

**MINUTES**  
**WASECA CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**  
**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2023, 6:00 P.M.**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Waseca City Council Work Session began at 6:00 p.m.

**ROLL CALL**

Councilmembers Present:	Mayor Randy Zimmerman	Mark Christiansen – 7:23 p.m.
	Jeremy Conrath	James Ebertowski
	John Mansfield – 6:02 p.m.	Stacey Schroeder- Via Phone
Councilmembers Absent:	Daren Arndt	

Staff Present: Carl Sonnenberg, City Manager  
Penny Vought, Waseca Police Chief  
Alicia Fischer, Finance Director  
Julia Hall, City Clerk  
Andrew Harren, Waseca Police Officer  
Angie Grotberg, Waseca Police Lieutenant  
Barb Kietzman, Waseca Police Department Records Clerk  
Brent Brass, Waseca Police Investigator  
Courtney Hartle, Waseca Police Officer  
Scott Girtler, Waseca Police Sergeant  
Elizabeth Gruenhagen, Waseca Police Officer  
Tim Schroeder, Waseca Police Sergeant – Via Phone  
Thomas Bendorf, Waseca Police Officer

Waseca County Staff Present: Jay Dulas, Waseca County Sheriff  
Doug Gerdt, Waseca County Chief Deputy  
Serena Frazier, Waseca County Sheriff's Deputy  
Rachel Cornelius, Waseca County Attorney

New Richland Staff Present: Tanyce Bruegger, New Richland Police Chief

**PURPOSE**

Mayor Zimmerman opened the meeting, stating that the purpose of the meeting was a discussion on Waseca Police Department staffing current and going forward.

City Manager Carl Sonnenberg Introduced Councilmember Stacey Schroeder on the phone, explained because it is a work session no action was to be taken, we are within the legal parameters of the open meeting law.

**CONVERSATION**

- Chief Vought started off the meeting reading a statement:  
"I believe we have been and will be able to provide excellent service to the residents of Waseca. In turn, we have a tremendous amount of support within our community. I also believe that we have dedicated officers and Staff who want to do a great job for the City and the Citizens of Waseca."

A timeline of the Waseca Police Department since 2020.

1. January 6, 2020- Arik Matson was shot- "Probably one of the most traumatic events a department can endure."  
Have not been at full staff since that day due to waiting months to fill his position,
  2. January 22, 2021- Another officer left for another department.
  3. At first it was possible to only fill one of the two positions but in May of 2021 authorization to fill both positions was received.
  4. Meanwhile the Department was still dealing with COVID. During this time they were directed if they left the state they would need to quarantine seven (7) days before they could return to work, many officers just cancelled their vacations and continued to work.
  5. October 14, 2021, and May of 2022 Police Department was able to do a commendation ceremony. Which included a law enforcement purple heart, medal of honor awards, lifesavings awards and unit commendations. As support, all officers were present to show their support even if not monetarily compensated.
  6. January 2022 an officer went out on FMLA and has since left employment. This officer's position has not been replaced.
  7. March 2022 officers were directed that they must maintain certain thresholds on their vacation accruals or they would lose them by mid-September 2022. Scheduling was done to work on a plan to get them their vacation time so they did not lose any. Some were able to take vacations and others did not want to short the rest of the department, so they did not take vacations. Chief Vought was then told to start "denying" vacation requests. She asked for a two (2) week reprieve of the directive for one (1) officer who had been sick and they could not get him under the threshold, that request was denied. Some officers did lose vacation hours.
  8. It was asked to provide "check-ups from the neck-up" to the PD, which is a review of how the officers are doing not just physically, because it was not in the budget it was denied. It took something being reported to the former City Manager to do something to help the Police Officers for the budget to be adjusted in June 2022, and check-ups from the neck-up" are now in the 2023 budget for PD.
  9. November 2022, an officer went out on FMLA.
  10. December 2022, an officer went out on FMLA.
  11. One of the officers on FMLA returned last Friday, but on March 1<sup>st</sup> another officer has their last day and it has been said that there may be other officers looking to leave, true or frustration it still needs to be addressed.
  12. "We are still very much a group of dedicated employees who will continue to show up and do the best job we can for our residents." Open to discussion on how to recruit new officers and retain the officers currently on staff.
- Councilmember Conrath stated that going back to the additional mandatory quarantine time, that should not have been done.
  - Detective Brass pointed out that the short staffing began before the shooting of Officer Matson, nine (9) to ten (10) Patrol officers would be preferred. The issue is not that more money is needed but more officers are needed.
  - Councilmember Ebertowski said he understands how all of that affects not just work life but also home life.
  - Chief Vought pointed out that PD has been short staffed almost the entire thirty-nine (39) years she has worked for PD, scheduling has always been hard. A copy of the current schedule was share with the Councilmembers.
  - Councilmember Mansfield pointed out that two open positions are in the budget. Asked if there was an equivalent standard between City PD and Sheriffs?
  - Chief Vought explained that they have been trying to hire since June for the two positions, that the hiring process begins right away when an application is received, they do not wait for a certain number or date. They

