

Cop Shakedown

Crime is falling, but EPD wants lots more officers

Eugene has falling crime rates and is one of the safest cities in the nation, but the EPD says it needs a dramatic increase in funding.

A consultant hired by EPD reported that the police need 21 percent more staff to provide a basic level of police staffing and 57 percent more staff if the city wants proactive community policing.

Funding the increase, which could cost roughly \$7 million to \$18 million a year based on staffing costs, could cause massive tax increases or budget cuts for other city services. By comparison, the city's entire Parks Division operates on a \$10 million annual budget. The Library Division budget is also \$10 million. The EPD's current budget is \$42 million a year.

In the last decade Eugene's violent crime rate has fallen 62 percent, and its property crime rate has fallen 27 percent, according to FBI data. Of 254 U.S. cities with more than 100,000 people, Eugene now ranks 216th in violent crime rate and 82nd in property crime rate. Eugene has about the same number of police officers as Salem, a nearby city of similar size with a similar crime rate.

But EPD's consultant, Magellan Research Corporation, called Eugene's police staffing "completely unsatisfactory." The Magellan study, led by a North Texas University associate professor who is a former police officer,

reported that EPD needs to hire 36 more officers and 34 more civilian employees for a basic service level and 126 more officers and 60 more civilians to do community policing.

It's unclear whether the City Council will go for the huge police increase. EPD has been calling for dramatic police increases for more than a decade and has not gotten them. Last year the city manager did give the department a big budget increase to hire five more officers, two detectives and two civilian support positions. The manager also included an additional administrative police sergeant in next year's proposed budget but not the dramatic staffing increase in the Magellan study.

With the city projecting budget shortfalls in coming years, it's unclear whether, when and how the city would pay for the big police increase.

Eugene Police Chief Robert Lehner told the City Council May 29 that he'd like the UO to help pay for more police. He called the UO "worse than almost any other university"

in paying for campus policing. But the UO is struggling to pay many of its Ph.D professors as much as the city pays its high school-grad cops, and the city has been asking the UO for more money for four years without results.

A council majority made increasing police one of its official goals this year. Mayor Piercy said she's "very interested in getting on the road to where we have to be in terms of policing."

But the council has not discussed how it will pay for more police, generally through tax increases or service cuts in other departments.

Lehner said the council should consider prioritizing police functions. For example, he said the city does fairly well staffing its traffic safety unit and at limiting accidents. Doing that instead of funding a different police priority "is a policy choice," Lehner said.

crime prevention including drug treatment programs. "It's not just a conversation that just putting more police on the street is going to help."

Lehner didn't talk about increasing the efficiency of the EPD. Magellan called the EPD "highly efficient," but didn't say how it reached that conclusion.

A study by the Police Executive Research Forum and International City Management Association two years ago questioned EPD's efficiency in the wake of officer sex scandals. The PERF/ICMA report noted that EPD appeared to have an adequate number of supervisory sergeants but failed to supervise its officers. Trial testimony indicated that while the EPD claimed it was sorely understaffed, Eugene officer Roger Magaña was able to spend a large part of his on-duty time molest-

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Lehner said the city should also consider the impact of a dramatic EPD increase on the county courts and jail. Lane County has long complained that it doesn't have enough jail beds and prosecutors to deal with the arrests EPD already makes.

Councilor Andrea Ortiz argued that the city needs to have a larger discussion about

ing and harassing women.

The PERF/ICMA study faulted a previous EPD staffing study for failing to determine "what the actual need was in terms of personnel hours to handle the existing workload," and for failing to determine "whether or not personnel are used as efficiently and effectively as possible."

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