

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING

August 4, 2021

In Attendance:

Members Present: Chairperson, Ann Smith, Larry Chapman, Barry Mitchell and Mayor Janet Winkler

Others Present: Town Manager, Jonathan Greer, Chief of Police, Richard Blevins, and Town Clerk, Tammy Swanson

Call to Order:

Ann called the Public Safety Committee meeting to order, and stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss incentives for hiring new police officers.

Recruitment Incentive Proposal – Pre-Sworn Hiring Option:

Jonathan presented the following Pre-Sworn Hiring option explanation from Chief Blevins.

Recruitment Incentive Proposal

Pre-Sworn Hiring Option:

The number of vacancies throughout the area in the entry level patrol officer positions has made the recruitment of prospective graduates of local BLET programs extremely competitive. With most agencies now offering about the same hiring package, it often comes down to who can offer a prospective graduate a position first as to who they decide to go to work for. Many of the larger agencies in the area have for some time had a program of hiring prospective officers before they graduate from the BLET program.

In an early hire, where the trainee is already enrolled in BLET, the agency can employ the student in a trainee status before they actually graduate. This benefits the agency because they can lock someone in early on before they are heavily recruited. This offer of a position comes at a time when the trainee is usually without income and they are more likely to accept the first substantive offer that is given. It gives the agency the ability to monitor the trainee's progress and how they conduct themselves both on and off duty prior to them becoming a sworn officer.

In a recruitment/sponsor and early hire situation, the agency recruits someone for the purpose of sending them to BLET, who otherwise would not have gone. In this situation, the agency pays for uniforms, books and pays the trainee to go to school. This situation locks the trainee in from the beginning and is the best chance for the agency to get an officer they have sought out themselves.

The benefits to the trainee is that they are getting paid to go to school and learn. It removes the stress that comes from the financial uncertainty of being unemployed for 6 months. It gives them a sense of security as they know that as long as they perform to expectations they have a job waiting for them. In the recruitment/sponsor situation, it allows candidates who may have not been able to leave their current job to attend BLET. There are people out there that would make great police officers who just can't afford to take the leap and put their lives on hold for 6 months .

I would propose that the Town of Hudson/Hudson Police Department adopt an early hire policy, where promising candidates can be hired for existing vacancies prior to them graduating BLET. I have attached a very basic cost summary for what the program would cost. If approved, prior to implementation, a contract between the Town and the applicant would be drafted, to include provisions for the Town to separate the employee for reasons that are inconsistent with the qualities and traits and performance that are expected from an employee of the Hudson Police Department. The trainee would be a flat 37.5 hr. employee with holiday pay, accrued sick and vacation and health and dental insurance along with retirement. Trainees would not earn overtime and they would not qualify for the mandated 5% - 401k contribution. Trainees would fall under a Grade 9 and earn an hourly rate of \$15.39 (\$30,000 annual). In the event the trainee failed to complete the training or chose not to come to work for the Town of Hudson, they would be responsible for the repayment

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of the cost of their books and uniforms to the Town. If this proposal is acceptable, I will draft a final proposal along with a contract for review and approval.

Respectfully,

Richard Blevins

Chief Blevins commented that Lenoir Police Department is already doing this type of thing to recruit officers.

Chief Blevins stated that the BLET Program at Caldwell Community College did not make for the Fall semester, which means it will be at least June 2022 before there will be graduates from the College.

Jonathan stated that we already have a trainee policy in our "Pay Plan Policy," and implementing the Chief's proposal would be a process change, and not a policy change. Jonathan added that he plans to talk with Carroll Tuttle about any legalities associated with recouping costs if a candidate does not work out with the pre-sworn policy.

Section 4. Trainee Designation and Provisions

Applicants being considered for employment or Town employees who do not meet all of the requirements for the position for which they are being considered may be hired, promoted, demoted, or transferred by the Town Manager to a "trainee" status. In such cases, a plan for training, including a time schedule, must be prepared by the department head. Trainee salaries shall be no more than two salary grades below the minimum salary rate established for the position for which the person is being trained. A new employee designated as "trainee" shall be regarded as being in a probationary period. However, probationary periods shall be no less than six months and trainee periods may extend up to eighteen months. A trainee shall remain a probationary employee until the trainee period is satisfactorily completed.

If the training is not successfully completed to the satisfaction of the Town Manager, the trainee shall be transferred, demoted, or dismissed. If the training is successfully completed, the employee shall be paid at least at the minimum rate established for the position for which the employee was trained.

