



Legislation Text

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City Council Meeting Date: May 9, 2023

To: Mayor and City Council
City Administrator

From: Mark Elliott, Police Chief

Discussion on Current Police Officer Labor Force Availability, Recruitment and Retention Landscape.

Action Requested:

The Northfield City Council will receive a presentation on current hiring for police officer.

Summary Report:

The police officer hiring and retention landscape has shifted dramatically in the past few years. This shift has been a significant downward trend in available applicants. This is a trend that is captured in headlines throughout the country, and throughout Minnesota. It is experienced right here in Northfield as well. Since 2019 the Northfield PD has seen a drop in applicants for police officer by 81%, from 54 in 2019 to just 10 in 2023. In addition, we are facing more pressure on retaining qualified officers in this competitive labor market.

Not only are there fewer people entering the field, but many officers are exiting the field as well. They are leaving for a variety of reasons and in numbers the profession has never experienced before. There have been many reasons for exiting the field including retirements of baby boomers, police reform era of the last few years, heavy media reporting questioning police legitimacy and villainization, combined with rapidly rising pay in private sector jobs has led to a mass exodus of officers from the field. Fewer people are entering the field for some of the same reasons above and others such as changing career-lifestyle preferences. These challenges further magnify staffing challenges by increasing the workload of the existing staff putting even more strain on retention within the existing profession.

Departments around the country and around the state have been responding to this crisis by offering lateral transfer pay and benefits to current officers commensurate to their years of experience, and often offering signing bonuses in the thousands of dollars and front-loading benefits as well. Many departments are also offering retention bonuses to keep the officers they have from leaving for other departments, or other jobs outside of law enforcement.

This work session item will have Police Chief Mark Elliott describe the current landscape of police officer hiring and retention and a forecast of what the current trends are and what they will be in the near future.

This is a discussion item and any potential policy action options for the City Council will come at a later date.

Alternative Options:

N/A

Financial Impacts:

N/A

Tentative Timelines:

Staff is exploring the issue more closely and gathering more detailed information on what other Minnesota cities may be doing to respond to the issue. There may be strategies around pay and compensation and policies that we may be bringing back to Council for consideration. There is no specific timeline identified.