal/School Operating Budget, passage of which shall be

concurrent with the FY25-FY29 Capital Improvement Program (#8-24). EFFECTIVE DATE OF SUBMISSION 04/16/24; LAST DATE TO PASS THE BUDGET 05/31/24

Fire Department Budget

Note: Chief Gentile and Assistant Chief Bianchi joined the Committee.

FIRE DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL & STAFFING:

The Fire Department employs 207 full time employees (including four temporary Firefighters full time).

Chief Gentile stated that in 2023, the department responded to 10,950 calls, the highest number of calls the NFD has ever done, and 500 more calls than the previous calendar year. The department saw increases in EMS, suppressions, car accidents and fire alarm activations.

Building fires – In 2023, there were 16 structure fires including December 2023. This is an average number for the past several years. In the past five months, however, we've had 14 structure fires including 3 working fires, 5 second alarm fires, and 1 three alarm fire that happened last week. We have seen an increase in lithium ion batteries and lithium ion fires in Newton and across the nation. Lithium ion batteries are safe if used properly and if purchased in the correct place. One of the challenging things we've seen from the 14 structure fires is that there was not one common link. We initially thought lithium ion batteries was a good place to focus on because they're new and many people don't know the risks. Some of the other causes of the fires were smoking, overloaded electrical circuits and spontaneous combustion of oily rags.

These past 5 months are the busiest 5-month stretch found in the past 25 years. This profession remains unpredictable and it's incredibly important for us to stay ready. The department spends a tremendous amount of time and effort on training and preparing to be ready.

Apparatus – This summer, we anticipate receiving two new apparatus. First, Engine 7, will be replacing an old Engine 7 (2007) will be a spare replacing a current spare Engine (1999). New Ladder 3 is in the very early stages of design. That will be at least 2 years before it is delivered. The Current Ladder 3 (2009) will eventually be a spare when the new Ladder arrives.

Staffing – Typically, in the winter months, we do see an uptick in structure fires. It is common for cold weather to create some structure fires and issues, and it's difficult to fight a fire in icy conditions. That is where the winter staffing increase originally came from.

FIRE DEPARTMENT OUTCOMES AND STRATEGIES

Chief Gentile and Assistant Chief Bianchi addressed the departments outcomes and strategies for FY2025.

Outcome 1 - Provide Outstanding Emergency Response and Mitigation - This allows us to be ready and trained to put a fire out and be prepared to start search and rescues, a critical part of what the department does on a daily basis.

Outcome 2 - Prepare for Emergencies - We also have to stay ready for other types of incidents. The department has become part of the ASHER response team, and we continue to prepare and hope that day never happens.

Outcome 3 - Hire, Retain, Train and Provide for the Wellness of our Members - We focus on firefighter health. It makes it difficult to run the NFD when people aren't healthy, and it contributes to the overall safety. We provide cancer screening for any firefighter who's interested, and we provide nutritional training, which has been successful. Assistant Chief Bianchi added that they are in the process of hiring five recruits. It is hopeful they will enter the academy in mid-summer because the process is extremely long from when we begin to interview to background checks, medical exams and PAT testing.

Outcome 4 – Upgrade and Improve Fire Radio Frequencies

Questions, answers and comments:

What is the line item for Fire Department Damage Recovery Program, which is now zero? Assistant Chief Bianchi answered that the line item is for if our vehicles get in an accident the recovery for damaged vehicles will be placed in that account.

Due to our narrow streets, are you looking for smaller trucks? Assistant Chief Bianchi answered yes, it is our goal to keep in mind smaller trucks. We focused on this theory on Engine 7 and will continue on the proposed new ladder truck. Our focus was to see what we could do without sacrificing the length of the ladder and equipment on the truck. Even 6-8 inches makes a big difference.

It's wonderful to see the NFD has maintained its Class One Fire Rating.

Does NFD have information/pamphlets discussing fire prevention, fire awareness for residents and business owners on fire extinguishers and smoke alarms? Chief Gentile answered yes, a large part of the Fire Prevention Bureau's task is to provide information to those looking for information and the basics of fire safety. We can do a better job making sure people know to receive fire safety tips.

Through the spring, summer and fall we have community events. Will the NFD have a table with brochures, sample smoke alarms and sample fire extinguishers that folks could see to perhaps purchase later? Assistant Chief Bianchi answered in the distant past on village days we had an apparatus present with firefighters handing out information. It is a great idea to provide pamphlets.

