

Sheriff's department to update equipment, training

Committee passes ordinance allowing department to use seized funds

By Hunter Turpin
Special to The Freeman

WAUKESHA —The Waukesha County Judiciary and Law Enforcement Committee addressed budgetary and staffing concerns within the sheriff's department, passing an ordinance to fund equipment replacement and hearing an update on hiring and overtime, in a meeting on Friday.

The sheriff's department announced that transfers from the Huber Facility are completed for the year; this was one of the major adjustments the department made to create efficiencies both

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financially and in hiring. The department also said it wants to update equipment and training following mass shootings, such as in Uvalde, Texas.

"I, in an effort to be as transparent as I can humanly possibly be, tell you that we do not have a funding source to do equipment replacement beyond this year," Waukesha County Sheriff Eric Severson said. "We need to ask for help or we need to make a decision that we're not going to provide the equipment necessary to do our job."

Budget ordinance

The committee unanimously passed an ordinance to ease budget concerns by modifying the 2022 county sheriff's department budget, allowing seized funds to be used by the department. Seized funds are the proceeds from criminal activity that law enforcement seizes following an investigation proving the money was made

unlawfully.

The ordinance would allow \$60,000 in seized funds currently reserved in the county's general fund to be used by the department for equipment updates, according to county documents.

Federal guidelines require that these funds be used to enhance law enforcement activities. Thus, \$12,000 will be used to purchase breaching tools for vehicles; the other \$48,000 will be for ballistic shields for school resource officers in high schools and a handful of patrol vehicles, County Inspector Jim Gumm said.

The sheriff's department said that recent active shooter situations, including that in Uvalde, have made ballistic shields a more pressing issue for the department.

"We consider this, unfortunately, the world we live in," Gumm said. "This is a necessary piece of equipment and, I think, the public expects that law enforcement have this capability and be able to utilize it in absolute crisis and emergency."

Severson said that, while

he feels good about the department's capabilities to respond in a mass shooting, the department still wants to improve and is working on active shooter training modules for officers.

"...we are actually requiring our officers to look at evidence in Uvalde," Severson said. "We're completely revisiting our operations and our training to make sure that the deficiencies of other agencies during these highly critical, highly dangerous situations aren't going to be repeated."

For decades, seized funds could be used by law enforcement, but after some abuse of the system in other agencies, there was a bipartisan movement at the state and federal level to place restrictions on seizure and forfeiture of proceeds from criminal enterprises, limiting their ability

to use them, Severson explained. He said that, today, the department is spending this balance faster than it's being replenished and is predicting the department will not be able to support its sworn equipment replacement plan beyond 2023, necessitating this ordinance.

Hiring update

Ahead of a correctional officer hiring event next week, the sheriff's department reported that deputy overtime is down 20% from this time last year, but correctional officer overtime is up 8%.

The department had five open deputy positions as of Friday and was interviewing five applicants the same day. If all those positions are taken, the department's deputy staff would be filled but not fully trained as upwards of 35 officers will

complete training by the end of the year. However, that's only half of the organization.

In the corrections division, 16 CO job openings were filled since the meeting in June, but the department is anticipating between 10 and 15 openings yet to be filled by the job fair. The job fair will be held Monday and Tuesday from 12-8 p.m. at the Ingleside Hotel in Waukesha.

Other action

The committee also passed a resolution, with one board member opposed, to designate the Waukesha County Communications Center as the single public safety answering point, or where 911 calls are answered, in order to receive grant money from the state. The grant money would be used to give employees advanced training and pay for equipment.



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