
WHITEWATER POLICE DEPARTMENT
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: City Manager John Weidl

FROM: Chief Dan Meyer

SUBJECT: Whitewater Police Department Staffing Plan

DATE: November 15, 2023

CC:

What is the Staffing Need?

The Whitewater Police Department has been staffed with 24 sworn officers since 2008. A great deal has changed since then, much of which greatly impacts how we police and investigate criminal activity. For instance, technology has advanced significantly in that time. Today, nearly every major investigation we conduct requires analyzing records on electronic equipment like computers or cell phones. This is very time consuming and requires applying for a search warrant, physically obtaining the electronic device, sending the device to an outside entity to be analyzed, reviewing the records, and ultimately storing the original device as evidence.

In addition to the general changes, like technological advancement, that all law enforcement agencies must adapt to, Whitewater specifically has been acutely impacted by demographic change. We've seen the addition of a large number of people from Nicaragua and Venezuela since early 2022. This change has impacted the community significantly. The police department has adapted to meet the following challenges:

- Overcoming lack of trust in law enforcement that many people have based on the environment in their home country
- Communicating with individuals speaking a Central American dialect of Spanish
- Protecting juveniles being victimized while living in non-familial living situations
- Encountering a large number of unlicensed drivers while continuing to enforce our traffic laws
- Ensuring we accurately identify and document our interactions with individuals who in some cases are intentionally deceiving officers with false documents
- Educating individuals about our laws and ordinances

We have worked diligently to meet these challenges by equipping our staff with technology. We've used Propio to help officers communicate with non-English speakers. We've purchased two drones and formed a drone team that has greatly increased our investigative capabilities. We've installed automated license plate reading (ALPR) cameras that also greatly increase our investigative capabilities. All of these things increase our efficiency, but they can't replace officers. We are at a point where we simply need additional staffing in order to ensure Whitewater residents receive the level of proactive law enforcement service that community members are accustomed to.

Addressing WPD Staffing for 2024

There will be a vacancy in our Detective Lieutenant position beginning January 2, 2024. We are working off the assumption that this position will be filled internally by internal promotion as we have three qualified internal candidates who have applied. Consequently, we have posted a Patrol Officer opening that will eventually backfill the opening created by the staff member promoted to Detective Lieutenant. Once hired, the Patrol Officer opening will put us at 25 sworn officers, which is one over the 24 we are budgeted for. However, financially, there will be no adverse impact because Officer Derek Johnson is away on military leave through fall of 2024, and we are confident we will see at least one retirement before he returns.

We have also considered what options are available in the event the Common Council were to approve additional funding law enforcement resources in 2024 above and beyond what is currently in the proposed 2024-2025 budget. It should be noted that any additional funding would be pulled from City reserves. If the Council does wish to provide additional funding, the following options should be considered:

- **Fund a Referendum Consultant (estimated cost \$50,000 - \$65,000):** This would pre-fund the costs associated with having a consultant provide services related to a planning and providing educational materials for a referendum for law enforcement services. The majority of the work completed by the consultant would occur in 2024 with the anticipated referendum occurring in 2025.
- **Fund Additional Technology:** The police department ultimately desires to expand the system of automated license plate reader (ALPR) cameras so that all major entrances to the City are covered. The service contract for one of these Flock cameras costs \$3,000/year. \$54,000 would allow us to purchase an additional nine Flock cameras for two years which mirrors the service contract of the three cameras already installed. This would allow us to get cameras at all major entrances to the City and would fund those cameras through this current budget cycle. If this were approved, beginning in 2026, servicing all 12 Flock cameras would cost \$36,000 annually.
- **Funding One Additional Sworn Officer (estimated cost \$100,000 - \$120,000):** As stated previously, we see a clear need for additional staffing. The challenging part is

determining how to ensure we have the greatest impact from an additional officer. Adding one officer would definitely have a positive impact on proactive enforcement and response times, however, some of the benefit would be lost in having the impact of reducing overtime costs (i.e. our staffing limit is either eight or nine officers daily depending on the day, and adding the additional officer on a day where we were scheduled one under our limit, would result in removing the need to pay an officer overtime to fill the position, but would not bring the department staffing up above the minimum number of officers on that day).

One consideration would be to hire an additional detective (in addition to the two currently budgeted) so that one of our detectives could be assigned to focus on drug enforcement, as well as investigating major crimes that stem from drug activity. This position could be posted both internally and externally, with preference given to an individual fluent in Spanish. If a more large-scale staffing increase is funded long-term, this additional position would be a logical component of any long-term staffing increase.

Addressing WPD Staffing Long-term

While I firmly believe additional staffing is justified, it is critical that we have an outside perspective provide a recommendation on what the need, if any, really is. To that end, the City has pre-funded \$50,000 to have a third-party consultant conduct a WPD staffing study in 2024. An RFP for the staff study consultant would need to be completed in the first quarter of 2024. Based on the outcome of that study, City leadership will be in a much better position to analyze how to best move forward.

Assuming the staffing study finds WPD to be understaffed, the best option to address the issue in an immediate sense will likely be a referendum. If the Common Council decides to address staffing through a referendum, the following timeline is recommended:

- **April, 2024:** RFP created to hire a consultant to provide services related to the referendum (Estimated cost of \$65,000 which is not currently funded in the budget)
- **May, 2024:** Consultant selected
- **August, 2024:** Council confirms the referendum question for the ballot based on data provided by staffing study and RFP consultant
- **April, 2025:** Referendum question goes on the ballot for the spring election

Ultimately, our goal is to ensure WPD is properly staffed now and in the future so that the Whitewater community continues to be a safe and enjoyable place to live and work.