

Approved

**CITY OF WAUSAU HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
MINUTES OF OPEN SESSION**

DATE/TIME: April 8, at 4:45 p.m.  
LOCATION: City Hall (407 Grant Street) – Council Chambers  
MEMBERS PRESENT: Becky McElhaney (C), Gary Gisselman, Dawn Herbst, Tom Kilian, Michael Martens  
MEMBERS ABSENT:  
Also Present: A. Keenan

The meeting of the Human Resources Committee was called to order by McElhaney.

**Approval of the March 11, 2024 Minutes.**

Motion by Herbst to approve the March 11, 2024 minutes. Second by Gisselman. All ayes. Motion passed 5-0.

**Human Resources Report for March 2024.**

No questions were asked. Report will be filed.

**Discussion and Possible Action Approving the Addition of Two (2) Police Officer Positions for the Wausau Police Department.**

McElhaney allowed public comment from those wishing to speak on this item.

Chief Barnes explained that this request is not a solution to homelessness; it is a request for additional staff that can focus on crime and ordinance violations in the downtown area that has become more prevalent in the past few months. Barnes said that he has no interest in criminalizing homelessness or making a person's situation worse than it is; his focus is on the Police Department being able to enforce the laws and ordinances of the community. Funds have been volunteered to cover hiring two additional officers for 2025 that will focus specifically on the downtown area.

Kilian asked if the department was given the money from the foundation to focus on the issues Barnes had mentioned downtown. Barnes said the foundation has given the department money for two police officers. They do not have the flexibility to hire other positions as an alternative. The officers would be expected to enforce the laws, standards, and ordinances of the city and to help create positive outcomes with individuals and connect people with resources, which is an expectation of all Wausau police officers. Kilian questioned how the department received funds from a foundation and who contacted who. Barnes said the department has utilized this process for decades to help fund additional positions for the department, he made the contact, and after discussion of the issue he received funding. Kilian asked what percentage of the unhoused population Barnes believes has mental health issues, addiction issues, and are veterans. Barnes did not provide a number but said he feels that

many unhoused are struggling with mental health issues and/or addiction issues, and that veterans are able to utilize more robust resources from the VA. Killian asked if crimes are committed by others in the community who do not fall into the unhoused population. Barnes said that the department takes appropriate enforcement action with anyone who is violating ordinances or breaking the law; the department does not criminalize homelessness, they deal with behaviors. Killian said he feels that although the department may be applying enforcement uniformly, enforcement of ordinances such as no sleeping in parks specifically target the unhoused population since they do not have a “mansion” in Riverview to sleep in.

McElhaney said that Riverview has neighborhood meetings and crime is treated the same in Riverview as in other neighborhoods; Riverview is not just “mansions” as over half of their school kids are on the free or reduced lunch program. McElhaney asked Barnes if crime is treated the same in the Riverview district as in other districts. Barnes said yes, their officers serve the whole community, however, officers may be pulled away from their assigned area to help with situations that arise, and hiring two officers for downtown would lessen this from happening.

Martens asked what the negative impact is of pulling officers from their assigned areas to assist with calls. Barnes said that the officers patrol alone, but certain calls require two or more officers for safety reasons. The calls related to incidents downtown have required two or more officers, which is why Barnes has requested two officers. If officers are not able to patrol their designated areas, it can impact the quality of life for residents in those areas.

Kilian asked Barnes what number of people have been kicked out of the parks who make 100k. Barnes said they do not ask for a person’s annual income, but understood what Killian was asking and said that the people sleeping in parks most likely have very low or no income. Killian also asked about bathrooms and garbage cans, saying that these issues target the unhoused who do not have other options available to them.

Gisselman said that about a year and a half ago the council was supposed to have a committee of the whole to talk about homelessness but nothing happened, and hopes that after next week a committee of the whole can be scheduled to address and solve the issues of homelessness in Wausau.

