



SAGINAW POLICE DEPARTMENT

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DATE: January 5, 2021
TO: Gabe Reaume, City Manager
FROM: Lee Howell, Chief of Police
SUBJECT: Recruitment and Retention

Manpower numbers being critical to effective policing and crime control, it is vital that Saginaw PD remain competitive for qualified applicants in the DFW area. You may recall from a March '19 memo and salary comparison study I provided that was also included in a Council presentation in the fall, how it is critical to the recruitment and retention of police officer applicants to keep salaries and benefits competitive with our public safety market area.

A 2019 PERF study showed 66% of departments nationwide had declining applicants. After events of 2020, this is now estimated to be much higher. In addition. Another study estimates 40% of officers who entered the profession within the last 5 years have already departed, turning to other jobs.

Since 2015 police positions have declined nationwide by 20,000 officers, mostly due to attrition. Younger applicants were seeking jobs in the private sector at a higher rate. Over the last two decades, the average age of a police officer has risen by 5 years while the average retirement age has gone lower by 5 years. Thirty years ago the average target age for retirement from law enforcement was 62. This has now been reduced to 57, and a 20-25 year career target goal has replaced a 30+ year career for those committed as law enforcement lifers.

Both COVID-19 and the reaction to the George Floyd incident have changed things yet again for the worse. At the pace we were receiving qualified applicants in the fall of 2019, we had projected being able to fill our open police officer positions by April of this year. Now applicants have plummeted again from an already reduced number. Since March '20, we are getting fewer applications, and fewer *qualified* applicants. This is a market-wide problem and was reflected in a recent TCC basic peace officer academy class which graduated only 5 students. Out of 10 original students, 3 failed, and 2 more dropped out. An average class anytime in the last 20 years should have had 25 students and maybe one failure.

In addition to a rapidly shrinking applicant pool, the trend for at least a decade now has been for the larger and faster growing departments with bigger budgets who pay recruits to attend the academy - or have their own internal academies, to gobble up the majority of new applicants. Also, more than ever, tenured experience is at a premium. Several years ago large and mid-size agencies began paying experienced officers thru "lateral entry" incentives, taking the heart of our traditional applicant pool.

A 5 year experienced officer can apply with around 20 potential agencies we directly compete with that will pay an average of \$10,000 more annually than we can. A few years ago there was a large tenured exodus from Saginaw PD when the lateral trend first started. Today, we face losing another round of experienced officers who have become marketable as the core of our patrol ranks reaches the 4 to 7 year mark. They can make career moves better for their future, not only making more money immediately, but also trimming years off their careers to retire at a higher pension.

We updated a survey of small to mid-size comparison agencies that we directly compete with to get a salary comparison by position/rank. Shutdowns and tax shortages have placed some cities at a budget shortfall, but many will still see pay rise by either COLA or step adjustments to maintain market competitiveness.

The survey shows we are competing not only for experienced applicants, but also with pay plans that have higher top out ranges, and "step plans" that accelerate officers through the range. Saginaw PD has a great reputation, quality personnel, and an attractive environment. We have been successful in hiring qualified experienced applicants in the last few years, and even had one return recently after leaving for greener pastures. However, very soon, we will seriously need to address range and rank compression in order to compete not only at entry level, but to also retain our experience and enhance the incentive to advance in rank.

We have recently examined our hiring and recruitment processes. We are advertising in several markets and added a new public safety job announcement periodical focused on minority candidates. We have implemented a written test as an additional assessment of potential success in a basic academy, and have streamlined the process for quality certified applicants when they present themselves. If we do not stay competitive at entry level, attract tenure with a plan that pays for experience, and continue to have a compressed pay scale that lacks pay incentive for retention or advancement, our applicant pool will dry up and the best and brightest of our experienced officers will seek employment elsewhere.

I recommend we commission the comprehensive salary and benefit market study and request it include a focus on developing a plan to decompress the pay ranges, bring tenured employees above midpoint, adjust rank ranges to reduce overlap, and allow for lateral entry of experienced officers in the most efficient, equitable and expedient manner possible.