



City of Jonesboro

Municipal Center
300 S. Church Street
Jonesboro, AR 72401

Meeting Minutes Public Safety Council Committee

Tuesday, June 20, 2023

5:00 PM

Municipal Center, 300 S. Church

1. Call To Order

2. Roll Call by City Clerk April Leggett

Present 6 - Mitch Johnson;David McClain;Chris Moore;Brian Emison;Janice Porter and LJ Bryant

Absent 1 - Chris Gibson

3. Approval of minutes

[MIN-23:051](#)

Minutes for the Public Safety Committee meeting on May 16, 2023

Attachments: [Minutes](#)

A motion was made by Chris Moore, seconded by Brian Emison, that this matter be Passed . The motion PASSED with the following vote.

Aye: 5 - David McClain;Chris Moore;Brian Emison;Janice Porter and LJ Bryant

Absent: 1 - Chris Gibson

4. New Business

ORDINANCES TO BE INTRODUCED

[ORD-23:027](#)

AN ORDINANCE TO THE CITY OF JONESBORO TO PLACE VARIOUS TRAFFIC SIGNS AT DESIGNATED LOCATIONS AS DETERMINED BY THE TRAFFIC CONTROL COMMITTEE

Sponsors: Engineering

A motion was made by Chris Moore, seconded by Brian Emison, that this matter be Recommended to Council . The motion PASSED with the following vote.

Aye: 5 - David McClain;Chris Moore;Brian Emison;Janice Porter and LJ Bryant

Absent: 1 - Chris Gibson

RESOLUTIONS TO BE INTRODUCED

[RES-23:104](#)

RESOLUTION BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF JONESBORO, ARKANSAS TO CONDEMN PROPERTY LOCATED AT: 405 State St. Jonesboro, AR 72401; Parcel #: 01-144171-03500; OWNER: Charles E. Noell, Jr., deceased

Sponsors: Code Enforcement

Attachments: [405 State Map](#)
[405 State Precondemnation Certified Letter Returned](#)
[405 State Precondemnation Notice Affidavit](#)
[WIN_20230428_10_39_25_Pro](#)
[WIN_20230428_10_40_54_Pro](#)
[WIN_20230428_10_41_01_Pro](#)
[WIN_20230428_10_41_30_Pro](#)
[WIN_20230428_10_41_44_Pro](#)
[405 State Inspection Report](#)

A motion was made by Chris Moore, seconded by Brian Emison, that this matter be Recommended to Council . The motion PASSED with the following vote.

Aye: 5 - David McClain;Chris Moore;Brian Emison;Janice Porter and LJ Bryant

Absent: 1 - Chris Gibson

5. Pending Items

6. Other Business

[COM-23:026](#)

DISCUSSION ON THE POLICE PAY AND RETENTION PLAN GOING FORWARD WITH POLICE CHIEF RICK ELLIOT

Attachments: [JPD Handouts](#)

Mayor Harold Copenhaver said, Mr. Chair if I could I would like to address the committee first before Steve Purtee and Chief Elliot make their presentations. If that's ok. Chairman Mitch Johnson said, yes sir. Mayor Copenhaver approached the podium and said, thank you Mr. Chair for this time and to be in front of the committee today and I also want to say thank you to everyone being present today. Conversation is always good and I look forward to many to come so thank you for your presence. I appreciate some of wives that I see in the room, of our officers, as well. So again, I'm looking forward to conversation and obviously there's been some chatter around State Police hiring some of our police officers. After spending a week with mayors from around the state at the Arkansas Municipal League conference I can assure you that we're not alone. On the bright side, we do have more officers than most cities our size and larger, and we're doing a far better job in a lot of areas than most. We just need to ensure that we stay that way. I don't have any confirmed facts about officers leaving JPD but everything I've heard so far is speculative, but we have to prepare in case that occurs. As I knew when I took office back in 2020, we are going to have to show our police force some appreciation, some commitment and indeed some pay raises. It's been a difficult time to be a police officer in our country and my number one commitment is safety. Part of the commitment includes pay adjustments; that we've made multiple times over the last two and half years, as recently as last year. We were among the top five statewide in base pay, and at that time we were asked to