What are the department's thoughts on development decisions the City has been making over the past several years? How does this influence your staffing, training needs and equipment? Chief Gentile answered that it starts early when we find out about a development, we look at the impact it's going to have on call volumes. It's a difficult task, but we do our best to come up on what the impacts may be. Currently, we're comfortable with the 10 apparatus we have but as these projects increase, call volumes also increase. We try to foresee the amount of runs that we will do because of these large developments. The Fire Prevention Bureau is important when it comes to these newer buildings, especially high rise or large capacity buildings, because it impacts the way we fight a fire. Sprinklers, standpipes, alarm systems and notification really become critical. We have increased our standpipe

and equipment trainings. It is necessary in large buildings for us to have an internal way of getting water to our lines to fight a fire.

In the future, please inform us of any budget implications the NFD may have as the City continues to receive proposals or special permits on large developments.

If the population in 2022 was approximately the same as 2023 why did the number of NFD calls increase? Chief Gentile answered that research was done to determine that, because it is something that we're trying to stay on top of on why call volumes increased by 500, a large jump. Universally, EMS, accidents and suppression calls rose which tells us that it's busier now.

Where is the line item for the EMS contract? Chief Gentile answered that Coastal Ambulance are at a zero bid. Coastal Ambulance provides us with four 24-hour ambulances, a 24-hour supervisor, and a 16-hour impact truck during the day. Coastal Ambulance does not charge the City. The City just renewed the contract for an additional two years. We work with a paramedic basic model of ambulance services, which has been very successful. Coastal Ambulance has been very receptive to the City's needs.

FIRE DEPARTMENT BUDGET FY2025

The following are significant line item changes to expenses in the budget:

- Fire Administration - \$38,620 increase
- Fire Rescue - \$523,858 increase
- Fire Prevention – \$33,203 decrease
- Fire Alarm Services – \$14,645 increase
- Fire Vehicle Maintenance - \$20,584 decrease
- Fire Communications - \$66,719 increase

GRANT, GIFT, REVOLVING FUND EXPENDITURE AUTHORIZATION

- State Regional HAZMAT Response Grant Program \$100,000
- Fire Department Damage Recovery Revolving \$100,000
- Fire Department Gifts \$10,000

	<u>NFD Responses per year</u>				
	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>
EMS Responses	4633	4554	5123	5190	4945
Suppression Responses	4917	4222	4409	5244	6005
Total	9550	8776	9532	10434	10950

Councilors thanked Chief Gentile, Assistant Chief Bianchi and the department for their incredible work, bravery and diligence.

Councilor Lucas made a motion to accept the Fire Department Budget. The Committee took a straw vote to accept the Fire Department budget of \$31,278,241, a 7.15% increase from FY2024, which passed unanimously. This year, there were no CIP projects for the Fire Department.

Police Department Budget

Note: Chief Carmichael, Chief Gentile, Mr. Yeo and Ms. Lemieux joined the Committee to discuss Police and Fire Communications (Dispatch) Bureau.

Chair Grossman stated that the most significant changes to the Police and Fire Departments' budgets this year relate to the topic of dispatch, impacting both departments.

Ms. Lemieux explained the global challenges faced with the dispatch staffing. She reviewed strategies employed in the past three years to improve staffing. She also addressed an interim strategy while the City continues to work on fully staffing dispatch, including what we expect for union involvement and how we envision this temporary solution ending.

Since the Mr. Floyd tragedy, over the past three years Police Departments across the country have had difficulty recruiting and the inability to hire qualified officers which has impacted our Dispatch Bureau. Dispatch has typically been a position of interest to two different categories of individuals. One category tends to be younger individuals who are hoping to get onto the Police or Fire Departments. The second category tends to be individuals that want to make dispatch their career. We have had challenges staffing in both categories. This is happening nationwide. There are very specific skills needed to be successful as a dispatcher; they must be "on" every minute of their shift. Oftentimes, when we are understaffed, we must force a second shift on our dispatchers. This means a 16 hour-shift, which takes a toll on people. Some people wash out through the training process, and some people do it for a few years before deciding it is too stressful. Dispatching is a very difficult job. It is necessary to find the correct candidates and be able to retain them. Even if we have great candidates, it's not unrealistic to think that several of them will wash out. Due to all these challenges we've had in the past three years, we have addressed the issues and given bonuses to all dispatchers thanking them for their dedication and work through the pandemic.

