

Discussion / Direction

of the Police Officer Recruitment and Retention Plan



City & Borough of Sitka
Police Department
304 Lake Street, Sitka, AK 99835
907-747-3245



Memorandum

January 17, 2019

To: Mayor Paxton and Assembly Members
Keith Brady, Municipal Administrator

From: Chief Jeff Ankerfelt

Date: January 16, 2019

Subject: Discussion / Direction of the Police Officer Recruitment and Retention Plan

Since 2016 the police department has been working hard to change from an agency focused solely on law enforcement to one that embodies the very best of Community Policing. To accomplish this, I and caring staff developed a strategic plan that emphasizes four strategies to improve public safety and the wellbeing of both our community and police employees. These strategies are, promoting *Community Engagement*, improving *Customer Service*, engaging in *Problem Solving* to and investing in the *Organizational Development* of the staff and facility. Great strides have been made in our effort change the organizational culture of the police department. We are evolving from an entity that has viewed itself as neglected and apart from the community, to one that is connected and provides a service experienced as legitimate and valued by all that we serve. While this evolution has been resisted by a few employees, most have contributed enthusiastically and are hopeful that they will see the "light at the end of the tunnel". One of our greatest and most costly struggles has been attracting and retaining good police officers.

It is the intent of this memorandum to provide a clear picture of the current recruitment and employee retention problems in police department and what I believe we need to do to adequately staff, recruit, and retain police officers. If the recommendations are adopted, I believe that we can attract and retain qualified police officers and improve public safety while simultaneously cutting the wasteful spending associated with employee turnover.

The number of officers that the Sitka police department is allowed to hire has been reduced over the years to 16. The number of police officers currently employed by SPD has fallen to 12 with only 10 officers capable of performing the duties of a police officer. 16 to 17 fully functional officers are needed to provide 24 hour patrol coverage and adequately investigate crimes without incurring overtime related to short shifts.

The departments history of chronic understaffing, poor working conditions, disconnected leadership, and the stressful nature of police work has led to burnout, fatigue related errors, illness, excessive overtime costs, and prohibitively expensive employee turnover. Since 2010, 32 police officers have



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been hired and then quit the police department. This has left the PD at given time, three to four officers below its authorized strength and a typical staffing level of about 12 officers. Most of those officers being new or in training. As of today, with two officers on administrative leave and one early retirement, the police department now has 10 police officers including the Chief.

I need to share a few facts about the challenges we are facing:

- The police department is allowed to hire 16 Police Officers. This number includes the Chief of Police. 15 of those officers are paid from the general fund and one officer, until 1/15/19, was funded by a federal justice assistance grant (JAG). As a result of our current staffing shortages, we have lost the opportunity to use a JAG grant fund to employ an officer for drug enforcement and a collaborative grant with the Sitka Tribe to improve our response to domestic violence. This is a loss of approximately \$200,000.00 per year.
- 16 employed, fully trained officers allows the PD to staff the patrol function, assign one officer to work criminal investigations, and one officer to investigate drug related crimes. At the moment, SPD can field a total of 10 police officers including the Chief. Two of the remaining 10 officers have accepted job offers from the Alaska State Troopers and are expected to leave SPD on/or about April 1st of 2019. Three more officers including myself are likely to leave Sitka PD before the end of the year. This would leave Sitka with a total of 5 officers, or less than 1/3 of the minimum number of police officers needed to provide service.
- Since 2010 SPD has suffered a consistent vacancy rate of three to four officers. With a long term average strength of only 12 officers and an average experience level of 1 to 3 years, our organizational capacity to deliver consistent service has been an insurmountable struggle. The financial and organizational cost of this kind of short staffing, turnover, and the constant need to hire and retrain has been staggering. For example, during the first year it costs \$143,571.20 in salary and benefits to hire, equip, and train a single police officer. It is important to understand that during this first year, a new officer is not contributing independently to the staffing level of the PD or to the service needed by the community. Below is a chart showing some of the first year costs related to hiring and training a new officer. Please note the overall cost of turnover since 2010. These are conservative figures that do not include things like the wages of supporting employees or the overtime required to fill vacant shifts.

First year cost of new police officer		
Testing	\$1500.00	This includes a written test, polygraph and Psychological exam. Does not include the \$1500 annual expense for advertising.
Moving Allowance	\$5000.00	Most new hires cannot afford the move to Sitka. A new officer submits receipts for moving related expenses.



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Equipment	\$2600.00	This includes uniforms, firearm, Bullet resistant vest and misc. equipment like handcuffs etc.	
Training Academy	\$12,500.00	The Alaska Police Standards Council no longer subsidizes the cost of the training academy. *does not include SPD field training officer pay. Trainers receive an extra \$2/hr.	
First year wages and Benefits	\$121,971.20 *does not include overtime	Calculated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step B @28.06 per hour • Midpoint leave accrual of 8.73 hours per pay period • Family medical coverage 	
TOTAL	\$143,571.20		
Cost of hiring 32 new officers since 2010.	\$143,571.20 x 32 Officers =	<u>\$ 4,594,278.40</u>	

Since 2010, our lack of staffing and the resulting need to fill empty shifts has come at great expense to our community in overtime pay. Below is a chart that shows our overtime costs for the past 5 years and an estimated total since 2010. Since the conditions have been the same since 2010, it is reasonable to speculate that the average annual overtime costs have been about \$300,000.00 per year.

