

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

Resolution authorizing payment of hiring bonuses of up to \$30,000 to new hire lateral police officers and up to \$15,000 to exceptional (BLEA Certified) hires to remain competitive with other jurisdictions in hiring for these hard-to-fill vacancies.

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Police Department

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Human Resources Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**ACTION**

This Resolution will authorize the City to increase the hiring bonuses it can pay to fill vacancies in the Police Department to remain competitive with other jurisdictions that are also seeking to fill these positions by offering larger hiring bonuses. Specifically, it will allow the City to offer up to \$30,000 to new lateral police officers and up to \$15,000 to exceptional (BLEA Certified) hires. The Bellevue Police Department is facing a high number of police officer vacancies in the patrol unit and lateral police officers require less training than entry level officers and are typically able to assume solo-patrol status in less than half the time it takes an entry-level recruit to attain that status. Exceptional (BLEA Certified) hires are also able to be released as independent officers in a shorter period than entry-level recruits.

RECOMMENDATION

Move to adopt Resolution No. 10422

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Like many agencies in the region and nationwide, Bellevue's experience has shown that recruiting police officers continues to be very competitive, mainly for lateral and exceptional hires. Commissioned lateral police officers are skilled workers who have already completed the required training at their previous agency and meet the qualifications to be a law enforcement officer, so the skills they bring make them highly sought-after candidates. Obtaining these types of hires pose an added challenge since fewer officers are interested in transferring agencies. Compared to entry level officers, lateral and exceptional (Basic Law Enforcement Academy Certified) police officers, have a higher rate of successfully completing their probationary periods and their onboarding costs less due to the shorter training time required.

Currently, the average wait time to get an entry level recruit into the academy is approximately six to eight weeks (two months) and could be longer depending on new officer hiring from other Western Washington agencies. The Basic Law Enforcement Academy (BLEA) is approximately four to five months of instruction. Once commissioned and returned to Bellevue PD, the pre-field training phase is approximately eight weeks (two months) or longer depending on availability of FTO (Field Training Officers). The FTO program is approximately four months long without extensions That is an

estimated 12 to 14-month turn around for an entry level recruit to be released as an independent officer.

In contrast, a lateral officer can potentially be released as an independent officer in approximately five months. Once a lateral officer is hired, they have approximately five to six weeks of pre-Equivalency Academy training. In addition, they are required to attend a two-week Equivalency Academy if they are from out of state. They are then scheduled for a three-month field training phase. Some lateral candidates have been able to be released early off FTO due to their exceptional performance. An exceptional (BLEA Certified) entry officer, can potentially be released as an independent officer in approximately four to five months. Once an exceptional (BLEA Certified) entry officer is hired, they have approximately four to six weeks of pre-FTO training and then are scheduled for a three-month field training phase. In addition, they are required to attend a two-week Equivalency Academy if they are from out of state.

Accordingly, the hiring of lateral officers and exceptional (BLEA Certified) officers has several benefits for the community. Principally, it reduces approximately 10 months or more of wait time for an independent officer to begin providing policing to the community, reducing the workload on fellow officers, and reducing the amount of time paid to officers to attend training rather than engaging in active police work. In addition, based on the Department's own experience, a higher percentage of lateral hires successfully complete their probationary period than entry level new hires.

In consideration of these benefits, in 2017 City Manager Miyake authorized a hiring bonus of \$5,000 to be offered to only new hire lateral police officers. New hire lateral police officers received half of the bonus at the time of hire, and the remainder after successfully completing a one-year probationary period with the Bellevue Police Department.

In 2018, due to the initial success of the hiring bonus and to remain competitive with the recruitment efforts of other local police agencies, staff requested Council authorize an increase in the hiring bonus of up to \$16,000. Council approved the requested increase in the maximum hiring bonus amount which would be paid in three installments. To promote retention, a portion of the hiring bonus, excluding the initial \$5,000 payment, would have to be repaid to the City if the employee voluntarily left employment or was terminated for cause within three years of hire.

Since 2018, there has been no change to the maximum hiring bonus amount for lateral police officers, however, in 2023, the City began providing up to \$7,500 to cover moving expenses for lateral hire police officers relocating from out-of-state. As with the hiring bonus, employees are required to repay a portion of the reimbursement payment for moving expenses if they separate from employment with the City within three years. The City also began offering a hiring bonus of up to a \$10,000 for exceptional (BLEA Certified) hires to be paid in three installments with a similar three-year commitment.