As an interim measure, we have entered into agreements for at least three years with the Police and Fire Unions to allow our personnel in those departments, if they are certified or trained, to take dispatch shifts on a voluntary basis. We have created a tiered system -- Tier 1 and Tier 2 dispatch employees. Tier 1 dispatchers are trained and can handle a station, but do not have all of the full capabilities and knowledge to be a Tier 2 dispatcher. A year ago, we reevaluated our dispatch pay scale hoping to attract good candidates. A full complement in the Dispatch Bureau is 24 dispatchers. Several months ago, we were on the verge of being as low as 14 dispatchers. Currently, we are at 17, a 25%+ decrease rate in dispatch. Dispatchers are part of the AFSCME 3092 bargaining unit along with many other City departments, which make it challenging when negotiating. AFSCME employees and the bargaining unit are the ones who own these dispatch jobs. Unions are very concerned about making

sure that we don't take away union work for unaffiliated people or that we don't take away union work from one and give to another.

Currently, we can train about two dispatchers at a time. It takes approximately four to six months to get someone fully trained. If we have six or eight vacancies, it would take two years to get eight people fully trained making us fully staffed assuming no retirements or resignations.

Several months ago, Chief Carmichael and Chief Gentile came to the Mayor proposing to use two dispatch consoles at Station 3, indicating we should staff the two consoles to handle fire and ambulance calls because we can't add more consoles to our current Dispatch Bureau at the Police Station.

Police Department Budget on Dispatch Bureau

We have budgeted for a full complement of 24 dispatchers. We will continue to try to fully staff the Dispatch Bureau with AFCSME employees. The proposal before you is a temporary proposal, meaning it could be for about five years. It will end either by us building a new Dispatch Bureau attracting more people, perhaps by us becoming a regional center, perhaps changes in the economy or society where people will want to be a dispatcher.

Fire Department Budget on Dispatch Bureau

We have budgeted for two dispatch positions at Station 3. The budget includes four FTE firefighters/dispatchers. For any of these FTE positions - which involves 7 days per week, 24 hours - it takes four bodies to fill that position. When it comes to calculating labor hours, it takes 4 FT people to fully-staff one console. The second console will be staffed by PT/OT labor. But that doesn't mean we will be as rigid, as to only allow people to work on one console and PT and labor to work on the other. There may be instances where two FT people are stationed on the consoles, or if a FT person goes on vacation, we may need to staff two PT/OT people on the consoles. When calculating the amount of labor it would take to staff two consoles for 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, we simply factored in 4 FT people are the equivalent of one console, and the PT/OT hours would cover the equivalent of the second console.

It is necessary to move forward and do whatever is in the best interest of the residents, the people who work here, and people traveling throughout the City. Safety is of the utmost importance. When we find the best solution, we will be able to afford it. We will not make decisions without involving AFSCME. We have made sure we've provided the funding even though we don't have all of the final answers.

Chief Carmichael stated that often times the dispatching profession will attract people who want to be police officers or firefighters, and they want to work in dispatch as a stepping stone. Newton is very fortunate to have the quality of dispatches we have, and they are absolutely amazing. When you call 911, you want that person to be very well trained and prepared to deal with the situation. Dispatchers are the nucleus of everything that happens as far as public safety in the City. It has been very difficult to recruit police officers and dispatchers. We've tried many different strategies. There's difficulty regarding the amount of people that we can train at one time, and we do have limitations in the facility. We make sure that we only have the highest standard of dispatchers. Some people get

weeded out and some think the job sounds good, but it ends up being too stressful for them. There's a lot of training and the job takes a unique person to do it successfully. In the interim, we've tried to supplement staffing using firefighters and police officers until we can get the dispatchers' numbers to 24. Currently, we have 17 dispatchers with some still in training. We also have 3 part-time dispatchers returning. When a police officer or a firefighter is in the room, there's only certain tasks that they can do. On the police side, that involves call taking and handling radios. Firefighters are handling the fire side. Dispatchers in Massachusetts have to have certain certifications including a 40-hour telecommunications training course, training in Criminal Justice Information Systems, training on how to run a plate, and how to run somebody for a warrant and to use the database for law enforcement. Training also includes suicide prevention, emergency medical dispatch, CPR, radio systems and the protocol the dispatcher takes. It takes approximately 6 months to train a dispatcher on the police side alone. It is more difficult to learn everything on the fire side. We are planning to negotiate and discuss with the unions on how to roll this out the correct way.

Chief Gentile stated that the Fire Department fully supports the Communications Bureau and will support them anyway possible allowing them to continue to do their job and do it well.

Questions, answers, comments and concerns:

Has the hiring flyer brought in any new candidates to the dispatch position? Chief Carmichael answered yes, some recruits. We've also used a consulting firm to help us create videos to attract qualified candidates. Many times even when we do recruitment campaigns, dispatchers have to be vetted the same as a police officer because they have to pass criminal background checks; they have access to law enforcement information. Sometimes we'll get a significant number of applicants, but there's mechanisms to weed some out because of their background checks. Sometimes, they don't make it through the extensive training.

What are the reasons why dispatchers leave after two or three years? Chief Carmichael answered that we've lost dispatchers through attending the fire or police academy and some just get burned out. It's a very stressful job. It takes a unique personality to do the job successfully. Thankfully, we're working on the facility to have more of a state of the art facility. A good work environment is very important.

The Dispatch Bureau feels like a classic HR problem for state and universities to tackle. Perhaps there are schools that would develop a major that would take on the job of attracting people to become dispatchers by providing courses.

If we become a regional dispatch center, would that alleviate staffing problems? Chief Carmichael answered that in Massachusetts, the PSAP (public safety answering point) 911 system has historically had almost every city and town across the state. For example, California, Texas and larger states have larger communications facilities. Massachusetts only began in the last 10 to 15 years, because there is still hesitancy. I have talked to Brookline, Belmont and Watertown and there is interest in it. There is money available from the state 911 system, so this could be a long range option.

Recently have there been more applicants for dispatch jobs than previously? Chief Carmichael answered no, there was an increase when we did recruitment campaigns. We do feel that we're going to be bringing in some good candidates. Again, it's the process and challenges. We do feel confident that we'll be able to get the recruitment numbers up and the staffing at some point, it's just been very slow for us to make that progress.

Is there anything the City Council can do to increase the number of trainees we can handle at one time? Chief Carmichael answered our limitation is the size of the facility. It is too small to fit more than a trainee and dispatcher.

Are dispatchers trained at the Police Station? Chief Carmichael answered yes.

Is increasing the training space on your list? Chief Carmichael answered yes, once we do any facility upgrades to the station, there is some thought that we could move the dispatch center out back enabling us to expand. Mr. Yeo added that the top priority of the project really is to create a new modern Dispatch Center. In the meantime, Commissioner Morse has been in discussions with Chief Carmichael discussing whether there is any temporary short term changes we could make to improve conditions and or training capabilities. We will continue to work on this short and long term.

If there's any temporary changes to the Dispatch Center, please let us know how we can help. Ms. Lemieux stressed the police facilities project stating that it is a major project, a significant capital investment. For the past three years, we have also asked isn't there something we can do to possibly train more than two people at a time? We have asked Commissioner Morse to look at the station to see if there is room for us to do something to improve the Dispatch Center for a couple million dollars within the confines of the building.

Is the budget for the overall police headquarters project a couple million dollars? Mr. Yeo answered that the project will require a debt exclusion override to fund. We are looking at the \$10 to \$15 million dollar range. There is good space in the back of the building enabling us to create a modern facility.

In terms of the dispatch, it seems sensible to combine the two and have them work together. Explain why the police and fire dispatch have been historically separate rather than one dispatch for all three services? Chief Carmichael answered that we have combined dispatch now, where you have a Dispatch Center that handle all police, fire and EMS dispatching. There are other models across the state. In some municipalities fire does the fire dispatch, the police do theirs, and one or the other does EMS. Chief Gentile added what we're proposing is to bring the dispatching to fire headquarters. Approximately 30 years ago, dispatching moved to a combined dispatch. There are many models, so we're just looking at a different model for a temporary measure to increase staffing.

If you move forward with this plan, will all of dispatch move to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC)? Chief Gentile answered no, only fire and EMS.