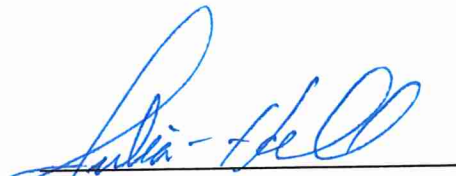
need applicants that are going to be a good fit for the City and the PD. Some lately have not been able to pass the required background check and do not even make it to the next steps in the process.

- Mayor Zimmerman said there are “9 to 10 thousand officers in Minnesota” was wondering if there is a network for them.
- Officer Harren pointed out that the hiring event he and Lieutenant Grotberg attended earlier in the day (Tuesday February 28, 2023) had approximately 61 departments/booths with approximately 75-100 students in attendance, where most of those students went straight to the booths from PDs in the Metro.
- Lieutenant Grotberg said that the ones they did talk to looked to the Metro because they were looking for the PD nearest “home”. She also pointed out that Brooklyn Center (population 32,000) offers officers between \$84,000 – \$105,000 with some being offered \$115,000 annually compared to Waseca (population 9,000) which offers \$67,496. Starting Waseca Deputy pay is \$61,000 - \$79,000.
- Councilmember Mansfield asked if there was a way to bring the Explorer Program back to the High School to create some of the local interest.
- Lieutenant Grotberg informed Council that the Explorer Program was shut down due to lack of interest.
- Deputy Frazier said that most people who ask about the position do not ask about pay but rather about the schedule which is currently six (6) and three (3) (meaning 6 shifts on 3 shifts off).
- Chief Vought stated that the PD currently has one detective working road shifts but that also then shorts us one working detective.
- Councilmember Conrath asked if there is a way to expand the hiring area and is there an issue with who is providing the Psych testing for the applicants?
- Chief Vought said the radius for hiring could be looked at and the firm that performs the psych tests is the same that has been doing it for many years, but with many applicants they aren’t getting to that step.
- Mayor Zimmerman asked if there was continued education for the officers.
- Chief Vought said that currently there are two online programs for the required continued education which was hard when several officers needed to renew at the same time during COVID but now more programs are going back to in person training. But some officers prefer to continue to do the online training. But yes there is continued training.
- Councilmember Schroeder asked if any of the officers who left were asked why they were leaving.
- Chief Vought said without speaking for them she does not know why specifically they left, there was no exit interview.
- Officer Harren said the schedule of working alone are big reasons people leave along with an increase in violent crimes are a big deterrent especially when working alone.
- Finance Director Alicia Fischer said that there are funds budgeted for two more patrol officers, but again that does not bring them to full staff.
- Detective Brass said yes nine (9) is full staff but ten (10 ) would be ideal.
- Points from Councilmember Conrath:
  1. Would like for Council to have input on the Union Contracts
  2. Would like for people not to lose their vacation and see if there is a way to increase the max threshold, instead of any being “lost” to have it paid out.
  3. Would like for unused sick time to be rolled into vacation time instead of lost to deter people from calling in “sick” just so they don’t lose it. Reward them for not being out sick.
  4. Does not believe that bonuses will work because if you are trying to compete with the larger cities the bonuses will have to be huge.
  5. He believes that the media has created the hiring problem, people are afraid to be officers. This thought was then echoed throughout the room ex: “yes you can get sued for helping” “you can be viewed forever on a split-second decision” “you are told what charges you face before an investigation or report is even started”.
- Lieutenant Grotberg shared that the Minnesota State Patrol class which normally can be 1200 recruits is now lucky if they have 200.

