

**CITY OF COLUMBIA
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION MINUTES
FEBRUARY 13, 2008 - 9:00 AM
CITY HALL – 1737 MAIN STREET
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - 3RD FLOOR**



The Columbia City Council met for a Work Session on Wednesday, February 13, 2008 in the City Hall Council Chambers located at 1737 Main Street, Columbia, South Carolina. Mayor Robert D. Coble called the meeting to order at 9:14 a.m. The following members of Council were present: The Honorable E. W. Cromartie, II, The Honorable Anne M. Sinclair, The Honorable Tameika Isaac Devine, The Honorable Daniel J. Rickenmann and The Honorable Kirkman Finlay III. The Honorable Sam Davis joined the meeting at 12:57 p.m. Also present were Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager and Ms. Erika D. Salley, City Clerk.

CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION / ACTION

- **Council recessed at 9:15 a.m. to move the meeting to the second floor in the Council Conference Room.**
- **Council reconvened the meeting at 9:26 a.m.**
- Public Safety Recruitment and Retention Program – Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager stated that nobody feels more strongly than he does about ensuring that our Public Safety personnel are compensated appropriately, but there are also employees swinging off the back of garbage trucks in the rain and working in the middle of the streets when water mains burst under adverse conditions. He has a responsibility to make sure all employees are compensated fairly.

Councilor Finlay asked why Council was told that there was not a need to discuss this issue last year. Gong forward Council needs sufficient information and this discussion needs to be carried out across all departments.

Councilor Devine noted that all Council members are very concerned about the well being of all employees. She is anxious to hear the recommendations today. There are other issues besides pay that impact recruitment in the Police Department. She stated that the Interim Police Chief could easily address some of the issues.

Councilor Rickenmann stated that the firefighters and officers should not have to take second jobs to make ends meet. While this may not stop that, it is a good start. He stated that the compensation study did not help. He said that both departments are losing good people. He expressed concerns about employees with only two years of service training new recruits.

Councilor Devine stated that there is a lot of misinformation out there that keeps being repeated. She said that Council members should be able to tell citizens where to go to get accurate information, such as the website.

Mayor Coble said that we needed to hire a Police Chief realizing that there will be a transition period; address the issue of retention and increase the number of Police Officers by establishing a long-term goal; and continue with the installation of the security cameras.

Councilor Sinclair said that she has not received any complaints about how the police operate in Council District Three. She noted that service delivery is still high quality despite recent challenges.

Councilor Rickenmann urged the Council to figure out the true needs of Columbia without comparing our city to other cities.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager explained that the highest turnover in the Police Department occurs within the first three (3) years of employment, but after five (5) years the rate drops dramatically. The Fire Department doesn't have problem with retention.

Councilor Devine stated that the city's technology should be on the cutting edge and that is a budget issue that we need to focus on.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager explained that this city was the first jurisdiction to authorize computers and bulletproof vests for each Police Officer. We fit every officer for a new vest every five (5) years. We have the capacity to generate reports in the field and then send them to Records. Each officer has his or her own radio. The Police Officers in this city are as well equipped as Police Officers anywhere in this country.

Councilor Rickenmann said that we have new cars that aren't being used, we need Tasers and computers in every car. We need to look at these things and budget for them.

Councilor Finlay requested the overtime hours for both departments.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager explained that implementation of the compensation plan would span over three (3) years due to the significant cost factor. We are working out a packet that would include implementation in year one that would utilize funds from the first quarter.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department, explained that Patrol areas require 24/7 coverage with four (4) Officers per squad. This is minimal staffing. There are 205 Officers currently available for patrol functions. A total of 256 Officers are needed.

Mayor Coble asked how does overtime impact the need for additional officers.

Interim Chief Norman Caldwell, Columbia Police Department, explained that officers are working overtime to fill in the gap of the vacant positions.

Councilor Finlay stated that 280 officers are needed to ensure that the Police Department is minimally staffed at all times.