Does the call come into the police station? Chief Gentile answered yes, what's really important when they're not in the same room is communication. We must have a direct line of communication, both radio and verbally using our computer aided dispatch (CAD software). The link for all three of the areas of dispatch even when they're in the same room, is the computer. They're communicating through the computer system. That wouldn't change. Obviously, it has challenges not being in the same room, but those challenges would be met.

Why not move dispatch for all to the EOC space? Chief Gentile answered that the problem would not be corrected by moving police dispatch to the EOC. EOC space will help increase training for additional dispatchers.

When we're talking about training two new people at a time, is that two police dispatchers at a time? Chief Gentile answered yes, the only people we're using to dispatch is certified 911 dispatchers who work at the police station.

What is the dispatcher management structure? Ms. Lemieux answered that several months ago, City Council approved increasing the Fire Department's complement by four temporary positions, to bring new people in knowing that we have retirements coming to get firefighters trained, which is also a tremendous, long lead time. The temporary firefighters called fire/dispatchers are for those positions. At this time, there is some sense of sunseting of when we would have these people because the goal is to get ourselves back to a combined Dispatch Center.

Do we have fire dispatchers who sit in police headquarters? Chief Carmichael answered that we have combined dispatch. Physically they're in the police station building. We do it in the two tiers. There could be potentially somebody that might not make Tier 2 because of the recruitment process and the candidates we've been recruiting. We expect them to get through Tier 2, so they are completely trained in police and fire.

If you're not training, how many individuals are in the dispatch room at one time? Chief Carmichael answered that it depends on the time of day. Typically in a day shift, we have a minimum of four dispatchers who are trained in police, fire and EMS.

Do all dispatchers report to the Police Chief or do some report to the Fire Chief? Chief Carmichael answered that dispatchers report to him. We work with Chief Gentile on the fire side and EMS. Ms. Lemieux added that if we had all 24 dispatch positions filled, four AFSCME personnel would be dispatchers who report to the Bureau Captain and Chief Carmichael. The reason why police and fire personnel are working dispatch is because we don't have enough AFSCME personnel to handle the minimum staffing required to work the Dispatch Center.

Who will sit in the EOC? Would it be fire and EMS employees, not AFSCME employees? Ms. Lemieux answered fire employees during this temporary time, and they would report to fire. This will be done very closely working with both departments even if people technically report to fire or police.

Do we use a translation service when answering calls to determine what type of response is necessary? Chief Carmichael answered we have multilingual staff and services are available.

Does this budget reflect a fully staffed Dispatch Center? Ms. Lemieux answered that in the Police Department Personnel Detail under Communications Cost Center, page 33, you won't see all 24 positions, because two of those positions are grant funded. There are 22 positions on the list with several vacancies. When you look at the budget for the police, you'll see approximately \$150,000 for overtime because if we're fully staffed, people use vacation and sick time incurring overtime expenses. The budget was put together looking for a full complement. In the Fire Department Budget, under Fire Personnel Detail, under Communications Cost Center you will see four positions that are firefighter/dispatch with a significant increased overtime line item for firefighter positions that are also dispatch. One console would be covered by fire dispatch personnel, the other console would be covered by overtime and part time retirees. We have always budgeted for a full complement.

If the positions aren't filled, does that amount go to the rainy day fund or does it carry over to the next year's budget? Ms. Lemieux answered we never carry salary money over and it wouldn't go to the rainy day fund. It would drop to free cash.

The Police Department received approximately 40,000 calls and the Fire Department received approximately 10,000 calls for service. Are the 10,000 calls in addition or out of the 40,000 calls? Chief Carmichael answered the calls that are coming into the police station, may be either police or fire related. Many of the 10,000 calls are shared with the police.

It is concerning to hear that some of dispatchers have to work 16-hour shifts.

Is the compensation for a dispatcher set at a high-enough level to attract people to the job? Ms. Lemieux answered yes, approximately a year ago, compensation was reviewed, and the pay scale was significantly raised hoping people would work for the City. We have the highest compensated dispatchers in the surrounding area.

Rather than differentiating between police and fire dispatch, can they be joined in the future putting dispatch together? Chief Gentile answered that the dispatchers are able to do all the positions making it a joint Dispatch Center.

Please keep us apprised on how the Dispatch Center plays out, how it will come to fruition, problem areas and how the City Council may assist.

Councilors thanked Chief Carmichael, Chief Gentile and the Administration for this informative information on an important topic.

