

Public Safety Committee Meeting Transcript – 02/08/2022

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>> Meeting for February 8th, 2022. The time is now 3:11:00 P.M., and our meeting is called to order. I am council member Mackenzie Kelly, and I'm vice chair of this committee. Today I'll be chairing this committee, because our chair, harper-madison, is unable to attend in person. I would also like to take a quick moment and congratulate our new ems chief for his appointment. We look forward to working with you as you set forth to make Austin a safer place. I'm joined here on the dais with our new council member vela, as well as council member Ellis virtually. The mayor is joining virtually, but his camera is off. And then we also have with us council member kitchen on the dais here in city hall chambers. This is a regularly scheduled committee meeting to discuss the following five items related to politic safety. Atv item number 1 is to approve the minutes of the November

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22nd, 2021 public safety committee. Item 2 is to discuss and recommend judicial appointments to the city of Austin municipal court. Item 3 is discussion and possible action on process and timeline for the appointment of Austin municipal court substitute judges. Item 4 is a briefing on the Austin code department's uniform staff survey results. Item 5 is the emergency medical services staffing process, including general staffing, recruitment/hiring process and solutions for longevity in staffing. Before concluding today's meeting, I will open the floor to my colleagues to discuss possible future items. We also have the opportunity to listen to citizen testimony today. Elise, are there any speakers that are signed up?

>> We have no speakers.

>> So there are no speakers today.

>> The first item is to approve the minutes of the November 22nd, 2021 meeting of the public

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safety committee. Is there a second? Council member Ellis seconds that motion. Is there any discussion? I'd like to put it up for a vote. All in favor of the motion to approve the minutes, please raise your hand. That looks like it is unanimous with council member -- or chair harper-madison off the dais. So, with the three of us voting in favor, zero voting in nay, one off the dais, the motion passes. The next item on our agenda is to discuss and recommend judicial appointments to city of Austin municipal court. Specifically, this will be an action item with a vote to recommend judge Kelly Evans as a substitute judge. Unfortunately, judge Evans was inadvertently left off the list of reappointed judges in December. Therefore, colleagues, today, we are here to vote to recommend judge Evans as way of clerical correction for this committee. Is there any discussion on this item? Seeing no discussion, I move to

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recommend to the city council the appointment of judge Kelly Evans as a substitute judge of the Austin municipal court for the judicial term beginning January 1st, 2022. Is there a second? Council member vela makes a second. Is there any discussion? Let's go ahead and have the vote. All in favor of recommending judge Kelly Evans as a substitute judge, please raise your hand. It looks like it's unanimous on the dais with council member -- I'm sorry, chair harper-madison off the dais. The motion passes. The next item on our agenda is discussion on the process and timeline for the appointment of Austin municipal court substitute judges. This will feature a presentation by Rebekah Kennedy from our human resources office, outlining the process to get additional substitute judges, primarily for nights and weekends. I'll open the floor to questions for Ms. Kennedy and discussion after the presentation. Ms. Kennedy, are you ready?

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>> Yes, thank you. Absolutely. I'm here today to talk to you about recruitment for additional substitute judges for our overnight and weekends. This presentation will outline those steps and you will recognize that this is very similar to what we just conducted in June -- between June and December of 2021. Next slide. So, as a reminder, our judges must live in the city limits, have two years experience practicing law, be in good standing with the state bar and be a U.S. Citizen. Next slide. So our process that we are proposing to use involves the human resources department, working with our presiding judge on posting substitute judges with specific needs for overnights and weekends. An item that we had talked with this committee about later last year was that if there was a need for substitute judges, that we would come back and present a process that was very specific to what we were searching for, and that's why we're here today.

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We will work with -- once this item is posted, once the advertisement for the positions are posted, we will work with is mes mainly through our judicial review panel to help us get the word out that these are available for applicants to apply. We will convene that judicial review panel, and I have the members of that on the next slide. After that, they will -- the judicial review panel will come and make their recommendation to the public safety committee. The public safety committee will then recommend

those judges to the council, in that we hope to appoint those substitute judges and they will be good for a term that will end on December 31st of 2025. Next slide. So these are the members of our judicial review panel. These are the same members that we used within the last few months to help us reappoint all of the municipal judges that we did in December, and then, of course, judge Evans today. So, these are going to be the same individuals that we seek to

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provide recommendation to this panel. So our timeline -- we're here with you today. We hope with your direction and approval that we will post our substitute judge posting starting tomorrow through middle of March. We'll screen applications and meet with the judicial review panel to go over those applications and any letters of intent. During March, we will continue with the judicial review panel to have them meet with candidates and to recommend top candidates to this committee. We are aiming for your March 28th meeting to come back with recommendations from that judicial review panel, so we can get the recommendation from this committee to city council and then at one of the council meetings in April, we hope to approve those substitute judges for the term. Next slide.

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So, hrd, our recruitment staff, will review candidates and make sure that they meet minimum qualifications for the position. We'll compile that hiring packet. We'll work with judicial review panel to interview qualified candidates. During that time, our presing judge also provides consultation to that review panel, and we will ensure that the public safety committee receives copies of the application and any comments from that judicial review panel. So these are some of the things the judicial review panel looks at. Legal knowledge, fairness, preparation, attentiveness, and potential judicial temperament, and the panel will rank candidates, and again, just provide that recommendation back to you to make that decision on who to move forward. Next slide. And then this is the final piece, where you make the recommendation to council. Next slide. So, I am available for any

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questions, and if this process looks okay, we will look to post the position tomorrow.

>> Kelly: Thank you so much, Ms. Kennedy. Any questions? Yes, council member vela.

>> Vela: Have we used part-time judges before or is this a change?

>> It is not a change. We have associate judges and substitute judges. We appointed several at our last meeting, but judge statman has indicated that she needs additional substitute judges, primarily for nights and weekends, because she's having a very hard time staffing those slots.

>> Understood. And this is maybe beyond the scope of the presentation, but how do they staff the -- and we're talking about the magistrate position in the Travis county jail, right?

