



## Agenda Memo

Crest Hill, IL

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<b>Meeting Date:</b>	August 26, 2024
<b>Submitter:</b>	Dave Strahl, Interim Human Resources Manager
<b>Department:</b>	Human Resources
<b>Agenda Item:</b>	Consideration of Revised Employee Handbook Language – Tuition Reimbursement Policy and Meal Reimbursement Policy

**Summary:** Several proposed changes to the Employee Handbook were presented and discussed at the July 8, 2024, workshop meeting. Several recommended changes were approved with minor modifications during the July 8 meeting. However, due to the length of the agenda discussions during the meeting a couple of items were deferred for additional, more detailed discussions. The items deferred were the Tuition Reimbursement Policy and the Meal Reimbursement Policy.

Attached are the suggested recommendations for consideration regarding changes to these policies along with background memorandums.

**Recommended Council Action:** Direction to the staff from the City Council as to which language changes are acceptable for inclusion in a revised Employee Handbook.

**Financial Impact:** Minimal depending on the policy changed.

**Funding Source:** Not Applicable.

**Budgeted Amount:** Not Applicable.

**Cost:** Minimal depending on the policy changed.

**Attachments:** Summary of the policies to be discussed.

## **CURRENT POLICY:**

### **TUITION REIMBURSEMENT**

The City supports employees who wish to continue their education in order to secure increased responsibility and growth in their professional careers with the City of Crest Hill. This growth can include continuing education courses, certification programs, completion of a GED, and any professional and technical education. In keeping with this philosophy, the City has established reimbursement for educational expenses incurred through various approved institutions of learning.

Any regular full-time employee who has been continuously employed for six (6) months or more (unless directed by the City) who enrolls in a job related course of study at an accredited junior college, college or university within the State of Illinois (or through an accredited online college or university program, whether in-state or out-of-state) may qualify to have the tuition and academic fees (including books) reimbursed by the City. The employee does not need to be registered in a degree program to be eligible for this benefit. Prior written approval must be obtained from the employee's Department Head and the Personnel Officer for each such course or program of study. The Department Head and the Personnel Officer have complete discretion in determining whether the course(s) is sufficiently related to the employee's work and would improve his performance to justify the tuition reimbursement. The Department Head and the Personnel Officer have the discretion to determine the number of courses that will be taken during any given period. Employees should provide a list of courses and estimated expenses during the preparation of the budget.

Because it is in the City's interests to ensure the employee receives maximum benefit from any such courses taken, tuition reimbursement will be paid at 100% only if the employee receives a Grade "A" or "B". Grade "C" or a "Pass" grade in a Pass/Fail course will be paid at 75%. The employee is responsible for paying the educational expenses upfront. All reimbursements will be made upon proof of payment and submission of the certified transcript of the grade. Any reimbursement paid under this program will be offset by Federal/State financial aid, scholarships, grants, etc. In addition, the employee must be actively employed at the time of reimbursement.

Employees who voluntarily terminate employment, or are terminated for cause will be required to refund the City the reimbursement they received on the following basis:

- a) Prior to one (1) year from the date of reimbursement, one hundred percent (100%) of the amount reimbursed.

- b) After one (1) year but prior to two (2) years from the date of reimbursement, seventy-five (75%) of the amount reimbursed.
- c) After two (2) years but prior to three (3) years from the date of reimbursement, fifty percent (50%) of the amount reimbursed.
- d) After three (3) years from the date of reimbursement (zero percent) 0% of the amount reimbursed.

Union employees will follow applicable provisions contained in the collective bargaining agreements.

## **Proposed Policy:**

### **TUITION REIMBURSEMENT**

The City supports employees who wish to continue their education in order to secure increased responsibility and growth in their professional careers with the City of Crest Hill. This growth can include continuing education courses, certification programs, completion of a GED, and any professional and technical education. In keeping with this philosophy, the City has established reimbursement for educational expenses incurred through various approved institutions of learning.

Any regular full-time employee who has been continuously employed for six (6) months or more (unless directed by the City) who enrolls in a job related course of study at an accredited junior college, college or university within the State of Illinois (or through an accredited online college or university program, whether in-state or out-of-state) may qualify to have the tuition and academic fees (including books) reimbursed by the City. The employee does not need to be registered in a degree program to be eligible for this benefit. Prior written approval must be obtained from the employee's Department Head and the Personnel Officer for each such course or program of study to ensure the proposed course of study is job related. Furthermore, approval of a course does NOT guarantee future approval for future courses to complete a specific degree program. Continuation in any program is dependent on budgetary constraints and future individual approval(s) for each class. The Department Head and the Personnel Officer have complete discretion in determining whether the course(s) is sufficiently related to the employee's work and would improve his performance to justify the tuition reimbursement. The Department Head and the Personnel Officer have the discretion to determine the number of courses that will be taken during any given period. Employees should provide a list of courses and estimated expenses if a course of study is included as part of the request for consideration during prior to the preparation of the budget. This course of study will include all related courses to complete the program and estimated expenses for each course. All requests MUST be submitted in writing using the Tuition Reimbursement Application Form. Any reimbursement will not exceed the average tuition cost for public universities in the state. This includes any on-line or remote classes. Reimbursement will NOT be considered for more than two classes/courses per semester.

Because it is in the City's interests to ensure the employee receives maximum benefit from any such courses taken, tuition reimbursement will be paid at 100% only if the employee receives a Grade "A" or "B". Grade "C" or a "Pass" grade in a Pass/Fail course will be paid at 75%. The employee is responsible for paying the educational expenses upfront. All reimbursements will be made upon proof of payment and submission of the certified transcript of the grade. Any reimbursement paid under this program will be offset by Federal/State financial

aid, scholarships, grants, etc. In addition, the employee must be actively employed at the time of reimbursement.

Employees who voluntarily terminate employment, or are terminated for cause will be required to refund the City the tuition reimbursement they received on the following basis:

- e) Prior to one (1) year from the date of reimbursement, one hundred percent (100%) of the amount reimbursed.
- f) After one (1) year but prior to two (2) years from the date of reimbursement, seventy-five (75%) of the amount reimbursed.
- g) After two (2) years but prior to three (3) years from the date of reimbursement, fifty percent (50%) of the amount reimbursed.
- h) After three (3) years from the date of reimbursement (zero percent) 0% of the amount reimbursed.

Union employees will follow applicable provisions contained in the collective bargaining agreements.

## Tuition Reimbursement Application Form

Employee Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Hire: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School or Vendor: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Class/Program: \_\_\_\_\_

Days/Times of Class/Program: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Description (Attach information from brochure, website, catalogue): \_\_\_\_\_

All Cost(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Describe this course/class/program will benefit your professional growth and applicability to your job duties at the city (attach additional pages as necessary): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Employee Acknowledgement: By submitting this form with my signature I understand the tuition reimbursement policy as outlined in the city handbook and understand that I accept the repayment policy as described in the handbook. I further acknowledge that city approval for any one request does not guarantee continued approvals for any course of study I may undertake.

Employee Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approvals – to be obtained prior to enrolling in any course(s):

☐ Approved ☐ Not Approved

Department Head Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Approved ☐ Not Approved

City Administrator Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

Raymond R. Soliman  
Mayor

Christine Vershay-Hall  
Clerk

Glen Conklin  
Treasurer

Ward 1  
Scott Dyke  
John Vershay

Ward 2  
Claudia Gazal  
Darrell Jefferson

Ward 3  
Tina Oberlin  
Mark Cipiti

Ward 4  
Nate Albert  
Joe Kubal



TO: Lisa Banovetz, Finance Director  
FROM: Dave Strahl, Interim Human Resources Representative  
SUBJECT: Meal Reimbursement Policy  
DATE: December 28, 2023

Background:

The city employee handbook has a meal reimbursement policy that provides for meals to be reimbursed for extended overtime purposes or while on travel/training for city business. The current meal reimbursement policy is provided below:

Meals

*Meals during the events that are not made available as a part of the registration fees are reimbursable. Meals while traveling, the day before or following the day in which the last official function is held may be reimbursable with prior approval. Employees are encouraged to attend all functions for which meals are provided as a part of the registration fee. Only meals occurring during work or travel time are eligible for per diem reimbursement.*

*The per diem schedule for breakfast, lunch and dinner is as follows:*

<i>Breakfast</i>	<i>\$10</i>
<i>Lunch</i>	<i>\$15</i>
<i>Dinner</i>	<i>\$25</i>

*When travel is required to a part of the country where the listed per diem rates may not be sufficient, the City Administrator may grant exception to this policy. Prior approval is required and receipts must be submitted with Travel and Expense Report. Failure to do so may result in reimbursement ineligibility.*

**CITY OF CREST HILL**

20600 City Center Boulevard  
Crest Hill, IL 60403

815-741-5100  
cityofcresthill.com

Miscellaneous Expenses

Reasonable miscellaneous expenses such as taxi fares, parking, tolls, tips, etc. are generally reimbursable. Some expenses for the day immediately preceding the first official function and the day following the day in which the last function is held may be reimbursable with the approval of the Department Head.

Non-reimbursable expenses

Some travel expenses are not reimbursable. Some examples of non-reimbursable expenses include:

- a) Alcoholic beverages
- b) Entertainment
- c) Early check-in or late check-out charges, unless appropriate circumstance exist and are pre-approved by the Department Head.
- d) Parking tickets or traffic tickets
- e) Pay per view movies
- f) Expenses incurred by a spouse, dependents and/or additional guests
- g) Any non-work related charges

Following an employee's return to work, the employee shall itemize expenses as required on the Travel and Expense Report. Completed purchase orders and Travel and Expense Reports must be submitted to the employee's Department Head within five (5) business days after the employee's return to work. All receipts must be submitted with the Travel and Expense Report including documentary evidence for expenses such as taxis and parking. When two (2) or more employees on City business jointly incur expenses, each participant, when practical, will pay and report individual expenses. Where this is not practical, the employee requesting reimbursement shall list the names or identify the group of other employees for who expenses being



*reported have been incurred. If certain required receipts are not available, a statement signed by the employee documenting the amounts paid may be acceptable.*

The meal reimbursement language as outlined in the Police union contract is as follows:

**Meal Compensation:**

*Any Police Officer working sixteen (16) consecutive hours in a twenty-four (24) hour period will be eligible for a meal reimbursement up to eight dollars (\$8.00). Any Police Officer attending a training school where a break is given for a meal will be eligible for such a meal reimbursement in accordance with the City personnel policy if this training is given outside of the City of Crest Hill and the meal is not provided at the training. Any Officers attending overnight training will be reimbursed up to ten dollars (\$10.00) for breakfast, fifteen dollars (\$15.00) for lunch and twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) for dinner. A receipt, dated for the overtime period worked or training school attended, must be turned in to receive payment. Meal compensation for all training courses will be provided according to the terms of the City personnel policy and only if the relevant meal is not provided by the training.*

The purpose of the policy is to set the parameters for reimbursements to ensure such reimbursements are related to city business and no city funds are used for non-reimbursable expenses as provided in the policy. In order to confirm non-reimbursable expenses are not included in a reimbursement request it is necessary that the city only process reimbursement requests that are provided by a third-party documenting payment. Such documentation must be the standard receipt of services or goods normally provided to other patrons and include contact information and dates of service. Handwritten receipts would not normally qualify as eligible since there is no verifiable information on a handwritten receipt. Furthermore, the receipt should be detailed enough to ensure no reimbursement is considered for items that are ineligible for reimbursement.

The policy does outline the ineligible expenses, it does not stress the critical nature of why official itemized receipts are necessary to confirm the policy is adhered to as part of the reimbursement request. Employees must

understand that if they want reimbursement, such reimbursement will be considered under the city's rules.

Conflicts of Policy:

The policy outlined in the police contract states, "Any officers attending overnight training will be reimbursed up to \$10 for breakfast, \$15 for lunch, and \$25 for dinner A (sic) receipt, dated for the overtime period worked or training school attended, must be turned in to receive payment. Meal compensation for all training courses will (sic) provided according to the terms of the City personnel policy and only if relevant meal is not provided by training."

Setting aside the poorly written policy, the reimbursement defaults to the city personnel manual regarding the informational details for reimbursement consideration. The reimbursement dollar limit is based on a receipt being provided. However, providing "a" receipt alone does not meet the consideration criteria in the personnel manual. The personnel manual does not specifically require an itemized receipt to ensure the prohibited items are not included for reimbursement consideration. The policy implies that provision but does not state it by way of listing the ineligible items. This would be an area to correct in the policy going forward.

The use of the terms reimbursement and per diem interchangeably create additional confusion since they actually mean different things. Reimbursement would be repayment up to a specific amount provided a detailed receipt is provided to ensure ineligible expenses are not submitted. This would be typical language for reimbursement purposes, unfortunately such language is not included in the current policy.

Per diem amounts are typically an amount provided in advance and are intended to cover all eligible expenses instead of reimbursement. Per diem allowances are to cover all charges and services related to the good/service it is intended for. For example, if there is a per diem per meal amount based on the number of meals, the employee would be expected to use the per diem amount to cover all related expenses of the meal. If the meal costs less than the per diem amount the difference remains with the employee. It is possible that the meal per diem amount may not be spent up to the limit on any particular meal and could be pooled to use for a meal over the individual

per diem amount. Regardless of the meal expenses, the per diem is all that will be considered the maximum amount available for meals.

**Recommendations:**

- Modify as necessary to clarify what is necessary to be submitted for a valid receipt, i.e. no handwritten receipts.
- Modify as necessary to clarify what is necessary to be submitted that constitutes an itemized receipt.
- Determine if the policy will be based on reimbursement or per diem rates. It is possible to provide reimbursement based on defined amounts. However, the use of the term per diem, if to be used should be clarified as to advances for meals at a future event and be the amount that is inclusive of all expense related to a specific expense.

**Recommended Policy:**

**Travel/M meal Reimbursement Policy:**

From time-to-time employees may be required to attend functions, seminars, meetings, or other training courses. Such training courses must be approved by the department head and costs related to out-of-town travel shall be reimbursed by the City in accordance with the following policies.

When an employee is on official business and required to be outside the corporate limits of the City pursuant to such official business, the employee shall be reimbursed for certain expenses in the following manner, unless alternative reimbursement terms are approved by the employee's department head:

- (a) Employees who are requested to travel seventy-five (75) miles or more from the City for training purposes or other City business, shall receive up to from the City fifty dollars (\$50.00) per diem to cover expenses connected with meals and

gratuities. If meals are included in the training or other City business, the cost of each included meal shall be deducted from the per diem based on the following schedule:

Breakfast - \$10.00; Lunch - \$15.00; Dinner - \$25.00.

The meal per diem schedule will also apply for direct reimbursements in instances in which the employee is at a required training event that is less than a full day in duration. In addition, these meal rates would apply in instances for training sessions within the seventy-five (75) range.

- (b) IRS rate for mileage incurred by a covered employee who uses their personal vehicle to travel from the City to training or other City business.
- (c) Employees shall be reimbursed for reasonable overnight lodging arrangements in cases of training or other required City business that is conducted seventy-five (75) miles or more from the City.
- (d) For travel destinations beyond five hundred (500) miles from the City, employees may request airfare (economy) and automobile rental (mid-size/standard car only).
- (e) Any out-of-pocket expenses such as tolls, emergency repairs, parking, etc. shall be reimbursed upon submission of itemized receipts illustrating the charges with dates and locations.

For an employee to be eligible for any of the above reimbursements, the employee must have prior approval from their department head to attend the training or business event. Meal expenses shall be paid upon submission of confirmation of the completion of training, if submitted on

a reimbursement basis. For purposes of this section, mileage is measured from the City's facility where the employee works to the location of the training or other business event, by the most direct route.

#### Miscellaneous Expenses

Reasonable miscellaneous expenses such as taxi fares, parking, resort fees, tolls, etc. are generally reimbursable provided such expenses are documented with itemized receipts that include dates and locations of expenses. Tips related to meals will be inclusive of the amount allotted per meal. Some expenses for the day immediately preceding the first official function and the day following the day in which the last function is held may be reimbursable with the prior approval of the Department Head.

#### Non-reimbursable expenses

Some travel expenses are not reimbursable. Some examples of non-reimbursable expenses include:

- a) Alcoholic beverages
- b) Entertainment
- c) Early check-in or late check-out charges, unless appropriate circumstance exist and are pre-approved by the Department Head.
- d) Parking tickets or traffic tickets
- e) Pay per view movies
- f) Expenses incurred by a spouse, dependents and/or additional guests
- g) Any non-work related charges, i.e. gym fees



Following an employee's return to work, the employee shall itemize expenses as required on the Travel and Expense Report. Completed purchase orders and Travel and Expense Reports must be submitted to the employee's Department Head within five (5) business days after the employee's return to work. All receipts must be submitted with the Travel and Expense Report including documentary evidence for expenses such as taxis and parking. When two (2) or more employees are on City business jointly incur expenses, each participant, when practical, will pay and report individual expenses. Where this is not practical, the employee requesting reimbursement shall list the names or identify the group of other employees for whose expenses being reported have been incurred. If certain required receipts are not available, a statement signed by the employee documenting the amounts paid may be acceptable.