

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: TEMPORARY INCREASE IN AUTHORIZED FTE COUNT FOR PUBLIC SAFETY DISPATCHERS

BACKGROUND:

The Emergency Communications Center (Dispatch) is staffed by 11 full-time Public Safety Dispatchers and one Lead Public Safety Dispatcher. These 12 individuals provide 911 call-taking and emergency services dispatch services 24 hours a day, every day of the year. In addition, they annually take thousands of calls for information about the City from citizens. There are always at least two dispatchers on duty.

Two Dispatcher vacancies will arise in the next several weeks. One dispatcher has resigned effective October 28 and another will retire January 1. Anticipating the retirement, a recruitment was conducted and is now in its final stages. Staff is requesting to hire two Dispatchers around November 1 to provide an overlap that will reduce, but not eliminate, the challenges and some costs associated with transition to new dispatchers. **To accomplish this, the department is requesting to increase the authorized staffing level for Public Safety Dispatchers from 11 to 12 for the period from November 1, 2020, to January 1, 2021.**

Replacing and training a dispatcher is a time intensive process. Dispatchers are required to take a 40-hour training course at the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy. **They cannot enroll in that course until they have been hired by a qualified agency.** In addition, each dispatcher completes an approximately 16-week in-service training program with the department.

In-service training is a mix of classroom and practical application experiences. Training is provided by senior dispatchers who have been certified as trainers. In the final phase of training a new dispatcher will take calls and dispatch services under the direct supervision of a trainer - both the new dispatcher and the trainer are on each call to insure appropriate responses.

During the 16 weeks of in-service training, an average of 24 hours of overtime per week is required to both provide the training and fill dispatching shifts that would normally be filled by a trained Dispatcher. If both new Dispatchers are hired on November 1, the training can proceed more quickly, reducing the length of time that overtime is required. The net increased cost to hire both Dispatchers on November 1 is expected to be between \$200 and \$2,700 compared to hiring one Dispatcher on November 1 and one Dispatcher on January 2. This range of increased costs is due to the different health insurance options the new Dispatcher may choose. Funding is available from salary savings in vacant Police Officer positions.

If the temporary increase in FTEs is not provided, the amount of overtime required of existing Dispatchers will be greater, and the likelihood of mandatory overtime assignments is increased. **Additionally, because there is a limited number of qualified Dispatchers, staff is concerned that a loss of additional Dispatchers to COVID-19 or other illness will have a detrimental impact on this critical function.**

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Increase the authorized FTE count for Public Safety Dispatchers from 11 to 12 for the period between November 1, 2020 and January 1, 2021.
2. Do not authorize a temporary increase in the Dispatcher staffing level.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

A fully trained and staffed Emergency Communications Center is a critical service to our citizens. It is difficult to maintain the necessary staffing levels while training new Dispatchers. Therefore, with two Dispatcher vacancies approaching, the Police Department needs to take additional steps to timely train two new dispatchers.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1, as described above.