>> Yeah.

>> How do they -- what is that kind of staffing order, or who's sent down there to handle the

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magistrations?

>> I will say that Judge Statman coordinates that process, so I would have to defer to her for more specifics on how she staffs the positions.

>> Okay, great. I've been down there many times and talked to the magistrate judges many times. And they're, generally speaking, excellent judges. I really appreciate their attentiveness and their availability to the criminal defense bar and to the prosecutors and police. And that's a great lineup of attorneys to review the applicants as well. Know just about everybody on there and that's a solid group of attorneys you have.

>> All right. Thank you.

>> Kelly: Council member Ellis, do you have any questions?

>> Ellis: I do not. I appreciate the presentation. In the past few weeks, we were able to do some work and talk about this as a full council, so I really appreciate these next steps and getting these positions filled.

>> Kelly: Thank you. And thank you to Ms. Kennedy for

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coming here today, and giving us that presentation. It's always great to hear from you and your updates.

>> Thank you.

>> Kelly: Thank you. With that, our next item on our agenda is a briefing on the Austin code department's uniform staff survey results. Is Ms. Renshaw ready?

>> We have the Austin code department presenting virtually and we're getting them pulled up right now.

>> Kelly: That's perfect. Thank you so much.

>> Yes. Good afternoon, council members, mayor. How you doing? Jose here. This afternoon, we want to thank you for the opportunity to present to you the results of the survey that we have as a follow-up conversation regarding the uniforms in the Austin code department. With me this afternoon, I have Elaine Garrett, assistant director, and she oversees most of the neighborhood enforcement groups that we have in the department, as well as Mr. Ken

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Garcia, our chief administrative officer, and he administers and manages the survey that we issue for employees. So let's go through the presentation, and if you have any questions, we're going to remain here for any questions and we'll go from there. Thank you.

>> Good afternoon, council members and committee members. My name is Elaine Garrett. I'm assistant director for the Austin code department. As some of you may recall who were here in July of 2021 to present information regarding the use of uniforms by the Austin co-inspectors. During that time, we provided an overview of the evolution of the uniform, and we advised that our department was in the process of creating an employee survey to provide feedback from the employees. So, with this being said, we're here today to provide you the results of that survey and any additional information regarding our community engagements, and to answer any questions you may

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have. With me as our director stated is Ken Garcia, and he was instrumental in the survey, so I will be returning this over to Mr. Garcia.

>> Thank you, assistant director Garrett. And good afternoon, vice chair, chair, mayor, and other council members that are able to join us today. I am Ken Garcia. I am the chief administrative officer of Austin code. I hope you can hear me okay. First, I want to say it's an honor to be able to be with you this afternoon. This is actually my first opportunity to directly address council members, so I am pretty excited about that. And I'm excited about being able to bring you the summary results from our uniformed survey that we conducted a few months ago.

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Jump forward two slides. One more. Thank you very much. So we created the survey based on the objectives that we're looking for coming off of the last public safety committee meeting with regard to the perception of our uniforms and staff and their measure of feeling safe in the communities, to the extent that the uniforms either help or hindered them in performing their jobs. And so we created a pretty simple, straightforward internal survey, specifically for our uniform staff. And this was created online, and opened at the end of August, beginning of September. And we had 60 of our staff open and fully complete the survey. If you can go one slide, please. So this is an example of what they would see.

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So, they were presented a series of statements and were asked to respond to the extent they agreed or whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement. First, regarding their formal class a khaki uniforms in the field. And then the same set of questions are then presented to them with regard to their informal blue polo uniforms. Very simple, very straightforward. Next slide. So as I said, there were really two different perspectives we were looking for with regard to their feedback. The first is really about the staff's perception of the uniform and how it aided them or interfered with their ability to perform their job. And then there's another set of questions with regard to their interaction in the community.

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So, this one is specific to the staff and their own perspective with the uniform. First question, being kind of the main one, the jumping off point. And that is, do they get confused with other law enforcement in the community? And as you read the results, I'll see that it's kind of small, at least it is on my screen. But the gold results are specific to the formal khaki uniform. That's the one you see there in the center graphic, in the blue are results with regard to the informal blue polo. That's what you see on the far right end. Does it get confused with other law enforcement? Well, in the formal khaki uniform, yes. 75% of our staff said yeah, that they have been confused, and in

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particular, confused in Travis county, with the sheriff's office in that uniform. But not so much in the informal blue polo. Only 48% responded that they often get confused for other law enforcement. So then we moved on from that one, when we asked, well, okay, so whether there may be confusion, does the uniform in any way interfere with their job, and by wide margins, 76% with the formal full 96 with the blue polo said no. That the uniforms don't interfere with their job. And, in fact, again by wide margins, they felt that the uniforms made them feel professional, made them feel respected, safe, and really distinguish them as a code inspector. And although it's not reflected

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in these results, in the comments that we received, it also -- there are several comments with regard to the uniforms. Actually made them feel like they were a part of something. So very team-oriented comments. So next set of results, if you go to the next slide, please, this one is really about the interactions in the community. Again, the -- each set were asked about the khaki and with regard to the informal polo. So the next question, in a crowd, we do a lot of work with festivals and other events, and by a full 80% for either uniform, staff said it makes them very easy to be recognized in a crowd by about the same margin, from 72% to as much as

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89%. The style they feel, at least, reassures people to trust them. It does not elicit rude behavior from customers. It does not discourage people from approaching them, particularly in the blue polo. Finally, I do feel that the uniforms really enhance their credibility with customers. So, not only does it not elicit rude behavior or discourage people from approaching them, but actually may encourage people to approach them, based on professional look that they present there in the public. So really interesting results, and we also got some good comments to kind of feed off of this, but we're also interested, okay, so they don't hinder, and they do, in fact, seem to help them and aid them in the performance of their jobs.