In recent years, with a few exceptions, hiring bonuses provided by comparable jurisdictions to attract lateral and exceptional hires have increased. Of 11 competing jurisdictions, including Seattle, King County, and Redmond; nine jurisdictions currently provide hiring bonus of \$25,000 or more. Locally,

Renton offers the highest hiring bonus in the amount of \$40,000, followed by Seattle and Federal Way which each offer \$30,000. Although these incentives are only components of an officer's total compensation package, the published figures are illustrative of the high demand for lateral police officers in Washington State.

Under the current proposal, the City would pay a bonus of up to \$30,000 to new hire lateral police officers as follows:

- Up to \$10,000 on the first paycheck following the officer's hire;
- Up to \$10,000 on the first or second paycheck after successful completion of their field training program; and
- Any remaining amount up to \$10,000 on the first or second paycheck after successful completion of their probationary period.

To promote retention of lateral police officers hired under this program, the officer will be required to pay back a portion of the hiring bonus, excluding the first payment of up to \$10,000, should they voluntarily leave employment or are terminated for cause before working four full years for the City. Repayment of the hiring bonus will follow the schedule set out below:

Date of Separation	Repayment Amount
<1 year from date of hire	100% of hiring bonus awarded over \$10,000.00
1 year to < 2 years from date of hire	75% of hiring bonus awarded over \$10,000.00
2 years to < 3 years from date of hire	50% of hiring bonus awarded over \$10,000.00
3 year to < 4 years from date of hire	25% of hiring bonus awarded over \$10,000.00

In addition, a bonus of up to \$15,000 would be paid to new exceptional (BLEA Certified) hires as follows:

- Up to \$5,000 on the first paycheck following the officer's hire;
- Up to \$5,000 on the first or second paycheck after successful completion of their field training program; and
- Any remaining amount up to \$5,000 on the first or second paycheck after successful completion of their probationary period.

To promote retention of new exceptional (BLEA Certified) hires under this program, the officer will be required to pay back a portion of the hiring bonus, excluding the first payment of up to \$5,000, should

they voluntarily leave employment or are terminated for cause before working three full years for the City. Repayment of the hiring bonus will follow the schedule set out below:

Date of Separation	Repayment Amount
<1 year from date of hire	100% of hiring bonus awarded over \$5,000.00
1 year to < 2 years from date of hire	67% of hiring bonus awarded over \$5,000.00
2 years to < 3 years from date of hire	33% of hiring bonus awarded over \$5,000.00

Both new lateral police officer hires and new exceptional (BLEA certified) hires will be required to sign a repayment agreement which will include the terms of receiving the hiring bonus and the repayment schedule before receiving any bonus payments.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

BCC 3.79.130(B) provides that the City Manager may adjust employee compensation and/or benefits when necessary to carry out sound personnel management and to accomplish objectives within the city’s defined commitments. Council approval is required, however, for adjustments to compensation and/or benefits of bargaining unit employees if the modifications exceed an annual cost to the City of \$50,000 in the aggregate for any bargaining unit. Here, because the proposed hiring bonus program may result in annual increased costs of more than \$50,000 in the aggregate for the police officer bargaining unit, Council approval is required. The Bellevue Police Officers Guild were noticed and waived the right to bargain.

Fiscal Impact

The Police Department currently has approximately 30 vacant police officer positions. In theory, if all those vacancies could be filled with lateral officers, which is unlikely, and they were all provided the maximum amount under this proposal, this would equal to \$900,000 plus variable expenses (employment taxes, retirement contributions, etc.). However, this is offset by the decreased costs of academy and time spent earning salary while on probation and in the field training program rather than productive policing.

The Police Department can fund the expected costs out of its existing General Fund budget. The Police 2025-26 proposed General Fund budget does not include these costs as it is expected that the Department can pay for increased costs, if any, from savings from the vacant positions.

OPTIONS

1. Adopt the Resolution authorizing payment of hiring bonuses of up to \$30,000 to new hire lateral police officers and up to \$15,000 to exceptional (BLEA Certified) hires to remain competitive with other jurisdictions in hiring for these hard-to-fill vacancies.
2. Do not adopt the Resolution and provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Union Notice
Proposed Resolution No. 10422

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A