prioritize starting pay and I pledged and you approved more than JPD requested. Though we have been preparing for our next adjustments in the recent months; the dynamics of police pay have changed significantly as you'll see in Mr. Purtee's report. Because of this change, we are undergoing a comprehensive review of how we compensate uniform employees. This conversation includes multiple departments working together for a solution. I am visiting with officers at every level and I want some third party input as well, such as Joe Hansen. Thankfully though, through tight fiscal management, we have the ability to address these issues for at least three to five years. I intend to have a preliminary look at up to a five year plan for you at next month's Public Safety meeting. Our goal has always been to pay our people the best we can within the framework of our city budget. As you know, we are stewards of the taxpayer's dollar. That's why we have to give the best raises we can while being fiscally responsible to our residents. I am confident that we can work through this process successfully. But we are talking about the individuals that provide us safety and I have pledged to take care of them since day one. I know that you want the same so I look forward to presenting you something next month. At this point, I'd like to turn over the podium to our Finance Department Director Steve Purtee to answer questions that you had brought several months ago and then Chief Elliot to follow up with that. Thank you Council.

Finance Department Director Steve Purtee approached the podium and said, thank you mayor. Mr. Chair if you don't mind I would like to distribute a few reports for your review. What I've distributed for you this evening are three reports that are kind of respective of the questions that were raised at last month's meeting. I took some notes from that session and I just wanted to touch on a very few of those. First, with regards to an assessment like this you always like to know where you've come from and I think that's a key part to this as well. You've got a one page report in front of you and the heading to it is simply JPD pay increase 2022 – 2023. This report just basically capsulates the percentage increases that we have seen occur in the pay structure for our uniform officers, specifically JPD, in the last two years. We've categorized this very simply by the starting pay category and then the max pay category. You can see that in the starting pay category from year end 2020, the starting pay was \$34,500 for uniform personnel. Over the course of that two year period that was increased to \$43,260, and that is the current starting pay structure for a U1 officer and firefighter in our city. You can see further that through that time period, two year period, that U1 category has seen several increases relative to the step plan as it is in place currently and then cost of living adjustments that have been applied since then. The total increase for this two year period for that category has been 28.4% when you sum out all of those pay increases. If you recall we kind of commented about this time last year, there was a very specific exercise relative to this analysis and that's when through your actions, your approval and with the mayor's support we did establish a 19.4% increase in our starting rate going from \$34,500 to \$43,260 at that time. I think it's already been indicated and I'm sure Chief Elliot will reference this as well in his remarks, that we saw that as pushing us up into the second or third highest offering rate for a uniform officer at that time one year ago. The further you can see the other categories respected to those, U2 through U6 in those categories as well. I think the key point here is it's showing a 10% increase in each of those categories for that two year period, and you can again see the respected step increases cost of living adjustments and then the total increase. One other point that is kind of clarified on this report is on the far right hand side. It talks about the max pay, identifies that. The emphasis has been at the same time that we're identifying cost of living adjustments. Through some of the limitations of the step program a person could max out at step 21, etc. So again, through the efforts of the work in this regard, it was determined that those max steps should be advanced each

of those periods as well. That's what you're seeing here and that resulted in basically a 10% increase for the two year period for those upper ranked categories in that report. That's just kind of where we've been.

