



City of La Center – Communications Chief Richardson’s Response to Councilmember Strobehn

Chief Richardson’s Response is for the community. The response originated as reply to a portion of an email from Councilmember Strobehn. This email from Councilmember Strobehn is below for the community to have context. The following page begins the response from Chief Richardson.

From: Thomas Strobehn <tstrobehn@ci.lacenter.wa.us>
Sent: Friday, October 15, 2021 12:11 PM
To: Greg Thornton <gthornton@ci.lacenter.wa.us>
Cc: Randy Williams <rwilliams@ci.lacenter.wa.us>; Bob Richardson <brichardson@lacenterpd.org>; Janice Corbin <sescorbin@msn.com>
Subject: Re: Police Budget

I understand but you are sidestepping the question. The budget is confusing the residents as they interpret what was presented. Your administration presented a budget for a full station with signing bonus, trainings, cameras etc...etc... The interpretation is that you are hiring officers filling the La Center Police Department with employees, which isn't the truth and your administration isn't making that clear. There is an election happening and the residents have the right to know where the Mayor stands on this topic.



Police Department
105 West 5th Street, La Center, WA 98629
Phone: 360.263.2400

Dear Councilmember Strobehn,

I would like to respond to the emails to Mayor Thornton regarding the Police Department and the budget. As you recall, the city contracted for an assessment of the police department as it had done with other city departments. This assessment clearly showed that the department was understaffed and underfunded.

The City Council directed Jeff Swanson and I to explore the alternative of contracting out law enforcement services with another law enforcement agency and bring those results back for consideration.

As I have explained to you in prior meetings, this has taken much more time than we anticipated due to the City of Ridgefield deciding whether they were interested (they are not) and having to work with the Clark County Sheriff's Office and the Clark County Council. The one-on-one remote meetings with the Clark County Council did not conclude until this past Monday.

I understand the significant decisions that lie ahead for the City Council regarding law enforcement services and the consequences these decisions have on the community. To make a correct decision the City Council must know the true costs of maintaining a police department versus the true costs for contracting out law enforcement services.

The true costs include recruitment, hiring bonuses, appropriate staffing levels, retention of employees, training, equipment, building maintenance, and future potential costs associated with police reform legislation. If these influences on the budget are not taken into consideration, the city (taxpayers) risk the long-term consequences of increased employee turnover, labor grievances, a poor professional reputation that impacts the recruitment of qualified police officers, and a police chief.

In a worst-case scenario, such as a situation where someone is injured or killed by a police employee who was inadequately trained, poorly equipped, followed a poorly developed department policy, received inadequate supervision, or was negligently hired, you face expensive litigation, the loss of insurance through the municipal insurance pool, intervention by the Criminal Justice Training Commission, the State Attorney General's Office, or the United States Department of Justice.

If you recall, during the preliminary budget presentation, the accuracy of the police budget was questioned by at least one City Councilmember who felt it was too low. We

are currently working on a true cost that includes staffing, equipment, training, SWAT, after hours records coverage, and other professional services.

I take exception to you accusing the Mayor or his administration from being untruthful in its presentation of a preliminary budget. We are presenting the true costs of staffing and running a police department that can meet the increased demands in training and provide the appropriate equipment required under recently passed police reform legislation. We also must budget sufficient funds to meet recruitment demands for officers, a promotion process for police sergeant, and the recruitment and relocation costs for a Police Chief.

The budget timeline is set to meet the approval deadline mandated by state law and is running concurrently with the process of developing a presentation to council on contracting out law enforcement services per their direction.

Since the City Council has not decided on the issue regarding the contracting out of law enforcement services, we must provide a budget that fully funds the police department so the future police chief can bring the department up to police best practices by correcting current deficiencies.

Remember that this was a preliminary budget and the best way to reduce confusion in the community is to have a discussion of your budget questions in an open council meeting as we continue to move forward with the budget approval process.

Unfortunately, most of the confusion in our community is due to the large amount of misinformation, false allegations, slander of City employees, City consultants, the Mayor, and the release of City emails and other City documents, without context, over social media to advance a specific political agenda.

Sincerely,

Bob Richardson
Interim Chief of Police
La Center Police Department