HUDSON POLICE DEPARTMENT TRAINEE		
SALARY	\$	15,000 (Trainee Salary)
FICA TAX - 6.2%	\$	898 (Gross - \$520 Health Ded x 6.2%)
MEDICARE TAX - 1.45%	\$	210 (Gross - \$520 Health Ded x 1.45%)
401K CONTRIBUTION - 3%	\$	450 (Gross x 3%)
Non-LEO RETIREMENT - 11.35%	\$	1,703
HEALTH/DENTAL INSURANCE	\$	3,835 (Medical/Gap-7,298.96) + (Dental-372.00) / 2
VISION INSURANCE	\$	23 (\$3.75 x 6)
LIFE INSURANCE	\$	85 (.28 x 34,811 x 6= 58.49) + (30 x 15 x 6= 27.00)
UNIFORM EXPENSE	\$	500
Books	\$	500
TOTAL	\$	23,204
Based upon a 6 month Training Period		

Take Home Car Program Expansion:

Jonathan presented the following take home car program explanation from Chief Blevins.

Recruiting Incentive

Take Home Car Program Expansion

For the 2021-2022 Fiscal Year, the Hudson Board of Commissioners approved a 5% pay increase for law enforcement to maintain our starting pay at a competitive level with surrounding agencies. Of course those agencies also increased their salaries and the competition to recruit and retain police officers continues and will for some time to come as there is a critical shortage of people entering the profession and a disproportionate number of current officers leaving the profession. It makes looking for additional recruiting incentives difficult because most agencies are offering about all they can at this point to attract potential hires.

In looking at what else I can do or we as a Town can offer, one possible incentive would be to expand the area we are trying to recruit from. With all agencies in Caldwell and most of the neighboring agencies offering take home cars with varying distances and times allowed, there could be potential officers out there that would come to work at Hudson if they lived within the area we allow officers to take their cars home.

Currently, we have a 15 minute take home car policy. The distance is timed from the Police Department to the officer's home, driving at normal traveling speed and using the quickest route, with the timer stopped for traffic lights. Regardless of the time, no one living out of county may take their patrol car outside of Caldwell County. Patrol cars are not allowed to be parked at other agencies or Fire Departments as a "halfway" point either.

In an effort to possibly recruit candidates that may live outside our current take home car limits, I would like to propose that the limits be expanded to possibly lure someone living further out. Many agencies have already begun expanding their take home car area. Many Catawba County agencies are now allowing their officers living outside of Catawba to take their cars home. Every day on 3211 see several Hickory and Catawba County cars traveling to and from work. Most agencies in Burke County have gone to a county wide take home policy.

As the Chief of Police, I am responsible for adhering to the budget I am given. I am all too aware of how much it cost to operate and how limited the funding for those operations is. I wish everyone of my officers lived in town and I had stacks of applicants to choose from. That is not the case and at this point I am looking at any tactic we can use to recruit and retain officers. At the time of this proposal, I am one officer short, approaching the 7- month mark, and I am confident in 2-3 weeks I will be two officers short. We have predicted and known that in the near future we would be facing a staffing crisis and that time has come. Our officers are well equipped, have a great schedule, competitive pay and just a great work environment. In asking why new or current officers don't want to work at Hudson, they sometimes say it's because we do not have Computer Assisted Dispatch or CAD. Some say it's because we don't have a SWAT team. Some say they want to work somewhere they can become a K-9 officer. Some say it's because they live too far away to take their car home.

With the exception of a SWAT team, I would love to be able to have CAD and a K-9. Those things are expensive, and take time to put into place. The quickest thing I can do is propose that we expand our recruiting area by increasing our take home car area.

Before I present any proposals, let me first give some statistics about our fleet and its usage of Town resources.

On a "Patrol Day", a day when the car is in service and is patrolling Hudson, a car averages about 100 miles of use. They consume approximately 8.5 gallons of fuel, which with current fuel prices (\$3.00) equates to \$25.50. The cost of tires (\$550)/lube & service (\$62) is approximately \$6.62 per patrol day based on current tire prices and oil change fees. A Patrol Car rotates out at about 100,000 miles, meaning that it sees about 1,000 Patrol Days. The cost of a Patrol Car currently is \$43,000, meaning the vehicle itself cost \$43.00 per Patrol Day. Altogether, it cost approximately \$74.87 to have a car in

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service patrolling Hudson per Patrol Day. The expected longevity of the car would be about 6 years on patrol, then they rotate out to the SRO's where they finish their service lives.