POLICE DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL & STAFFING:

The Police Department employs 192 full time employees and 56 part time employees.

Chair Carmichael stated that he has been the Police Chief for three years, and continues to be astounded by the level of professionalism and exemplary work staff does in the Police Department.

One of the most difficult things that I had to deal with this past year was the loss of one of our active officers, Captain Spalding. Captain Spalding applied for a grant called Dedication to Communities which we have received allowing us to begin a program of community policing initiatives, ability to train every officer, creating partnerships and allowing the community to see what the police do.

Newton is a safe City, but we still have our share of incidents and situations. Last year, we had some tragic, violent crimes occur.

Recognitions

Community policing initiatives, youth officers, Problem Oriented Policing Unit with our clinician and Sergeant Rooney addressing follow up visits for overdoses, drug issues and mental health crisis calls have all done a tremendous job. That unit has kicked off and has made great progress.

Community Resource Dog Leo graduated last week. Leo and Officer Lau attended training for 1 ½ years for Leo to become a Community Resource Dog.

The NPD was one of the first cities to be nationally accredited due to Captain Meade, Captain Devine and Officer Hill's hard dedication. This past year, we moved away from the national accreditation and focused more on the state accreditation, simply because of the Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST). When you look at the standards associated with it, we wanted something that was going to align with what Massachusetts is doing. When you're looking at national accreditation, there are other states that may be doing things a bit differently. We will be state accredited. All of our policies and procedures will align with what Massachusetts does and what POST requires us to do.

21st Century Policing was created during President Obama's Administration. The administration created this task force to review policing and found certain recommendations that Police Departments across the nation should do to be successful. When 21st Century Policing was created, there were six main pillars of policing that the task force felt Police Departments should achieve: 1) Building trust and police legitimacy, 2) Policy and oversight, 3) Social Media, 4) Technology 5) Training and Education and 6) Community Policing.

POLICE DEPARTMENT OUTCOMES AND STRATEGIES

Chief Carmichael addressed the departments outcomes and strategies for FY2025.

Outcome 1 Provide 21st Century Policing & Community Policing

Outcome 2 Support NPD Employees with Up-to-Date Facilities, Training, Equipment & Technology

Outcome 3 Focus on Recruiting, Hiring, Retention & Diversity

Outcome 4 Provide Transparency and Meet POST Standards

Questions, answers and comments:

Are you hiring all the parking control officers that you can? Chief Carmichael answered yes, we're trying. We run into the same issues with crossing guards, dispatchers and police officers. We are short five police officers and five that are in the Police Academy. It takes approximately six months to train a police officer. After the academy, it takes 12 weeks of field training. Recruitment has been very challenging, not unique to us, but because it's a situation that's experienced nationally. There is legislation filed to tighten Civil Service to assist with recruitment and access good candidates. We used to have several hundred people on our list for the City. The last couple of exams, we've had approximately 20-26 below where we need to be. Once we go through that list, we go on the statewide list, where you run into problems with them returning to their community. We're trying to do recruitment campaigns to attract people to take the exam, and to become police officers.

There was discussion about initiatives the department could take to reach out to the community, schools and churches.

How many officers are on the night shift and how does that number affect your ability to enforce the winter overnight parking ban? Chief Carmichael answered that it depends. Respectfully, he chose not to provide the number of officers on the road at one time. Due to staffing issues, there are times we are routinely running below what our staffing typically is, which is very challenging.

I've been interested in the winter overnight parking ban. At times individuals don't understand why the department can't implement a parking permit system. I've realized police time is more precious than ticketing cars.

I heard Police Departments are getting more recruits recently. Are we not seeing that in Massachusetts? Chief Carmichael answered that we are not seeing that in Massachusetts. There's many departments that chose to come out of Civil Service that are now waiting for the legislature to approve home rule petitions. Some police candidates are taking non Civil Service exams and are getting hired or they take both exams. Our last exam showed approximately 25 candidates taking the exam. With our past several hires, we've been able to diversify the department and we've been able to get some very strong candidates.