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We're interested in what is their preference, with regard to what they prefer to wear. That's the question we put to them. Okay. We've got the formal khaki, we've got the informal blue polo. Which one do you prefer to wear? When we outfit our staff, we generally get an equal number of both, of each of those. But by wide margins, their preference is for the blue polo. Not only when they're working in the office, but really when they're working in the field. And just overall, the blue polo is the preferred uniform for our staff is their favorite. So that really aligns well with the results from the other survey questions. So, some of the takeaways -- next slide, please. Some of the key themes, if you

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look at the results that we see reflected in responses and with respect to the original question of why we administer this survey in the first place, is although it does appear like particularly in the formal uniform that they can be mistaken for other public safety professionals when they're in the field, it

doesn't hinder them in their ability to perform the job, and, in fact, provides them with a sense of credibility and a sense of professionalism, and maybe gives them a sense of belonging to the mission, to the team. One is about the comfort of the uniforms. We had several comments with regard to are there other options with short sleeve, long sleeve, different styles, different materials, different

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colors. It certainly gives us an opportunity to look a little bit further into those things. Next slide, please. So that is something that we are doing. We are looking at those opportunities and how we outfit our uniform staff. We have shared these results with our full department. We are looking over our current uniform policies. We're making sure that those policies are in alignment with our strategic goals, and our goals regarding staff safety. We are showing that our leadership understands the expectation on them to ensure that our policies are being applied consistently across all of our field teams. So all good things. It was a very positive event. The staff were very engaged in these surveys and in the results. Very interested in where we take

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them. And so we like to say, regardless of what you throw at the team, whether it be a pandemic or a winter storm or a music festival, the Austin code staff, you know, continues to work serving our public and increasing our visibility in our community and working towards our mission to build a safer and greater Austin. So with that, I'll pass it back to assistant director Garrett for final comments and then we'll take whatever questions you may have.

>> Thank you. Next slide, please. So, being that we received all the feedback from our staff, we do understand many times that the engagement that we have with the community out here is sometimes seen as negative or positive. But we do know that we still continue to make great strides and gain the confidence and trust of the community.

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Our department in this year alone, we've made over 80 community meetings virtually or hybrid with community events and neighborhood associations. We've been engaging in several proactive educational campaigns throughout the city, focusing on those issues that are important to the communities. We're about to start one up for flood awareness as well. We've recently completed, right before this storm, but we've completed an outreach for winter storm reminders, doing door-to-door information to communities, reaching over 350 areas. And we begin to understand -- you know, we know that there's a reason that we continue to build that trust in the community. So we see those efforts as definitely needed and part of our mission. Next slide, please. And with that, that's the conclusion, and we're here for any questions you may have.

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>> Kelly: Thank you so much for that briefing. My biggest concern overall about this -- I guess we'll get the discussion started now. My biggest concern was that your department would get mixed up with

other public safety departments, but it looks like you did a really great job of ensuring that that wouldn't happen. And then also, the overall engagement with your staff seems to have worked out really well. Colleagues, do you have any questions for the code department? Council member Ellis, I saw your hand raised earlier. Go ahead.

>> Ellis: Thank you, vice chair Kelly. I have a couple of questions. And first, I appreciate being brought up to speed with this, because I knew this conversation was happening. But now that I'm on the public -- the public safety committee, I just wanted to know is this a departmental decision to go ahead and make this transition, or is there some other approval process that needs to happen first?

>> The origination of the uniform was a historic process. And it was based on the decision

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made by the director at the time. So, yes, it was an interdepartmental decision.

>> Ellis: Okay, that's great. I was thinking it probably didn't need council approval, but I was curious because we haven't needed to talk about the uniform policies of other departments, so it was new to me. And then, if a transition were made, is funding already allocated in this year's budget? Would it need to be something that needs to be allocated into another year's budget?

>> Let me answer that, council member Ellis. So, we allocate the funding for the uniforms. What we have learned from this survey is that, yeah, there is a preference of using one or the other. So we're going to adjust our policies. It is important that the inspectors have the professional look when they go to municipal court, when they go to base. That's something that we want to keep in there as an option. But looking at options, you

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know, considering the Texas weather, number one. They want to have something more comfortable. But actually something that identifies them with the Austin code department and being a city of Austin employee. So looking at those opportunities, we're not ambitious to increase anything. We actually use what we have right now assigned to every person to adjust and give them an option to choose in terms of what they would like to use as a uniform. So that's -- we're not going to make a big change, just looking at the opportunities to enhance it.

>> Ellis: Okay. Thank you for that clarification. I'm glad to get to see the results of it.

>> Kelly: Thank you, council member Ellis. Mayor Adler.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you, chair. I appreciate the opportunity to be with you. I'm not a member of the committee, but here just to participate. And I appreciate this work on

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the uniform. I remember when I came into council eight years ago, there were a material number of people in the community talking about code at that time and it predates you, director Roy. We're concerned that there was confusion with respect to public safety and law enforcement as we see it in that context. And code enforcement. And in that regard, it seems almost as if the cultural issue is as important as anything else. It's people that see their job as being one of helping people to comply with

what the city needs helping people find the path to be able to get done what they're trying to get done. As opposed to seeing the job as kind of the enforcer that has the power and the ability to be

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able to stop someone on a path. And I really think that you've done, director, a really good job of helping to move, and with your staff and executive team to be really conscious of that cultural difference. I think that pretty much drives everything. It's probably unfortunate, but you know that code is doing good, when I don't get a lot of emails about code. Because then, the system is all working. People are being able to get to where they need to get to. And there is so much more than years ago. I really like the more informal look, because I think it fits with that view of being the role of responsibility. I'm not sure that actually gives you any greater credibility.

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I just really like the informal attire because I think it fits with the culture you and your executive team are trying to set up. So, thank you.

>> Thank you, mayor, for those words. We're really here to help the community and work with the community. We have done a tremendous job in the past to be -- with the pandemic. It has been a tremendous effort to really connect with the community and fully understand what they need from us. So we appreciate it.

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you.

>> Kelly: For your comments. Council member vela, do you have any questions? No questions. Thank you so much, code department, for that briefing and we really appreciate your time and work. Next we'll move on to our final item on the agenda, which is a presentation regarding emergency medical services staffing's process, including general staffing, recruitment and hiring process, and solutions for longevity and staffing. Staff's ready to present.

>> Yes. Thank you, chair Kelly.

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Interim chief jasper brown, Austin county ems. And welcome, council member vela, congratulations on your election. So, first of all, I'd just like to go over our department staffing. We have 664 authorized strengths, authorized by the council to be hired into. 540 filled personnel, and that leaves us with vacancies of 124. Now, out of that 124, what were called medic openings, that's our lowest level, our entry level into the department, there's 47 of those. Those are what we can actually hire into without going through a promotional process. So, 77 of the sworn positions open are promotions eligible. 70 of those being our field clinical specialist rank. So that's really the -- kind of the pinch point for us. I only have a limited number I can hire into and then have to rely on promotions to then move the personnel up so we can hire

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more into the department. We just recently graduated a class this Monday, actually, that was scheduled for Friday, but got canceled with ice, as we just graduated the class on Monday. There was 11 cadets that will transition from civilian to sworn. So that will affect that 47 right there. So that will change to about 36. And that class started earlier than scheduled. We weren't really going to start that class until January. But we made a decision back in October and November to move that up in our hiring process, so we shortened the process, moved up the date from January 24th start date to December 1, which caused some people to drop out of the process, and we actually had four medics defer to this next academy because they weren't ready to come at that time. They either had leases, families, or other things they had to move and couldn't move in that short a time. So we had less cadets than normal, but it was -- we made a decision to go, let's go faster and get some people in, instead of waiting until January, and waiting another eight weeks

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until they graduated. Next slide, please. So, just to kind of understand how we got to 124 vacancies. The green numbers are our attrition levels. I know there's been a lot -- sorry, red is our attrition levels. I know there's been a lot of talk about attrition last year. That wasn't our highest attrition over the last six years. If you'll notice in '15 and '16, we actually lost -- had more people separate the department than last year. The difference in those three years is in '15 and '16, we had three people in each year retire. Last year, we had 24 of those 53 people retired. That means the 23 plus years, several of them were 28, 29, 30 years with the department. In the green, you can see what we actually hired through the cadet classes coming in. And so it actually looks pretty good as far as hiring versus our attrition or separation rate. Next slide, please.

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This is the same graph with some additional information and context. The blue is the attrition level, and the Orange is what has been added by council through requests either we've made or we've made to add positions to our department. Last year, we did lose 53, but we added 67 positions to the department. So that's a total of 120 vacancies to fill. You'll go to the next slide, please. When you look at that now, our chart doesn't look so good. There's only one year we actually hired more people than we could have hired into the department. So this is kind of a six-year, seven-year issue we've gotten to, where now we have 124 vacancies. This year, we only have 25 additional positions to fill into. And we're already starting an academy in March, so I feel we're going to be much more on the positive side this year. Since those positions, we won't have any additional positions this fiscal year that's already

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accounted for in the 25. Next slide, please. In our recruitment hiring process, our next academy starts on March 28th. Those cadets are already being offered positions. That's why I put 27 more or less, because we might have a few that either defer or turn down our offer, but we'll be offering 27 total cadets. There's 23 current applicants and four cadets that I spoke of earlier that defer to this academy. We have a hiring process open currently that started on January 31st and will end at the end of February, and that is scheduled to start in July. So again, I only have about 40-ish vacancies to hire into, and as

promotions occur, I'll have more. But we already have processes in place to fill those in as we go. Next slide, please. The promotion process I spoke of for the next clinical specialist is in may. There's 70 of those vacancies. We have to post 90 days, so we're posting materials now. The test is scheduled for early

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may. I believe the dates may fit. That's being locked down as we speak. After the promotional process, and the testing, any challenges to questions, then we'll create a list that those individuals will be promoted into the 70 vacancies. After that, there's a 14-week advanced live support class required for promotion by the office of the chief medical officer, which gives them their credential to practice at the als advanced life support level. So, for those 70 vacancies, I have 59 medics who currently hold a paramedic certification. There's probably about 20 to 25 that have not sat for a test at all since they've come into the department for whatever reason. They've chosen not to move up, they're comfortable with where they're at, the process, everything. So there's not 59 people sitting for each test every time we go. We have 20 individuals, medics

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enroll through our internal paramedic course that will take them from being either an emt or advanced emt to become a paramedic, but that process takes about 18 months and that class just started here in January, so we won't see the results of those until the following year. In the meantime, we're still hiring paramedics, trying to get paramedics in as we go through our hiring process, and there's advantages for paramedics that move them up the list higher, and there also is a paramedic stipend as they come into the department currently under our contract.

>> Kelly: If we'll pause for just a moment, council member kitchen has a question.

>> Kitchen: Thank you for allowing me to do that, because I have to step away. Can you remind me whether the community health paramedics are included in these numbers?

>> They are.

>> Kitchen: Okay. Do you have -- and I'm sorry, I don't even know, is that like -- are the community health paramedics like a separate designation? In other words, can you break

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down the numbers that you have in terms of vacancies and that sort of thing to let me know how the community health paramedics are working, or do you have the data that way?

>> I pretty much know off the top of my head that the two packages that were passed in the last process, I think there were seven clinical specialists each. There's one by I think yours and council member alter's maybe. They're not separate, they're just in, they're clinical specialists. Those 14 are part of the 70 vacancies.

>> Kitchen: Okay.

>> The only way for me to fill them and move them over, and we do have people interested to move over, is I have to pull from my field. And if I pull from the field, I can't staff the units that are designated for the streets.

>> Kitchen: Okay.

>> So probably about four years back when I think you helped us first invest in the community, those chips, community health paramedics are filled, but it's the additional I think 14 we

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have not filled yet.

>> Kitchen: Okay. Thank you. That's what I thought. I just wanted to double-check that.

>> Yes, ma'am.

>> Kelly: Thank you so much for being here and for asking that really important question. Go ahead and continue. Thanks.

>> Go back to presentation, please. Next slide, please. So, in longevity, as far as what we can do, obviously filling vacancies and reducing unwanted overtime is the key to everything. We're currently negotiating an ems contract for the next four years. Our current contract ends in September. Been working closely with the team and Devon from the relations office. Feel very positive about the contract. I can probably only discuss what is in open forums, but I think there will be good things that come out of it that will bring people in that maybe would have hesitated in the past to come work for us because of one reason or another. One of the things that has been talked about in public, and we discussed it in previous

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contract requests, was to hire straight into that promotional rank. Obviously, there will be a lot of things that need to be worked out as part of that, and we are hopeful that that will be a part of the contract. Because we certainly don't want to block promotions for the people that are here today, and that they'll have the opportunity to promote, but with 70 vacancies, we do need to close the gap some way or another. As far as the longevity, the schedule that was adopted earlier than we originally intended, it was our 24/72 schedule was only going to go into existence this fiscal year. Council made an investment in the previous fiscal year, and we started the 24/72 schedule. We do have what we call on-call in between where they're having to come in on those days off, and we're doing everything we can to reduce that unwanted extra overtime that's necessary to keep our trucks up and running. So as far as that context,

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reducing mandatory overtime, we currently have started what we call a pilot program of incentivizing volunteerism. And that has gone really well. We started it January 15th. We're running it currently through April 15th and we'll evaluate as we go along to see whether it stays or continues. What we're doing is paying extra for people who actually volunteer, not coming off of any other kind of list or anything, and so we're trying to incentivize those who really want to work and not those who are either scheduled or don't want to work. So far, it's been very positive. We produced our amount of people having to call in, and we think it's going to be a positive step forward. We'll see the results of it in the program. Next slide, please. The other thing we need to work on as we continue going along is fatigue

management plan, and that's basically balancing the system to make sure that we have the best utilization of all of our units out on the street. So that not one unit is

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overworked or has more workload than another. So some of that is through ambulance relocations. We have several that we're having to relocate or put them on trailers on-site, and once those are finished, we'll be able to add additional units to those stations. Examples are ems medic 1, which is on south 1st street, or medic 5 stakes, which is across from the dps headquarters on north Lamar. Both of those are going under renovations and they'll be able to house additional units once they're completely done. Once we do that we really feel like we can balance the system better, the units that are on will have less workload, and will be able to get more down time relaxation and be able to complete their necessary reports and other things that are critical for our system. And of course, reducing call volume. Part of that is risk reduction, and that's what we saw in our dispatch equity and optimization study. There was definitely several

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comments about coordinating better with Austin public health, Austin fire department, and other partners to make sure our risk reduction programs are coordinated and targeted, because if we can keep somebody from falling in the home or other things through better managing their diabetes or other issues, then we can keep them from calling 911, reducing responses and things like that. Again, Austin fire department has some excellent programs. We do. Austin public health. We need to coordinate better. We need to coordinate better. Low priority calls, we've already started doing this through telehealth with the office of the chief medical officer and the public -- and the pas, the additional physicians that they have. A lot of our low priority calls now, units when they get on scene are able to do telehealth to the doc and disposition those calls and not have to take them to a hospital. We want to get to a point where we're actually not even sending a unit, and those are handled through telehealth, which will reduce the number of low-priority calls. And then we're also triaging and managing through our paramedic consult line, which we started

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up under when the pandemic started. It was primarily to handle the pandemic calls of covid and handling patients and keeping them at home. And we saw success in that. Council invested in that. And through other low-priority calls that can't be managed through telehealth, they can also be managed through our paramedic consult line, which will reduce low-cal volume for our units. So really feel like those will be key issues in reducing the call volume for our units and reducing the workload for our staff. Next slide, please. That's the last one, I'm sorry. I'll take any questions you have, or comments.

>> Kelly: That was great. Thank you very much. Colleagues, do you have any questions? I want to recognize that council member alter has joined us and council member kitchen has had to take off. Do we have any questions? Council member alter.

>> Alter: I missed the very beginning, so I just want to make sure that I'm clearly

[3:56:31 PM]

understanding. We currently have 124 vacancies, which to some degree, is because of retirements and the additional positions that we're given. Those positions are at different ranks, and so you can't fill a clinical specialist with a new recruit. They have to go through the various trainings and steps. Tell me again when you -- as soon as you fill the clinical specialist, you're going to have more vacancies that you have to fill with the academy and just not quite seeing the timing of when we get more fully staffed. So can you help me understand what the assumptions are about retention in the meantime?

>> Yes, ma'am. So you're correct in the assessment of actually where we

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got to today. We currently have a promotion process scheduled, it will occur on may 5th. We can only do one process at a time. So as soon as that one occurs and however many sit for that test, and we'll immediately promote them, the list is -- we exhaust the list we have every time. And those will eat into the 70 vacancies. Those will create medic positions. Then we can hire medic positions into that. So it is kind of a domino effect right now. So this next class will close the gap probably almost in half. We'll probably only have less than 15 openings. And we're still hiring for that July class. So it will be critical for the may promotion process that we create more vacancies out of the medic ranks in order to hire more people into the department. That's why we're really looking into and the association really has discussed openly in support of it, hiring directly into the clinical specialist. If we can do that, we'll be able to close that gap quicker than

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we can through this hiring, going through a promotion process, and then hiring, and then a promotion process. So we really hopefully will -- that will make it into the contract. We're really looking forward to that opportunity.

>> Alter: So the piece that I'm missing here is when the medics promote to clinical specialist and there are additional openings, when you say you cut the amount in half, that is the openings at the medic level, creaked? Correct?

>> That's the 47 I'm talking about, and the 11 that just graduated, they'll make that 36 now. And we have 24 entering into our

-- or 27 entering into our next academy. We don't lose a lot in our academy, maybe one. So if 25 come out of the academy, that's going to drop us down to 11 openings. That's all I can hire into. And so it will be critical for that may test to promote people so we have enough to hire into for the July academy.

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>> Alter: Okay. But in a perfect world, if all 59 of your clinical specialists

-- or your medics promoted who are eligible, you would still need several classes to catch up?

>> Yes, ma'am. We have 70 positions. That would only fill 59 of them. And about 25 of those 59 have never sat for a test in the past. We've talked to them, encouraged them. Many of them are very happy

in the level they're at right now or have chosen not to advance. And that's okay. People can choose to work the level they want to work.

>> Alter: Okay. And so we're trying to solve the gaps by hiring in at that level and that's part of the negotiations with the association and our negotiators, but everyone kind of agrees on that part. For the medics then, so you don't know how many -- how much that gap is going to be, but

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you're -- so right now, you can really only go a couple classes out?

>> I'm not sure I understand the question, Ms. Alter.

>> Alter: So if you don't know

-- so you don't know how many of your medics are going to promote to the clinical specialist level, you can't predict the full trajectory for your classes.

>> That is correct.

>> Alter: And when we would be

--

>> That is correct. We had 25 sit for the last test, and only 15 passed the test. Those ten that didn't pass will sit for the next one. Some choose to, some don't. We actively encourage. We've been making sure we tell people just, you know what do you need, do you need help studying. It's important to promote. We really need you as paramedics to work in als role. It is a studying process they have to go through, and it is

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something that is part of civil service, you have to sit for the test and take the test.

>> Alter: Okay. And then there was another piece here I wanted to clarify. What are you assuming for retention, or for attrition during that period? Because that's just the numbers of where we are at now without losing anybody else.

>> We're assuming about 8-10% attrition. That's what's occurred in the past. And that seems to be right on track with where we're at month by month, about 8-10% attrition of current people filled in seats.

>> Alter: Okay, but if I was trying to get my 124 down, the attrition would be on top of that.

>> That would be on top of that this year. We tried to fill 14. We're likely to lose another 40-50 this year. And so we would have to fill 170

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to get to fill this year.

>> Alter: Could be all sorts of ranks and you have to --

>> Exactly. Most of the people that are retiring are at captain, commander, level ranks, because they've been in the organization 23, 25, 27, 28 years.

>> Alter: If we have a bubble the same way we had with police at the same time? Or is it just that's when they can retire with full benefits?

>> I'm not sure about the bubble in the police department that you're speaking of.

>> Alter: Well, they had a very large class, and so the number of retirements.

>> Right.

>> Alter: The number of people hitting that point when they can retire was high.

>> I think the difference -- and I'm not speaking out of turn for the police department or fire department, is a large portion of their vacancies are always at the entry level, because they promote and have plenty of people and have plenty of people to promote. But with mine, it's at that promoted level, which makes it more challenging, because I have to wait for people to sit

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through and get the promotion to create vacancies for me to hire in. I would imagine the fire department, all their openings are at the firefighter level and most of all the police officers are at their police officer entry level. And so if they get large cadet classes, they fill that lower rank. Even if I had 100 cadets come into my class, I don't have positions that they could go into.

>> Alter: Thank you. I was pleased to see the 12 graduates yesterday and it was exciting to see them. And hopefully we can honor our next much larger class.

>> Thank you for coming, miss alter.

>> Kelly: Thank you for your thoughtful questions. Council member Ellis?

>> Ellis: Thank you, vice chair Kelly. What possibilities are there for larger cadet classes? Is that something that is being looked at? And is it a trainer's availability or facility size

[4:04:45 PM]

issue?

>> It's not a trainer or availability of size for us. There are some conflicts that occur at the public safety training academy between when all three academies are going, especially in the use of showers and bathers and things like that when all of them are trying to do P.T. In the morning. But we have two large classrooms and we have the ability to run two different academies back-to-back or overlapping within our existing space. And when we have the training staff there. But our real pinch point is I can only hire so many in knowing that they have to have, when they transition from a civilian cadet, they have to have sworn medic positions for them to go into. And so right now, again, I have 47. Most of the cadets just graduated, so I have about 36 that I can only hire into right now.

>> Ellis: Okay, thank you for that. And what strategies are being utilized to try to recruit trained candidates that might be working nearby, you know, not for Austin, but trying to fill some of those higher positions

[4:05:46 PM]

with folks that are trained to work at that level?

>> So, that's one of the things we talked about. Again, we talked about it last negotiating process and we're discussing it now, is that hiring straight into the clinical specialist level. Because people who are working currently as a paramedic or advanced life support, we've received a lot of feedback. They may not want to come to Austin and work at basic life support. And then wait three or four, six months, to move up. They like to come straight in from one they're working at, and come straight into the department at that level. Currently, that's not an option. We are hopeful in the future that would be an

option, that we would be able to take some of the people that are either locally working in other areas around us, and would like to come and work at their current level, advanced life support. Many of them worked for many years as a paramedic, and for some, it's seen as a downgrade to work at a lower level for some period of time. All of that's very short. Because through our academy and promotion, our clearance

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process, you only have to be clear to the field for a few months before you can sit for the test. Traditionally, under civil service, it's a two-year waiting, but through contracts and other things, as soon as you're out of the academy, you're cleared to independent duty, which could be three to four months. You can sit for the next civil service test. So we've taken that off the table as far as our waiting. But again, some people want to come straight in and work at the advanced life support level.

>> Ellis: Thank you for that information. I appreciate it. I know we had discussed it in the last budget cycle, and so thank you for revisiting that with me and jogging my memory.

>> Yep, thank you.

>> Kelly: Thank you for those questions, council member Ellis. I've got council member vela up next with questions, and then we'll get to you, mayor Adler.

>> Vela: Very basic question I'm trying to familiarize myself with. So the starting rank at ems is

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what?

>> A medic.

>> And what do you have to have? What kind of certification do you have to have to be a medic?

>> So you have to be at least an emt-b, which is an emt basic. There's three levels. There's basic, an advanced, and a paramedic. And you can be any one of those, but you at least have to be a basic certified by the state. That's one of the differences we see in our three departments between Austin fire and police. We already have -- we search for people who have already chosen this field. They're already certified, and we require a year of experience. In the other departments, I know they hire no certifications or qualifications, and you get your t-close through the academy. In the fire department, they have to become basic certified. They provide that in the academy along with their fire certification. So we're hiring people who have already self-selected this field as their passion.

>> So you're hiring basically

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emt-bs.

>> Yes.

>> And they receive their emt-b where? Like, where do they get their education? Where do they get their training?

>> They can get it through -- ACC offers it. There are also local fire departments all over the area that do emt-b certification classes in-house. There's Texas state technical college. There's emt up in pflugerville -- sorry, Georgetown. There's several places that offer emt-b classes.

>> And how long is the training

-- what does the emt-b training consist of?

>> Through ACC, it's a full semester. They provide other courses to make it a full semester course. It's truly only I think about 120 hours. I think it's 80 hours of didactic classroom and 40, 60 hours where you go on rotations, rides, and E.R. Visits to get your clinical, and then you have to sit for a state test. So it can be very short and fast, or it can be extended out, depending on the course and place you choose.

[4:09:51 PM]

>> And when you're hiring people who are emt-bs, then they go into the academy?

>> Yes. Our academy is not to really teach them emt -- ems or emt-b skills. It's really to -- we do onboarding, hr, those type things in the first few days, and then we're really teaching them operational issues on how we operate here inside of Austin and Travis county ems. That's why our academy is only 8 weeks old, versus months.

>> Okay, and then the promotion that you were speaking of, can you explain the -- that and what the different category, the different levels are?

>> Yeah. So, our entry level rank is a medic, and you come into either medic communications or medic field. It's two separate paths. The next rank promotional is clinical specialist, for either field or comm. Then we have captains. Then we have commanders, division chiefs, assistant chiefs, and chief.

>> What does it take to become a clinical specialist?

>> In the field, you have to be

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a paramedic. So if you come in with your emt-b, you will not be eligible for that promotional test. That's why we're doing an internal class on our own to try to transition people internally. We work with the schedule so we don't have to go somewhere else, and then work around our schedule. We work with their schedule here and putting them through the class. We've done four internal classes already and we're doing one now. So they have to be a paramedic. On the communications side, they do not have to be a paramedic and we have people that promote as soon as they are eligible and promote to the clinical specialist.

>> And what is the difference between the field and the communications -- the job descriptions functions?

>> In the communications, the medic handles all the 911 calls, triage and providing pre-arrival instructions. At the clinical specialist rank, they're able to do that and do our radio system. And so they're actually doing the dispatching following up on units, ensuring staging is done, providing information, following up with star flight, if star flight is necessary, all the first responders that are out

[4:11:55 PM]

there in the county. Those are different job duties. In the field, you're handling either basic life support as a medic or advanced life support as a clinical specialist.

>> All right. And in terms of filling your vacancies, what is the biggest barrier right now?

>> I believe the biggest barrier is our gap at the clinical specialist rank. Just because of the way they've come to us. You know, I mentioned the two units of chips that we had. We also had eight clinical specialists added for our community -- our clinical consult line. And then we also got promotions as commanders, which all pulled from those middle ranks. So, that is our biggest issue right now, is how we fill those clinical specialists. That's why doing the internal class, comparing medics, so they're able to sit for future tests, and then possibly, hopefully if it works out, is

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hiring directly into clinical specialists from the outside.

>> And so it's a middle rank. Again, I know you mentioned that, but that's where the problem is.

>> That is the main problem. One of the things -- I will be talking with the chief when he comes in, as how we can do that. And we certainly welcome his ideas on how we might be able to fill those things. If we get to the point where we're still waiting to fill those gaps, you know, there are some options we may have, and it would be to reclass those positions down and then allow us to hire into them, and then as attrition happens, move them back to where they were supposed to be. But that takes several options, and it's a lot of paperwork, and it takes council action because of the classification ordinance that's passed. But I have to have vacancies at the lower rank to move people in and then promote because the current process is going to take a long time to fill that middle rank.

>> Okay.

[4:13:57 PM]

And final question. The pay for a medic versus a clinical specialist, what just

-- I know there may be ranges, but estimates?

>> I'm trying to remember off the top of my head here. I believe our entry level for a medic is I think 19. I don't know off the top of my head for clinical specialist, the rank. But there is a gap between the two for clinical specialist.

>> Okay. Thank you very much.

>> Kelly: Thank you, council

member >> Mayor: I appreciate the conversation we've had so far. Chief, thanks for being with us. My understanding is we'll see how the numbers work out. The vacancy level is higher. Ems right now, and fire and police, even though a lot of the conversation, a lot of the community centers on apb.

[4:14:57 PM]

Obviously, something we need to be able to work on and fill. What has been, chief, the roadblock thus far in getting the ability to bring in people at the level they might be trained for, if that would help us most quickly deal with the vacancies?

>> I think the best way to answer that is what we discussed already. It was discussed in the negotiations. Hiring into the promoted rank. So they want to come here and do the same things. I think we'll be able to attract some people from some localities around us that may want to come over at that level instead of at the basic level

>> Mayor: But the issue is a contract issue with respect to -- is that --

>> It is a contract issue and a

[4:15:59 PM]

civil service basic issue, first of all. The contract would help us go around that civil service issue, yes.

>> Mayor: I understand. Those are all my questions. Chief, I just want to say I really appreciate your leadership over the last year and a half, two years of -- just an incredibly difficult time. With so many things in the city. But the challenges which have been presented to our first responders, ems, you and your force, just extreme. I just wanted to thank you for your leadership over this time. Thank you, mayor.

>> I do have a couple questions. Thank you very much for that very informative presentation. The last time I reached out to your office, it was regarding the inability to staff units due to covid. Do you have any issues now staffing medic units because of covid?

>> We do not. It's not because we're not affected by covid, it's because

[4:17:00 PM]

of the special need pilot program we're using to incentivize volunteerism. What that is, we're paying two times their salary if they volunteer to come in to work on their own. Not required off of any kind of list. We've been able to keep all our units up, keep the paramedics off the street. We were pulling from them and other areas, our admin. This current academy, we shut it down for two weeks because we didn't have enough staff to staff it. We've been able to keep the academy going, the community health paramedics in -- continuing their care to our community and all our units have been staffed.

>> Where does the budget come from to incentivize those employees to come in at two and a half times their rate?

>> Two times.

>> I misheard you then. Where does it come from?

>> It's coming from our internal -- our current budget. We're evaluating that as we go along to make sure we have the budget for that. We do have vacancy savings

[4:18:01 PM]

because of the openings that we have. We're able to do that. I don't know that we'll do it long-term. That's something we have to assess. We'll see what comes out of any negotiations and stuff on pay and stuff.

>> Do you see any challenges you're facing currently with retention at your department?

>> You know, the effects of covid and two years, severe ice storm last year, some almost traumatic issues this year on people who are starting to get a little PTSD about this most recent ice storm. They're worn down. I think it's across the industry and across the nation. Every kind of workplace you see people are retiring and finding other ways to have an income, live their lives and things like that. I expect we're still going to see some retirements and some people leaving. That's why I'm still guessing we're going to be probably at 10%. Depending on what comes out of

[4:19:02 PM]

the contract, that could incentivize some to stay longer. They're already at the high ranks because of the steps and base skills go to about 20 years. That could be a positive impact on those who are already here and maybe they'll stay longer.

>> Thank you. I want to open up the floor to you, if there's anything that you might want to mention or say in regards to this presentation or anything at ems you'd like us to be aware of that you haven't mentioned already.

>> No.

>> Nothing else to add to the presentation?

>> No, not to the presentation. Thank you to the council and mayor and mayor pro tem. It's been an honor to serve and continue to serve the department. I appreciate everything that the council has done for us.

>> Thank you. I want to follow-up with that and echo the sentiments of the mayor when he said that we appreciate your leadership. It has been a tough time to work in ems and public safety in general. We're very thankful that you've filled that role and did so with such great pride. We really appreciate that.

[4:20:04 PM]

Councilmember rubella is going to ask another question.

>> Do you think the \$19 an hour starting pay is enough?

>> I believe we're competitive. But we need to be more competitive. People are making a choice between us and Williamson county. We pay about the same. On average, they work a little different schedule. They do a 24/48, kind of a normal schedule for a fire department. We do the 24/72. But if you're going to make the same amount of money, they work less calls in a day than our system is very busy. So they're going to make a choice, what's better for their lifestyle and everything else. We need to be really competitive. And I believe positive things will come out of the negotiations.

>> Thank you very much.

>> Thank you councilmember develop vela. Councilmember alter, go ahead. She has a question too.

>> Alter:

>> Oh, no, we can't hear you.

[4:21:05 PM]

>> It's very quiet again but it was fine earlier.

[Indiscernible]. Can you hear me now?

>> You are very, very quiet, ma'am.

>> Okay. I will be super quick. I will shout, I guess. I just wanted to thank chief brown for his service leading ems. We spoke yesterday at the graduation about how your medics and ems focus on problem solving and caring for our community and you have demonstrated that as a leader through some really difficult times. So thank you.

>> Thank you.

>> Hopefully you heard that.

>> Yes, thank you councilmember alter. Thank you again, chief, for being here. I really appreciate it. Could you make sure I'm on the list for when the graduation happens next time. I'd really like to attend to support your department.

>> Absolutely.

>> Colleagues, we have arrived at the time in our meeting where we discuss possible future

[4:22:05 PM]

public safety committee items. Do any of my colleagues have any future items to consider? I see no one's hand up. So I will mention an idea that I had, which I saw a report in the news about possible reporting changes at our 911 communications office to start utilizing artificial intelligence. I think that would be something that would be wonderful to bring to our committee and learn more about as we change the way we report crimes at 911. Yes, councilmember alter?

>> Alter: I'm not sure when your next -- can you hear me? I'm not sure when your next meeting is, but we should be getting the compensation study back with respect to victim services and 911. I think you co-sponsored those, Ms. Chair Kelly, that those might be something we could

[4:23:05 PM]

include in a future meeting.

>> Kelly: I made note of that. Thank you for reminding us that it was coming before us soon. Appreciate that. Councilmember vela says he doesn't have anything. Councilmember Ellis, did you have anything?

>> Ellis: Not at this time. But as a new committee member, I also know sometimes the chair and vice chair have an ongoing list similar to you and I do in regards to mobilities. I will think of anything not on the list and bring it to y'all's attention off line.

>> Kelly: That sounds wonderful. I'll check in with the chair when she's available so we can go over what the ongoing list might look like. Mayor, did you have anything you wanted to possibly add? No? Thank you so much for being here with us today. If nobody has anything else for it future items, do any of my colleagues have anything --

>> Harper-madison had her hand

[4:24:07 PM]

up.

>> Kelly: I don't can see her. Is she there?

>> Not a good sign. I promise you.

>> Harper-madison: One of the things I'm taking into consideration as we move forward and thinking about I-35 and the implications of I-35 and project connect, I think it would be prudent for us to put something on the agenda to have conversations around public safety around our moenlt mobility items.

>> Kelly: I'll make a note of that. When we meet to discuss future agenda items, we'll put that on the list.

>> Harper-madison: Thank you councilmember Kelly for stepping up and chairing the meeting. I know it was sort of short notice. You stepped up and you're doing the lord's work right now. Thank you so much. I appreciate you stepping up and taking care of business.

>> Kelly: Thank you. I appreciate that. I really hope you get to feeling better. Do any of my colleagues have any final thoughts or comments today? No? Okay. With that, I want to thank my

[4:25:09 PM]

colleagues, city staff and the community for their input and discussions today. I've said this many times before. It's important to note that council leans heavily on the knowledge and skill set that the city staff provides us. I want to thank them all for their briefings today. The public safety committee is vital to move our city forward. I appreciate everyone's hard work and time today. With that, the public safety committee meeting for February 8, 2022, at 4:25 P.M. is adjourned. Thank you everyone.