I think another specific question that was raised last month was regarding retention. I think when you start looking at retention you just have to dig into the detail. Through the effort of JPD and our HR Department you have a colored report that basically shows all of the terminations relative to JPD within the last four and a half year period. It starts at the year 2019 and goes through mid-year 2023. I think the key focus here is, I tried to delineate between that four and a half year period and the two and a half year period since 2021 just identifying those key areas relative to terminations and what basically the reasons were. One category that I think that we're probably trying to address here today and lay the ground work for the future work on it is that relative to those personnel that are leaving our department for another agency. You can see that the last two and a half years, there have been 15 personnel that left for either a category of competitive pay, work load or shift change indication. Then we further identify that group consisted of 14 officers and one special crimes unit officer, all in the U1 category. You can see that the average years for service for that group is 2.2 years, relative to that 15 personnel. Not to bore with the details of the report, you can go on down through there and see the various categories. Obviously, the highest percentage category were retirements, and we have 16 personnel that retired within the last two and a half years and you can see those various ranks with the average service of 22.6 years. The other categories are somewhat small in nature and you can see the difference in the identification there. I think another key category represents 15% of the terminations for this two and a half years and those were six officers, one criminal investigation officer and one special crime unit officer. They left our agency for a different line of work, questionable job fit, or they did not complete their training. Again, that was 8. I think that just gives you an overview of the various reasons. Again, just an attempt to identify what has happened to our personnel over a period of time. If you want to dig more into the detail you can look at the four and a half year trend for that as well. We'll be glad to try and address any questions on that. Another key question was retention specifically looking at categories of five year, ten year, and fifteen year buckets. That's a little hard to do in a report that can lay out very easily. I thought it was important to look at that based on our pay scale categories. Again, that's that JPD retention data that you have there in front of you. You can see that the patrol officers in the U1 category were 86 personnel in that group. As of this report and this is a couple weeks old, there were six open positions. Average years of service in that category is four years. In the range of those personnel is two months in service to twenty-seven years. Relative to that group. In our specialized investigative officers, which is the rest of the U1 category, there were 50 personnel, there are two open slots at this particular time. I think there were a little transition of school resource officers at that time. Relative to that category average years of service is 15 years, and the span of service for that group is one year to thirty-three years. Then you get up into our U2 category. This is our Sergeant group. We have Patrol Sergeant at 13 personnel. Obviously no open slots in that group. The average years of service for those 13 personnel is sixteen years and the span of that is ten years to twenty-four years. Then if you look at the same category again for our specialized investigative Sergeant. There's 12 personnel, no open slots, average years of service is seventeen years with a span of eleven years to twenty-five years of tenure. Then you get up into the remaining categories. You can see are Lieutenants, Captains, Assistant Chief and Chief and in those categories, it's consisting in 14 personnel and you can see the years of service average from twenty-two years to thirty-one years relative to those categories. You can see the various details in those as well. That is all of the information that I had prepared for this section. I'll be glad to try and entertain any questions.

Councilmember Chris Moore said, Steve I was the one that asked for the retention information and I appreciate that. When I look at your report, there's six categories that you've identified for a total of 54 officers in that time period. What I was interested in, along with that information, was I would like to see the comparison of those six categories of not just in house of how they're broke down, but how those six categories compare to other cities. In other words, when I'm looking at the first line item which is 28% of the officers left for another local agency; that doesn't tell me how that compares with other police departments around the state. Is that a typical phenomenon in the state or is that reflective of our culture or pay here? So, if possible, maybe the mayor or your department, at the next Public Safety committee would give us those same six categories with comparison for three or four other cities our size in Arkansas. Director Steve Purtee said, ok, we'll sure try to get that information.

Councilmember L.J. Bryant said, I would just say too, along with what Councilman Moore was saying, this might be more difficult but to compare call volume of agencies. I know some of these instances they're leaving for Walnut Ridge and very small departments and there could be multiple variables, but I can imagine one of them could be the call volume of the shift. Director Steve Purtee said, I'll relay that information to our PD administrative group as well and they'll probably be able to help us discover some of that data.

Chairman Mitch Johnson said, we appreciate you very much Mr. Purtee and we'll turn the floor over to Chief.

Police Chief Rick Elliot approached the podium and said, good evening mayor, committee and Mr. Chair. Again, thank you for the opportunity to come up and continue this discussion that we started at this meeting last month. I'm going to kind of back up a little bit. Last month we discussed about an ongoing crisis in this country, in the law enforcement world. Every law enforcement agency across the country is facing this crisis of shortage and people not wanting to get into this profession. It's obviously very concerning to the mayor, myself, my staff, and my people that we too have the same problem as everybody else in this state and everybody else across the country.