The inability of the off-leash animal control officer hired by the Parks and Rec Department to issue tickets to people who are in off leash areas where they shouldn't be is an issue. Please discuss with the police unions, to allow the officer to issue tickets; it would immensely help the whole City. Chief Carmichael answered one of the problems we've had with our animal control officer because we're stretched so thin it that is difficult to have somebody just concentrate on one thing like animal control. We are doing our best, but certainly willing to talk about how we can do better. We've also discussed if we could have two animal control officers by creating civilian animal control officers allowing us to free up officers so that they can perform community policing.

Does the department still hand out positive tickets for good behavior? Chief Carmichael answered yes, but not as many as he'd like.

Regarding Outcome 3, how is NPD working to have a more diverse Police Department? Chief Carmichael answered it is necessary to encourage the age cohorts that are eligible to become police officers to take the exam including those with a diverse background. Part of our recruitment process is to get that word out that NPD wants to be representative of the community. Due to Civil Service guidelines, we can only hire an officer from the top three people on the list. We have been discussing residency preference which would help.

I heard at the Dedication to Community Event, from two officers, that they are not welcome in the Newton schools. They have been told by teachers and principals to not wear their uniforms if they come to the school. Is this true? Chief Carmichael answered yes, one exemplary officer recently resigned due to this. Police officers wear uniforms. I intend to discuss my concerns with Superintendent Nolan. A Councilor stated that the Administration, Human Resources, Police Departments and Superintendent Nolan should address this issue.

Please explain why the officers were asked not to wear their uniforms. Do the school resource officers wear uniforms? Chief Carmichael answered yes, they wear a uniform but wear a much lower profile uniform. Many times, youth officers are in plainclothes. Our officers have been asked not to carry firearms, or some gear which are the tools of their trade. If you review the Newton Police Reform Task Force on what we do, people focus on the first half of that report. The second half of the report is what our police officers told us, how they feel, the respect level they feel, how they're welcomed and how they're looked at in the community. I always remind people that while the department is trying very hard to deal with all the recommendations from the Newton Police Reform Task Force as it relates to the police, there's a whole other side of how it relates to our officers.

Were these officers invited to school to address a certain topic or were they patrolling and just showed up? Chief Carmichael answered that one officer is a youth officer assigned to the schools.

Recently we discussed a Traffic Enforcement Division, specifically a motorcycle replacement program. Is that program and the funds to create the bureau in this budget? Chief Carmichael answered it is something that we want to review. The number one complaint received are traffic and speeding complaints, distracted and aggressive driving. The Traffic Bureau concentrates on many of these issues using directed patrols. It's not as effective as I would like it to be because we receive another call and must leave the area. Over the past several years, we have been trying to use the four motorcycles. I would like to budget to replace one new motorcycle each year using them for traffic enforcement. Motorcycles have the same equipment as a patrol vehicle.

Regarding the IT Department, do you have the funds necessary to address the issues and concerns? Chief Carmichael answered yes, some IT lines are in the CIP, and some are in the budget. IT Manager, Mr. Tocchio has done a phenomenal job dealing with our servers, telephones, radios and the entire IT infrastructure of the department. There's still plenty to do, but we're in a good place right now.

POLICE DEPARTMENT BUDGET FY2025

The following are significant line-item changes to expenses in the budget.

Police Admin/Support - \$21, 140 increase
Police Traffic Safety - \$184,595 increase
Police Patrol Services - \$179,519 increase
Police Investigations - \$34,170 increase
Police Vehicle Maintenance - \$50,000 increase

GRANT, GIFT, REVOLVING FUND EXPENDITURE AUTHORIZATION

Sale of Surplus Police Equipment Revolving \$150,000
Cops & Kids Program Gifts \$25,000
Federal Bullet Proof Vest Reimbursement Grant \$50,000
Federal Byrne Equipment Grant \$75,000
State Bullet Proof Vest Reimbursement Grant \$100,000
State Municipal Police Staffing Grant \$300,000
State SETB Dispatch Grant \$150,000
State E-911 Dispatch Grant \$550,000
State Pedestrian Safety Grant \$25,000
State Traffic Safety Grant \$300,000
Police Dept Damage Recovery Revolving \$100,000

Councilors thanked Chief Carmichael and the department for their diligence.

Councilor Lucas made a motion to approve the Police Department Budget. The Committee took a straw vote to approve the Police Department budget of \$27,051,270, a 3.74% increase from FY2024, which passed unanimously. This year, there were no CIP projects for the Police Department.

The Committee adjourned at 9:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Becky Grossman, Chair