- A note read by City Manager Sonnenberg from Councilmember Arndt said that he does support the Police Department and wants them to be competitive in their hiring.
- Chief Vought mentioned that there is another hiring event next week in Hennepin County,
- Mayor Zimmerman stated the need to “pound the pavement and be deliberate”
- Deputy Frazier said that she had seen some recruitment videos that were very informative, showed the good in the community and why people would want to work there.
- Officer Harren said that many departments offer paid time for officers to exercise. A small break was taken if anyone wanted to step in and see the exercise room at the Police Department.
- Mayor Zimmerman said that the exercise room resembled more a “home gym” and not an adequate fitness room.
- Pastor Sipe asked the officers why they stay. Some answers given were:
  1. No interest in the Metro
  2. Great place to raise a family
  3. Love the community
  4. Home
  5. Most given answer “Coworkers are family”
- Councilmember Schroeder asked if they have thought of hiring a recruitment service for hiring or even just for pointers.
- Councilmember Mansfield said that the officers will be the best recruiters. He asked for a copy of job descriptions and an organization chart, City Manager Sonnenberg said that staff can provide that. He would like to know what all could be done by the Council to help the PD.
- To Councilmember Schroeder's question City Manager Sonnenberg said those conversations are ongoing, and that the hiring fair for that day was just brought to the PDs attention last week. Chief Vought confirmed they were able to beat the deadline to get signed up at the last minute. That is why they are already talking about the one in Hennepin County, she will work with them to get signed up.
- Chief Vought said the last pay and compensation review was done in 2016.
- Councilmember Conrath said because of all the changes that have been happening in the last few years it would be a good time to review the pay and comp plan.
- Finance Director Alicia Fischer confirmed that is correct and that it is time to look into an updated pay and comp review, those conversations have begun.
- Councilmember Christiansen said that this isn't just a one group issue, what is the retirement, what would be a way to increase incentive, is there a way to make it more appealing?
- Chief Vought said that “longevity pay” could be what is used as an incentive.
- Finance Director Alicia Fischer said that we can look into what options are available.
- Lieutenant Grotberg said that in their training it was said the Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA) will not be able to sustain the large exit of officers right now and in nine (9) years it may no longer be available to officers.
- Attorney Cornelius said that training is hard, there isn't enough funds to send everyone because they should be paid for those days even if they are not on patrol.
- Sergeant Schroeder said that it is not about the money, it is about the people. He repeatedly said how he loves his team and would do anything for them. They need to figure out a way to support the people.
- City Manager Sonnenberg said that a list of ideas should be put together to be presented for the 2024 budget. To include the cost to have nine (9) Patrol Officers not eight (8).
- Councilmember Conrath asked if it would be possible to move some around to help alleviate the schedules of the Patrol Officers. He would like to see the patrol stress alleviated sooner than the 2024 budget.
- Chief Vought said that possible department restructuring can be discussed.
- Attorney Cornelius said that the Drug Task force Officer is greatly needed in the community, the number of cases is large, not just little amounts or “little fish”. That position is shared with Waseca County.


- Councilmember Schroeder asked why the D.A.R.E. program was not being taught by the School Resource Officer (SRO).
- Chief Vought said with the SRO being new to that position at the time of training it was best they stay at the school instead of stepping away to do training right away. There is someone trained to teach the D.A.R.E. program who was accommodating to keep teaching the program, as they enjoy it, until it will be turned over. The SRO will be taking the training.
- Councilmember Mansfield asked if there was D.A.R.E. training for more than one grade of students.
- Lieutenant Grotberg confirmed there is training available to more grades than just 5<sup>th</sup> grade, it just is not currently offered.
- Councilmember Ebertowski circled back for clarification on who it was that denied the “check up from the neck up” reviews. Chief Vought confirmed it was the prior City Manager Mattson, due to budget. But it had been added now to the 2023 budget and to continue. Councilmember Ebertowski then asked what kind of follow-up there is to those checks, Chief Vought responded that depends on the situation, they are all different.
- Councilmember Mansfield asked if there was a “buddy check” process like there is in the military.
- Lieutenant Grotberg said yes informally, as well as there are groups that offer peer support.
- Chief Vought said that the City has an Employee Assistance Program.
- Lieutenant Grotberg stated that she had heard that it had not been well received.
- Mayor Zimmerman said that some Police Departments do have Law Enforcement Chaplains, and he introduced Pastor Sipe.
  1. Pastor Sipe gave an introduction of himself, and what he has done with other Law Enforcement Programs, how they have provided assistance to officers because the Chaplains are for the officers, no one else.
- Mayor Zimmerman asked for a summary of the meeting to include goals and future topics:
  1. Training
  2. Marketing of Waseca as a community
  3. Recruitment
  4. Larger gym/fitness area
  5. Reiterate the importance of the Police Department and how we as City Council can accommodate.
- Officer Harren thanked the Council for acknowledge their needs, there was a collective agreement of the officers in the room.
- Councilmember Ebertowski said the first goal should be getting the two (2) if not three (3) officers hired to relieve any officer from having to work alone.
- Councilmember Conrath said the big picture is to relieve stresses by filling bodies. It is long overdue.
- Councilmember Mansfield said he was happy to be included in the conversation and learn as a Council how they can work to help going forward.
- Chief Vought said her last point is that they have “Great Officers and PD Admin Barb and Christine”.
- Finance Director Fischer wanted to remind the Council that all these points have in the past been talked about and things were omitted, changed, or remained based on the decision of Council, it is nice to hear that things will be looked at again.

This being the beginning of an ongoing conversation the work session adjourned at 8:00 p.m.



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JULIA HALL  
CITY CLERK



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RANDY L. ZIMMERMAN  
MAYOR