Councilor Sinclair noted that these positions are already budgeted but not filled. There are 24 recruits currently in training.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager noted that a total of 286 officers are needed, there are 22 entry-level police vacancies that are funded, but 11 additional positions need to be funded. There are some constitutional privileges we must provide such as public safety, blocking streets and controlling traffic. We had over 300 special events last year that required some level of public safety duties.

Councilor Cromartie asked for the number of full time officers assigned to narcotics and the gang taskforce for the City of Columbia only.

Mayor Coble stated that the retention plan would start in next years budget and be phased in after that. The retention plan would address getting more of the officers away from overtime and hiring more officers as part of that. It sounds like the number for the total force should be 375 +/- . We should wait until the new Chief of Police gets in and then say what our goal is for the total of new officers. We hired twenty (20) in 2006.

Councilor Finlay suggested that the incentive plan be tiered to the first 5-year period, which is where we seem to have a lot of fall out.

Councilor Rickenmann said that we need rewards for loyalty after five (5) years and officers need to know there's a career path.

Councilor Finlay further suggested that as we fill positions we also determine how that impacts overtime. This will allow us to move slowly away from overtime.

Councilor Cromartie stated that other Police Chiefs reported that allowing officers to take their cars home is a great retention tool and it serves as a deterrent. He wants to know the number of officers that take their cars home.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager said that officers living in city limits are allowed to take their cars home to the extent that we are able to do it. The city has sufficient vehicles to accomplish patrol functions, but an additional 250 vehicles would be needed in order for every officer to have a car to take home. He asked nine (9) Columbia Police Officers, sergeants and below, to rate four (4) issues from 1 to 4 with 4 being most important; salaries, cars, equipment and benefits. They rated them as follows: salaries, benefits, equipment and cars.

Councilor Finlay noted that the total amount for Police and Fire is \$2,679,727. He suggested that they put \$900,000 into next years budget for the Retention Plan.

Councilor Devine asked if there was a possibility of not phasing the plan into the budget and just doing it at one time.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager stated that there is some possibility, but there would be some sacrifice involved.

Mayor Coble asked who would get the money and how it would be distributed. He requested a briefing on these matters.

Councilor Devine directed the City Manager to bring back a recommendation

Councilor Finlay asked what impact festivals have on the Columbia Police Department each year. Can't we get some of our money back from Hospitality Tax?

Upon motion by Mayor Coble, seconded by Ms. Sinclair, Council voted unanimously to confirm the following six (6) goals to City Staff for the safety of all citizens of the City of Columbia with the caveat that the Interim Finance Director provides an estimated proposed budget for Public Safety (Police and Fire) over the next three (3) years indicating what revenue would be needed to meet these goals.

1. Hire a new Police Chief in March 2008;
2. Direct the City Manager to implement the retention plan in phases over the next three (3) years or less, effective fiscal year 2008/2009;
3. Establish a goal of 375 Police Officer personnel of which would be 286 Patrol Officers and 19 additional positions;
4. Continue to move forward with the installation of security cameras (We are currently implementing Phase I and negotiating contracts for Phases 2 and 3);

5. Review the final draft of the Gang Assessment by February 20, 2008 and proceed with implementing the recommendations; and
6. Continue our commitment to the goals of the Criminal Domestic Violence Taskforce.

- **Council recessed at 10:53 a.m.**
- **Council reconvened at 11:11 a.m.**

Upon motion by Mr. Finlay, seconded by Ms. Devine, Council voted unanimously to go into Executive Session at 11:11 a.m. for the discussion of the employment of an employee as it relates to the Police Chief position.

- **Mr. Finlay left the meeting at 12:00 p.m.**
- **Mr. Davis joined the Executive Session discussion at 12:57 p.m.**
- **Ms. Sinclair left the meeting at 1:13 p.m.**
- **Council adjourned the meeting at 1:30 p.m. No further action was taken.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Salley
City Clerk