First I want to say, when the mayor came in we did make some headway on this issue. We certainly appreciate the mayor and the council on the movement forward that we've made on this old salary plan that's been in place since 2016. I'll say, I think that's a plan that is time for a revamping. As we move forward, I've got to say that this problem is a concern. I've talked with other Chief's and Sherriff's across the state and it's the same problem. It's a problem where if officers are not tied to that community they're going to look for another agency that may have better benefits, better pay or whatever. In this particular case, right now, the problem we're facing is, sure, I've got several officers that have applied for Arkansas State Police. The governor made a substantial increase to the start of state police salary. The fact that the state of Arkansas pays their insurance, pays for their retirement; these are things that we cannot compete with. It's unfortunate. On a municipal level, I think we need to do what we can do to retain what we have and try to move forward and stay competitive. So I passed out a sheet earlier. Just kind of as we're going over statistics earlier with Mr. Purtee. He kind of took the breakdown of why people left. We've kept a record and tried to do an exit interview as officers leave, as they go other places for the reasoning, and we've had officers go to other agencies and may take a little less money just to get away from the sheer call volume. Our call volume is up. These officers answering over 6,000 calls a month. 6,000. As Mr. Sturch at dispatch says, we're looking at 10% increases at call volume across the board in the city. So calls for service, not only police, but everything else has gone up. Out numbers where they're at and the holes that are empty, that puts a lot of stress and work load on these

officers that are out there on shift. So having to have a lot of calls, it does cut down on the amount of time they get to do on pro-active policing just because they are answering calls.

When we kind of look at the over view of the department, we are authorized 175 sworn personnel. That's a good number. Is that a number that I think I'm happy with, considering the size of the city? Absolutely not. I think the call volume and everything else, I'd love to see that grow by another 20. I can't get 20.

Right now we currently have 13 positions that are not filled. That compared to other agencies across the state, large agencies, we're very fortunate. There's other agencies that have 15 and 20 positions that are not filled. So I feel that we are very fortunate right now. Currently we have six in the academy, four that's in their FTO stage, one on military deployment and I have five on FMLA or light duty. You take those unopened, the ones that's in training, military deploy and those that are injured, those are additional bodies that are not out there on the streets therefore it's putting the work load on everybody else that is available.

Currently in the department we have eight plus individuals that's eligible to retire at any time. They have reached their point in their career with LOPFI that they've met all requirements for retirement. These officers on are the DROP program and they could leave at any point that they wish.

Years of experience. Right now we have 66 officers with five years or less of experience. We have 23 with five to ten years of experience. We have 20 with eleven to fifteen years of experience. We have 23 with sixteen to twenty years of experience. We have 16 with twenty-one to twenty five years of experience. We have 9 with twenty-six to thirty years of experience and we only have 5 with thirty plus years of experience with the department.

On your list, as you look at the numbers that we've hired over the past years, we hired 13 in 2018, 14 in 2019, 17 in 2020, 20 in 2021 and 24 in 2022.

Certified officers that we've hired in the past since 2018, 2 in 2018, 1 in 2019, 0 in 2020, 8 in 2021, 7 in 2022, so after the pay adjustment in 2022 we did succeed in our mission at that time in increasing the pay. It did attract some officers. The problem is that this pay issue, yes we addressed it in April of 2022 but no sooner than we addressed it here, every agency across the state saw what we did and did the same thing. As we stand here today, the Arkansas Municipal League published their recent salary survey from Johansen, who is the group that they've always used at the league and the same group that we have used in the past. This publication was made public at the conference last week. It's now on their AML website, but the information was effective February 1, 2023. Since that time, most of the major cities in the state have made adjustments. No sooner than we do a survey in 2022 and we come in with a salary adjustment, and there was a brief period that we were on of the top municipal agencies in the state, but it didn't last. Everybody else across the state scrambled and adjusted, and yet adjusted again and as of last week Bentonville adjusted again. The issue is that one, finding somebody wanting to do this job, stay in this job is tough. It's tough across the country. The market right now is open across the country. Everybody's hiring and if somebody is not tied to their community by family or other means, if they're looking to move then there's opportunities out there for them go and be employed anywhere. What we look at for us, yes I know that State Police is actively and hard recruited my officers, and the reason being and they have told us we have the best trained officers in the state and they'll take every one of them.

The salary survey that you have in front of you, these numbers where just update as of this week. These numbers are fluid, it's evolving daily, weekly. Try's to compete across the board for a rare commodity, I guess you could say. As we move forward, the mayor, I, and Mr. Purtee, Mr. Richardson and Mr. Thomas, assistant Chief, we've been in talks with the mayor on what does moving forward look like. Does it involve revamping the current salary structure, which I think is overdue, does it look at

involving incentives? So right now, everything's on the table as we've had discussions. It's trying to find a combination of what kind of pay adjustment, is there any incentives that we can do. It's a fluid process right now that we're kind of going through and trying to, as the mayor said, have a resolution in a short amount of time. I think hopefully this time next month at this meeting, we'll be able to walk in with a plan that will suite these needs and hopefully we can move forward. I would hope that this plan would help retain some of these officers that may be looking at leaving, but more important I hope it's a plan that helps me compete against the local industry around here. Because I'm not competing so much against Northeast Arkansas but I'm competing against local businesses.