Annual overtime costs for the past 5 years					
	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019 to date
Overtime	\$264,390.12	\$304,331.20	\$295,062.29	\$310,404.70	\$99,169.24
Double time	\$10,129.36	\$6,133.71	\$11,592.97	\$13,068.19	\$18,888.58
Total	\$274,519.48	\$310,464.91	\$306,655.26	\$323,472.89	\$118,057.82
Average annual cost of about \$300,000.00 since 2010.					
\$300,000 X 9 (years)=			<u>\$2,700,000.00</u>		

Since 2010, the financial impact associated with the loss of 32 officers and the associated overtime for filling short shifts has unnecessarily cost the community of Sitka nearly **\$7.3 million dollars.*



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We are facing a public safety crisis. The number of persons seeking a career in law enforcement has fallen to an historical low and the pool of qualified applicants is no longer large enough to meet demand. The reasons for this are many but include a greater awareness of the unappreciated sacrifices and uncompensated losses that they and their families will incur as a direct result of being a police officer. To meet their safety needs, communities across the United States have discovered the need to apply private market incentives and competitive pay to attract employees. In Alaska alone, the Alaska State Troopers (AST), Anchorage PD, Fairbanks PD, and others are aggressively marketing themselves to officers in other municipal police department. They are doing this with higher wages, signing bonuses, compressed wage scales, and better working conditions to include updated facilities. This competitiveness both in Alaska and with departments in the lower 48 has left Sitka vulnerable. As mentioned earlier, two excellent SPD officers are leaving to join the AST for better wages and working conditions in April of 2019.

Below is a chart depicting the pay disparity between SPD patrol officers and officers working for other law enforcement agencies in Alaska. The pay disparity is equally significant for officers that have been promoted to positions of greater responsibility like Sergeant and Lieutenant.

<i>WAGES</i>	<i>Current Sitka PD and (proposed)</i>	<i>Anchorage PD</i>	<i>Juneau PD</i>	<i>AK Troopers</i>
<i>Recruit with no previous experience</i>	\$27.38 <u>(\$33.00)</u>	\$33.61	\$30.15	\$32.56
<i>1-year experience</i>	\$28.06 <u>(\$35.00)</u>	\$33.11 \$34.77 after 16 months	\$31.20	\$35.05
<i>2-year</i>	\$28.76 <u>(\$36.50)</u>	\$36.52	\$32.30	\$36.36
<i>3-year</i>	\$29.47 <u>(\$38.00)</u>	\$38.34	\$33.42	\$37.73
<i>4-year</i>	\$30.22 <u>(\$40.00)</u>	\$40.27	\$34.59	\$39.14



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5-year	\$30.97	\$42.28	\$35.80	\$40.60
	(\$42.00)			
How long it takes to reach top of range	Eliminate-15years \$37.19 (10 year \$43.00) (4% increase for AA degree 8% increase for Bachelor's degree)	5 years \$42.48. 4% increase for AA degree 8% increase for Bachelor's degree	8 years \$43.56	6 years \$42.13 +3.75% for Bachelors +5% for living in Sitka +\$3000 per year for rural (Sitka)

It has been my belief that just like our beautiful town, The Sitka Police Department and its developing commitment to community policing should be considered a destination department. Not the PD of the past that was disconnected from the people it serves, that operates out of a dirty, antiquated, and unsafe facility, and that falls short of offering a competitive livable wage. Not a place where we train people for other departments, but where professional people start and finish their career.

Most of our improvements are in progress but we need to act quickly on officer wages and stabilizing our staffing level. As mentioned earlier, we will be down to eight officers by April of 2019. We are at a crossroads for the future of Sitka's Police Department. It is my urgent recommendation that we do the following as quickly as possible:

- Immediately raise the base wage of all represented and non-represented police officers, not including the Chief of Police, by \$5 per hour. The total cost to the city for 15 police officers would be approximately \$156,000.00 per year. Please note that this is just a few thousand dollars more than the cost of hiring and training one new employee for one year. Implement a pay scale that matches or marginally beats the pay rate of the Alaska State Troopers and the Anchorage Police Department.
- Compress the wage scale from 15 steps to 5 steps for both represented and non-represented police officers. A new scale for represented and non-represented should start just 5 steps from the top and include the \$5.00 per hour raise. It is a commonly understood industry benchmark that it takes approximately 5 years for a police officer to become what is considered a "Master



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Patrol Officer". It is after about 5 years of accrued experience and training that an officer begins to reach their potential and we begin to enjoy a full return on our investments. Compressing the scale to 5 years will significantly increase the likelihood that an officer becomes fully vested both financially and in the community.

- The average annual rate of turnover has been 3 to 4 officers. As demonstrated earlier, this persistent lack of staffing has cost the city *millions* of dollars and has immeasurably stunted the evolution of the Police Department's efforts to become a modern police agency. It is my proposal that the police department be allowed to, until stabilized, hire at a rate and number of officers that takes into account our annual rate of turnover. For example, rather than try to hire sixteen officers, we be allowed to hire at 19 officers. Once stabilized, we would cut back our hiring to maintain a consistent staffing level of 16 officers. The benefits of this practice are measurable. They include valuable improvements like reduced overtime costs, reduced burnout and turnover, improved service delivery and improved morale. Note that when we stabilize at a strength of 16 officers, we will eliminate the equivalent cost in overtime.

Thank you for considering this proposal.