McElhaney said that she works downtown and parks in Jefferson Street ramp. She and her staff are now not allowed to go to their vehicles alone because of recent events of someone with a knife and grabbing females in the ramp. McElhaney said that she sees someone with a knife as a criminal issue, not a homeless issue. McElhaney said that we need more social workers, housing, transitional housing, etc., but we also need more officers and this should not be an “either or” decision. McElhaney agreed with Gisselman that the City needs to find out how to provide more resources to the unhoused population, but it also needs to help the police department be able to do their job.

Liz Brodek, Development Director, spoke in favor of this item and agreed with McElhaney that it should not be an “either or” decision. Brodek said they need an immediate solution to the detrimental behaviors that are occurring in the downtown area, they need the long-term solutions which are currently outside of what the City can provide, and they need the committee of the whole to come up with a strategy. Brodek spoke of the importance of the downtown area economically and said that if they are not able to attract and retain businesses and residents to downtown it will have a serious negative impact not only to Wausau but to the central Wisconsin region.

Herbst said that she watched the videos of events occurring downtown and we do not need this behavior downtown. Herbst said that people have to open their eyes to what is going on downtown and realize that the officers are needed to help address these issues.

Barnes said that these positions are not permanent and would sunset at the end of 2025 with an evaluation at that time as to whether the additional officers have helped or not and should be made permanent.

Martens said that he was on the fence about this issue but after listening to many discussions of different groups, he realized that residents are very concerned about crime and believes that this would help.

Gisselman asked if the officers would be union members. Barnes said yes. Gisselman wondered what would happen if the positions sunset. Keenan said that as retirements happen, those positions would fill the vacancies.

Motion by Herbst approving the addition of two police officer positions for the Wausau Police Department. Second by Martens. Motion passed 3-2 (*Kilian and Gisselman were the dissenting votes.*)

**Discussion and Possible Action Approving the Employee Agreement for Course Fees Paid by the City of Wausau to Obtain a Class A or Class B Commercial Driver’s License.**

Keenan said that the City currently sponsors employees to obtain their commercial driver’s license and would like to incorporate a repayment commitment as they do for Police and Fire. This may give employees more incentive to stay with the City after receiving their license. Martens said he was surprised that the City did not do this when it initially started sending employees to get their CDL’s.

Motion by Martens approving the employee agreement for course fees paid by the City of Wausau to obtain a Class A or Class B commercial driver’s license. Second by Gisselman. All ayes. Motion passed 5-0.

**Discussion and Possible Action Approving the Addition of Employee Handbook Section 4.08 – CDL Repayment Commitment.**

McElhaney said that is adding the language of the CDL repayment to the Employee Handbook.

Motion by Gisselman approving the addition of Employee Handbook Section 4.08 – CDL Repayment Commitment. Second by Martens. All ayes. Motion passed 5-0.

**Discussion and Possible Action Approving the Revision of the Role and Responsibilities of the Human Resources Committee.**

City Attorney Anne Jacobson said that the information in the packet is what was presented last time along with the example from Madison. Jacobson said she could put together a resolution for what the committee decides to draft and provide it at the meeting.

McElhaney said that one of the duties of the committee that she had a question about was the interviewing of all appointed positions annually, as the committee has never done this. Jacobson said that she has never known this to happen either. McElhaney recommended removing the Human Resources Committee this language (municipal code 2.06.050). Gisselman questioned if it was something the mayor is doing or should be doing or if not, should the committee be doing it? McElhaney said that she would like the Human Resources Committee removed from 2.06.050, 2.10.050, and 2.12.040 of the municipal code.

Discussion took place and it was determined that the committee does talk with various employees about needs and staffing through any requests that they make, and that McElhaney's suggestions could be put forth as amendments to the municipal code. Gisselman asked if this could be done based on the language of the agenda item. Jacobson said yes.

Motion by Martens approving the revision of the role and responsibilities of the Human Resources Committee. Second by Herbst. All ayes. Motion passed 5-0.

**Adjournment.**

Motion by Kilian to adjourn. Second by Martens. Meeting was adjourned.

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Rebecca McElhaney  
Human Resources Committee, Chair

Video available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUkPbkyafNQ>