



**BUSINESS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND**

**AB 6442
April 2, 2024
Consent Agenda**

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	AB 6442: Hiring Incentives for Lateral Police Officers	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Approve the Lateral Police Officer Hiring Incentives Program for a 12-month period substantially in the form attached as Exhibit 1 to this AB.	

DEPARTMENT:	Police & Administrative Services
STAFF:	Ed Holmes, Police Chief Ali Spietz, Chief of Administration
COUNCIL LIAISON:	n/a
EXHIBITS:	1. Lateral Police Officer Hiring Incentives Program
CITY COUNCIL PRIORITY:	n/a

AMOUNT OF EXPENDITURE	\$ n/a
AMOUNT BUDGETED	\$ n/a
APPROPRIATION REQUIRED	\$ n/a

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the agenda bill is to present a pilot incentive program for hiring experienced police officers.

- The Mercer Island Police Department (MIPD) is projecting a staffing shortage by mid-year 2024 due to four recent resignations and three anticipated retirements.
- It takes approximately 12 to 14 months until a new entry-level police officer can be counted towards the minimum staffing requirements due to attending the academy and field training.
- Experienced police officers – also referred to as lateral officers – have already attended the academy and been certified. Once hired, they can fill shifts within 3 to 4 months, reducing the need to meet minimum staffing requirements using overtime. Lateral officers also bring immediate experience on their first day.
- Many police departments in the region have implemented similar programs to recruit lateral officers.
- Staff recommends implementing an incentive program to attract lateral/experience officers given the opportunity cost savings associated with hiring lateral officers versus entry-level officers and to award current City employees for recruiting lateral/experienced officers.
- There is no immediate financial impact or budget action necessary as a result of the 12-month pilot program. Costs will be absorbed by the Police Department’s operating budget.

BACKGROUND

The MIPD is projecting a staffing shortage by June 2024. So far this year, three officers have left MIPD for other agencies (one to a Fire Department and two to other local Police Departments). Two more officers are in the process of seeking employment with other police departments. Additionally, a new officer who is currently in the academy was injured and is unable to attend academy classes while he recovers. This injury will delay his status as a solo officer until late summer/early fall. Adding to the staffing challenges is the anticipated retirement of three officers in June, leaving the department with a projected shortage of nine officers for at the beginning of the summer.

Four new officers were hired and are scheduled to start the academy in mid-April. While these new hires will help staffing in the long run, they are unable to help meet minimum staffing levels as solo officers during the upcoming busy summer months.

The Hiring Process

New Officers

All new officers must attend the police academy to become Certified Peace Officers, which takes four and a half months. The police academy will not accept a new officer unless they have already been hired by a police department. As such, departments must first hire a candidate, then get the recruit on the academy's waitlist. For recruits who are unable to enter the academy right after hiring, they assist with ancillary department work outside of patrol.

The City is required to pay a new officer while they wait to get into the academy, while they are in the academy, and while they are in the Field Training Officer (FTO) program. The hiring process for a new police officer includes the following steps:

1. Application
2. Written test
3. Physical fitness test
4. Oral board interview
5. Background investigation
6. Polygraph
7. Chief's interview
8. Conditional job offer
9. Psychological test
10. Physical exam by a physician
11. Unconditional job offer
12. Candidate's name added to academy wait list (~4 months)
13. Police academy (4 ½ months)
14. FTO program (~3 months)
15. Solo officer

The total time from initial testing to working as a solo officer is approximately 12-14 months, assuming after this timeframe first-time officers make a good fit for the profession. In the past five years, four officers did not successfully make it through their probationary period (two failed probation and two resigned during probation).

Lateral and Experienced Officers

A Lateral Police Officer has at least 24 months of the last 36 months in the position and an Experienced Police Officer has less than 24 months of the last 36 months in the position. Lateral and experienced officers have already attended the academy and are certified peace officers.

Once hired, they can fill shifts within 3-4 months, reducing the need to meet minimum patrol staffing requirements using overtime. Lateral officers also bring experience and training to their first day with their new department.

The hiring process for a lateral police officer includes the following steps:

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|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Application | 5. Chief’s interview | 9. Unconditional job offer |
| 2. Oral board interview | 6. Conditional job offer | 10. Expedited FTO program (2 months) |
| 3. Background investigation | 7. Psychological test | 11. Solo officer |
| 4. Polygraph | 8. Physical exam by a physician | |

Total time from initial test to solo officer is approximately 3–4 months. Unlike entry-level applicants, lateral officers do not have to attend the academy and have a proven track record of performing the necessary job duties.

MIPD Staffing Model

Patrol

When fully staffed, 24 officers are assigned to Patrol, with six officers assigned to each of the four squads. The minimum staffing requirement is three officers per squad. As such, the total number to maintain minimum staffing for the four squads is 12 available officers. However, MIPD is rarely fully staffed. Shift vacancies regularly occur due to training, sick time, vacation time, and FMLA leave. Additionally, new officers being trained cannot be counted as a solo officer for minimum staffing purposes.

Marine Patrol

During the 6-month (mid-April through mid-Sept) boating season, one boat is deployed seven days a week, with a second boat on the weekends. Each boat is staffed by two officers: one supervisor assigned to the Marine Patrol unit 12 months a year and one Marine Patrol Officer who is moved from Patrol to the Marine Patrol unit during the boating season.

When Patrol shifts are above the 3-officer minimum staffing level, officers will be moved from their Patrol shift to cover a vacant Marine Patrol shift. If an officer cannot be moved from a Patrol shift to a Marine Patrol shift, the Marine Patrol shift is filled using overtime. When staffing numbers are low, filling Marine Patrol shifts becomes challenging.

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

Given the projected staffing shortages, there are a considerable number of patrol shifts throughout the summer season that will need to be filled. Police Command staff developed options to address these staffing shortages, however most of them impact service levels of other police programming.

One option that does not impact service levels is hiring lateral or experienced officers. However, in this recruiting climate, police departments are offering hiring incentives to attract experienced candidates. Many agencies in King County offer incentives for lateral candidates, ranging from \$5,000 to \$40,000 (see below).

2024 Lateral Police Officer Hiring Incentives			
Agency	Amount	Agency	Amount
City of Auburn	\$20,000	City of Kirkland	\$25,000
City of Bellevue	\$16,000	City of Lynnwood	\$25,000
City of Bothell	\$0	City of Redmond	\$0
City of Des Moines	\$40,000	City of Renton	\$20,000
City of Edmonds	\$25,000	City of Seattle	\$30,000
City of Federal Way	\$30,000	City of Tukwila	\$25,000
City of Issaquah	\$16,000	King County Sheriff*	\$15,000
City of Kent	\$25,000		

Lateral Recruitment Hiring Incentives Program Proposal

If the Mercer Island Police Department were able to hire lateral or experienced officers in the next few weeks, staffing for this upcoming summer could improve greatly. Since the City does not currently have a hiring incentive program, staff recommends implementing a 12-month pilot program to incentivize later or experienced officers to join the MIPD.

The first of the two proposed incentives is for a lateral or experienced officer to receive \$20,000 paid out in three increments, with the first being paid at time of hire, the second upon successful completion of probation, and the third upon completion of six months as a permanent, non-probationary employee. The second and third payments are conditions on the officer remaining employed for three years from the date of hire. Should the officer separate from employment prior to that date, the officer shall be required to return the second and third payments to the City.

The second incentive is to award current City employees an incentive of \$5,000 for recruiting lateral or experienced officers. The first payment of \$2,500 would be paid when the lateral officer receives their first paycheck, and the second payment of \$2,500 would be paid when the lateral officer completes their probationary period. This second incentive for recruiting will be open to non-represented employees and represented employees whose union has agreed to participate in the program.

Staff propose implementing these two incentive programs on a 12-month trial basis and commits to reporting back to the Council with an assessment of the program's effectiveness in recruiting lateral officers to the City of Mercer Island. See Exhibit 1 for additional details of the proposed trial program.

Financial Impacts

These incentives will be paid for using salary savings from anticipated vacancies and from overtime savings associated with filling vacant positions. If there is a large response to this incentive and additional funding is needed, staff will return to the Council for a budget appropriation.

Mercer Island Police Association Support

On April 2, the Mercer Island Police Association and City management reviewed the terms of the lateral hiring incentives. The Union indicated support for the pilot program, which will be memorialized in a MOU if the City Council approves the program.

NEXT STEPS

If the City Council supports the Lateral Police Officer Hiring Incentives Program, staff will finalize the procedures and implement the Program on a 12-month trial basis.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Approve the Lateral Police Officer Hiring Incentives Program for a 12-month trial period substantially in the form attached as Exhibit 1 to this AB.