When we look at our applicant pool, we have tested 130 applicants this year. 130. I got six that passed. That's what I'm looking at sending to the academy in August. Six out of 130. We may get a bunch of applicants and a lot of them don't show, some that do show they can't pass the written and physical test, then we wash out quite a bit in the background. I have a high standard set for officers that go to work here. I don't want to lower standards to just fill shoes. I don't want to take a subpar applicant and end up on TV like Memphis Tennessee. My goal is that one that I hope this will take care of the problem but as the mayor says, as we fix this or move forward with it I would like to see it on a long term plan. I don't need a Band-Aid. I need something long term that when they hire in they know where they're at, and I hope from this point on that we can have it set up where the council reviews this in a more timely fashion so we don't get so far behind as we are now.

To the officers that showed up today, I want to say thank you to each and every one of you for everything you've done keeping this city safe. You look at our crime stats over the past 15 years. We've really not had a large spike in crime, yet we have grown 15,000 people and it's due to one thing, this dedicated bunch of men and women. Thank you. Any questions.

Councilmember David McClain said, Mr. Chairman I have a couple of questions. Chief, thank you for all the information. Steve, thank you for the information. A few things. One, I think the time has come to address the problem we have, losing officers. If my math is correct, we've lost 17 since the beginning of 2023 and potentially could lose 15. Chief, what does that do when we lose experienced officers. What happens and how long does it take for us to replace someone? Chief Rick Elliot said, well just to give a little more history on that. In the past 18 months we've lost 35. When we ran a cost analysis you're looking at about \$65,000. The day they hire in there's about \$12,000 in equipment that they're issued. Then they start their training process and it's a good eight months before they're an asset to the city. They have to complete the academy and their FTO program before they can get out and patrol by themselves. So it's a lengthy process and unfortunately, during this training phase we'll lose one or two that just cannot cut the training. You go back and look at Mr. Purtee's sheet there is a breakdown on the reason when a person was departed. Again, I'm not going to pass someone through training just to have a body on the street. That body will end up getting themselves hurt or somebody else hurt or killed. We're going to try and maintain our standards that we have and we take pride in that. Sometimes things don't go right but you know what, we deal with it. Councilmember David McClain said, let me ask this then Chief. It seems like moral and pay are our main issues that we're dealing with. Within the next month, what are we looking at? Are we looking at? What plans do we have right now? Are we willing to make the investment and are we willing to split our uniform employees, whether it be police and fire, splitting them and having two separate plans? Are we willing to do that? Mayor you can answer that or Steve you can, but whoever wants to answer that, are we willing to do that? I think it's time, honestly, and I think we have to decide how to keep from losing. Losing 35 in 18 months, Chief, is a lot of people. A lot of experience, a lot of

great value to our city. I think we have to be willing to say we have an issue, rip the band-aid off, fix it and move forward from there. My question, what plans do we have and are we willing? Chief Rick Elliot said, I will defer to the mayor on anything concerning that issue. That's up to the mayor and Mr. Purtee.

Mayor Harold Copenhaver said, Councilman, let me go ahead and reiterate too. Basically what we're doing here with our conversations is putting everything on the table and it needs to be done. So I think, the last page, even though the Chief didn't go over it, competitive pay, incentives, shift differentials, recruiting bonuses, sign-on bonuses, tiered raise structure as well as additional insurance support are on the table. The reason for the third-party group is they come in from outside and gives us the ability to say on police verses fire, what's those differences, if there's differences and they'll give us recommendation on that. So I think everything's on the table at this point so that was a good question. Councilmember David McClain said, so are we looking by the next Public Safety meeting on having this done? Mayor Harold Copenhaver said, we will have a preliminary report. Our goal, and my goal in particular, is to have a minimum of three years and possible five year plan of action moving forward. We've already contacted the third-party group to initiate these conversations, so we're already proactive on this but we don't want to put a band-aid on it, we want to do the right thing.

Councilmember David McClain said, let me ask this Mr. Chairman. I feel we need more time in the next meeting. In our next meeting can we either adjust our time ahead or should we call a special called meeting in order to devote plenty of time to discussion, questions, comments, so if someone wants to get up and speak? I'm in favor of that so we have plenty of time to look over things, have conversation and go from there. Chairman Mitch Johnson said, I think that is probably a given councilmen. Especially if we're coming back with some hard numbers and some preliminary things that we can look at. I'm ok with preliminaries coming back, but I don't this thing to linger and for us have to come back and digest at every Public Safety meeting. We need to just press forward and I think, mayor that your office and Chief it's been a long time as well. I mean, we've done this before. We probably didn't stress hard enough, the importance of reviewing these things every two to three years. I think with the way the times are now you may want to put a two year review in this. I agree with everything Chief says and I'm grateful that we have officers out there that are sticking through with us. Especially, as we look at this and try to fix it permanently. I don't know if we need to look at special called or just extend our time. I guess we can work on how we want to do that in the next week. Councilmember David McClain said, I guess the question would be is if we left it before the Council meeting that limits us. So could we look at another day or again if we bump the time up 30 minutes or make it at 4 o'clock, but we need to devote plenty of time. Chairman Mitch Johnson said, yes I agree. It shouldn't be less than an hour. I think as we start this process as you're working with this stiff mayor then we'll be looking at what we need to do as far as time frame. Councilmember David McClain said, so one more thing. If we have a committee, am I understanding that we are forming a committee? We have a third-party, Chief, mayor. What's this look like and are we going to have someone like an officer? What does that look like as well? Mayor Harold Copenhaver said, through our discussions and where Chief and I've gone, we'll be doing one on one conversations with different ranks and different employees. The third-party group is a collaborative group and we want the representation of the police department because these are the individuals that we're working with. Its top priority for me to understand where they're coming from, what they're seeing and what they're vision is as well. Chief Rick Elliot said, like I said earlier, there's several things that are on the table. Going into this we know that not everything that is on the table will be granted, but it's important that we kind of narrow the list down and see what's important to most and then move forward from there. The key thing is that the wheels are in motion. We're

just looking forward to hopefully get this back to you at this next committee meeting so we can move on and have a resolution as soon as possible with hopes that maybe I can retain some that's looking to move elsewhere. I think that tonight we have made this public that the city is serious about this, the mayor is committed to this, and I'm committed to this, my staff's committed to this, ya'll are committed to this. I hope the men and women of the department realize that they've not been forgotten, they're valued and appreciated and we're looking to move forward.

Councilmember David McClain said, when is our next scheduled Public Safety meeting? The 18th. Should we go ahead and make the adjustment now to the time?

Mayor Harold Copenhaver said, I think if I can keep Mr. Chair up-to-date to where we are in the process and then I challenge any other councilmember, or anybody in this room, if you would like input please make that connection with us as we continue to communicate. I think any of those questions we need to move forward with, but Mr. Chair, I would be more than happy to keep you up-to-date with those discussions and then we look at how much time we feel we need. Chairman Mitch Johnson said, yeah maybe no more than the next two weeks we can that way everybody can plan accordingly to allocate all the time that we will need. Mayor Harold Copenhaver said, perfect.

Councilmember Chris Moore said, why don't we back the time up so far before the Council meeting and have good attendance. I would think that we would be looking at a special called meeting on the odd Tuesday that we're not meeting. If you back the meetings up two hours to 3 o'clock our attendance isn't going to be there. Chairman Mitch Johnson said, we'll look at all those options. I'm more than happy to call a special called meeting. Chief we appreciate your time, we appreciate your officers and your staff and we look forward to having great things come out of this.

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[COM-23:027](#)

VECTOR MOSQUITO CONTROL REPORT FOR THE CITY OF JONESBORO FOR THE MONTH OF MAY 2022

Attachments: [Jonesboro May, 2023](#)

Filed

7. Public Comments

8. Adjournment

A motion was made by LJ Bryant, seconded by Chris Moore, that this meeting be Adjourned. The motion PASSED with the following vote.

Aye: 5 - David McClain;Chris Moore;Brian Emison;Janice Porter and LJ Bryant

Absent: 1 - Chris Gibson