I came up with two different proposals. I am not particularly in favor of either one for a host of reasons. However, I feel I have to offer up some plan of filling our positions and keeping officers on the streets. Both will incur additional cost, and cause me to have to rethink our fleet rotation plan. The only way that I can bring myself to propose either of these plans is in knowing that it may net us an officer that lives a little outside our area that otherwise would apply at Hudson. At most, I think we would only be looking at 1 or 2 cars being affected. For the most part, our fleet would continue to see 100-mile patrol days. In either proposal, I am still opposed to the cars being parked at other agencies as a halfway point in both proposals, the car is to be driven to and kept at the officer's residence.

Proposal 1

Dividing the county North and South along Hwy 268 and Roby Martin Road, and allowing officers to take their cars home that live South of this line.

This would allow us to recruit from the most heavily populated areas in the County, and would make it so any officer working at either of the other police departments could work at Hudson PD with no loss of a benefit. If I take the furthest distance out this would allow, it would be East on 268 at the County Line, which is 24 miles away. Allowing an officer to drive to and from there would add a total of 48 miles to the now normal mileage of 100 miles per day. We can round that number up to 150 for the sake of the figures.

Under Proposal 1, a "Patrol Day" would be about 150 miles. The car would consume approximately 12.5 gallons of fuel, which with current fuel prices (\$3.00) equates to \$37.50. So, the cost of tires (\$550)/lube (\$62) service would be approximately \$9.54 per patrol day based on the current prices and oil change fees. A Patrol Car rotates out at about 100,000 miles, meaning that under proposal 1, it would see about 667 Patrol Days. The cost of a Patrol Car is currently \$43,000, meaning that under Proposal 1, the cost per patrol day for just the vehicle would be approximately \$64.47. Altogether, under Proposal 1, it would cost approximately \$111.51 per Patrol Day. Under proposal 1, the expected longevity of a patrol car would be about 4 years.

Proposal 2

Allowing officers to drive their patrol cars home anywhere inside Caldwell County.

This would allow us to recruit from any agency in Caldwell County. As I said, some agencies are now allowing County Wide take home car privileges. Valdese Police Department recently went this route to expand their applicant pool. Under Proposal 2, any officer living in Caldwell County could potentially consider Hudson Police Department without the loss of the take home car benefit. For the calculations used to come up with expenditures, I used the farthest Northwest corner of Caldwell County, near the Avery County Line. The distance from there is 34.5 miles. Allowing an officer to drive to and from there would add a total of 69 miles to the now normal mileage of 100 miles per day. We can round that number up to 170 for the sake of the figures.

Under Proposal 2, a "Patrol Day" would be about 170 miles. The car would consume approximately 14.17 gallons of fuel, which with current fuel prices (\$3.00) equates to \$42.51. The cost of tires (\$550)/lube (\$62) service would be approximately \$10.82 per patrol day based on the current prices and oil change fees. A Patrol car rotates out at about 100,000 miles, meaning that under proposal 2, it would see about 588 patrol days. The cost of a Patrol Car is currently \$43,000, meaning that under Proposal 2, the cost per patrol day for just the vehicle would be approximately \$73.13. Altogether, under proposal 2, it would cost approximately \$126.46 per patrol day. Under proposal 2, the expected longevity of a patrol car would be about 3 years.

Proposal 3

Setting a flat 25-mile radius for take home cars.

Proposal 3 very closely mimics Proposal 1, but instead of limiting the 25-mile distance to inside Caldwell County, it would allow for officers living outside of Caldwell County within the 25-mile radius to drive their patrol vehicles to and from their homes. This would allow us to compete for officers living in Burke and Catawba County. The financial impact would be identical to Proposal 1.

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Chief Blevins stated that he does have an applicant that lives in Morganton, and according to applicant, he wants to work for our Police Department regardless of the car take-home policy. Chief Blevins commented that the applicant would fit in the flat 25-mile radius option.

Ann asked what would happen if there were an emergency, and our officers were 25 miles away.

Chief Blevins explained that he would rally enough officers together, even from other agencies if necessary, until his officers could all get here. Chief Blevins commented that one of his main concerns is the wear and tear this program would have on our patrol cars. He added, however, that we do have a good car rotation schedule in place, which is working very well in replacing our vehicles.

Motion: (Larry Chapman/Barry Mitchell) to recommend approval of the Take Home Car Program Expansion with the flat 25-mile radius as described in Proposal 3. Unanimously approved.

Update – Wrecker Rotation:

Chief Blevins stated that as of this week, the wrecker rotation is up and running, with only 2 wrecker services qualifying under the Police Department's guidelines. Those services were Tucker's Towing and Keen's Towing & Recovery. Chief Blevins stated that some of the other wrecker services that had inquired about being on the rotation were disappointed they did not make the cut.

Adjournment:

Motion: (Larry Chapman/Barry Mitchell) to adjourn the meeting. Unanimously approved.

Tamra T. Swanson, Town Clerk