

Louisburg Police Department
Public Monthly Report
October 2022



Chief Jason Abbott

Chief's Monthly Summary: September-October 2022

First, I want to recognize the people who were killed in another senseless act of violence last week in Raleigh, including one of our own, Raleigh Police Officer Gabriel Torres, who was killed as he was on his way to work. May God bless the Torres family, the Raleigh Police Department family, and all the other families touched by this tragic event.

It has been requested that I present a more comprehensive report of the activities of the Police Department, rather than submitting the stats and numbers as we have in the past. In the spirit of transparency and accountability, this new monthly report format is intended to provide more information about the activities and responsibilities of your Police Department.

It's hard to believe we are in the last quarter of 2022. October brings us into what has typically been the busiest months of the year for the Police Department with the holidays just around the corner. We usually see burglaries, robberies, thefts, and property crimes increase this time of year, and in light of this, we adjust our procedures by shifting more of our daily activities to focus on crime prevention. With the economy taking a down-turn this year, coupled with a rising cost of living, we anticipate thefts to climb. We are already seeing it here and in the jurisdictions around us.

We are also preparing for two large Town events with Halloween Trick or Treat in the Burg on Oct 31, and Christmas Market and Parade on December 4. The Police Department will be working to ensure these events are as safe as possible.

Lastly, Councilman Russel requested information be presented to the Council at this meeting regarding employees of the police department who will be eligible for retirement within the next five years. I have provided this information that also includes current and future challenges. The Town is in the process of conducting a formal compensation classification study and, moving forward, our ability to adequately meet these challenges will be directly impacted by the results of this study.

As always, I want to thank the Council, Mayor, and our citizens for the support and trust you have in us. I hope you find these reports useful and informative.

Chief Jason Abbott

1. Employee Actions and Recognitions

- Officer Adam Eldridge received the *Advanced Law Enforcement Certification* from the NC Criminal Justice Education & Training Standards Commission. This is the highest professional certification offered by the Commission for police officers who have achieved a high level of training, education and experience.

2. Recruiting & Retention

- The Department currently has two (2) Police Officer vacancies.
- Unfortunately, Officer Adam Eldridge has announced his resignation from the Department. He has accepted a position with the Wake Forest PD and his last day of full-time service with us is November 6. He will be staying on with us as a part-time officer. The particular challenge with his resignation is how to handle K9 Lennox. He has agreed to maintain and care for Lennox until we can find a replacement handler.
- I am scheduled to hire a new officer this month. The recruit has accepted a conditional offer and I am awaiting approval for his certification from CJ Standards.
- K9 Justice, the Department's first K9, is scheduled to retire from duty at the end of this year after serving our community since 2014. The industry standard for K9 service time is 8 years and based on Justice's last evaluation by our trainer, he has recommended that Justice retire at the end of this year.

3. Community Tip

Be diligent to secure your personal property. We are receiving random reports of minor thefts from inside unlocked vehicles at night. Please remember: 1) Lock your vehicle whenever it is parked. 2) Do not leave valuables and personal belongings in plain view. 3) Close garage doors at night. 4) Leave exterior lights on – criminals like darkness and tend to avoid well-lit areas. 5) Alarm and video systems are helpful to deter criminals and aid investigations. 6) While Louisburg is generally a safe Town, be diligent and mindful of your surroundings.

4. Complaints Against Officers and Findings

-None

5. Use-of Force and Vehicle Pursuits

Louisburg Police Officers pursued a dirt-bike style motorcycle in Town that ended on Hwy 561. The motorcycle was stolen from a dealership in Raleigh and the driver was arrested. No injuries were reported in the incident. Calls regarding 4-wheelers and dirt-bikes on the roadways are becoming more frequent. These calls present particular challenges when the drivers refuse to stop for the blue lights and a pursuit ensues.

6. Operations & Notable Investigations

- Investigating a large number of counterfeit money orders that have been passed in and around Louisburg. The US Secret Service is assisting with the cases and has adopted the cases for Federal prosecution.
- Investigators working with our Federal partners to pursue additional leads in a series of armed robberies at sweepstakes last year in eastern NC that included Louisburg.
- Investigators are working a series of retail thefts with a total loss of approximately \$5000. Six (6) individuals have been identified and charges are pending against each.
- Investigating a fraud case involving counterfeit checks that have been passed at four different businesses. The individual has been identified and charges are pending.
- We are investigating an arson that occurred in Fox Park MHP. We arrested a suspect for intentionally burning an unoccupied mobile home.
- We assisted the Sheriff's Office with a stand-off involving an armed individual at a business on Hwy 561 just out of town. The situation was resolved without incident.
- We are intentionally focusing on the growing number of new construction sites in Town. Construction sites are considered an easy target for criminals. We have had a couple reports where newly constructed buildings were entered recently.
- We planned and prepared for Hurricane Ian's impacts in our area on 9/30. We had extra staff on-hand for potential power outages and other weather-related emergencies. A large portion of Town lost power and we worked hand-in-hand with the Electrical Department that night to help them safely restore electricity. We also worked traffic control at a number of busy intersections during this time.

*Special Note – The Electrical Department should be commended for their work that night. Those men were working with electrical lines up in bucket trucks in the driving rain and wind blowing up to 50 mph. They worked through those treacherous conditions to restore power for our people and were out as late as 3am in the morning.

- We are still working daily with staff at Maria Parham Franklin to meet our obligations in the processes of serving Involuntary Commitment Orders on patients at the ER and transfers to the Behavioral Health Unit.
- We received additional requests for services from Cross Creek Carter School and Louisburg High School (Magnet School). Cross Creek Charter has agreed to pay for an officer to be at their campus daily to provide security. Louisburg HS requested extending SRO services on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4pm-7:30pm for evening classes.

7. Budget Summary

We are approximately 25% of the way through the fiscal year. 28.66% of the FY 22/23 operating budget has been encumbered as of 9/30/22.

Grants – We have completed all upgrades to our Range and the 2021 GCC Grant for that project is being closed out. The Range looks great. We are anticipating and preparing to apply for the 2022 GCC Grant possibly in November.

We are also in the final stages and should be closing the 21-22 USDA Grant/Loan for four (4) Police Cars. I have been working with Sean to wrap this up. This project has been plagued with supply chain issues.

8. Department Training Summary

- De-escalation Techniques
- Annual Firearms Qualifications (at our newly remodeled range!)
- Hazardous Materials
- Bloodborne Pathogens
- Radar Operator recertifications
- On October 5, I attended training on how to respond to a Police Officer line-of-duty death. The presentation by Chief Lawrence Capps of the Knightdale Police Department outlined challenges he faced in a line-of-duty death incident last year. Knightdale Police Officer Ryan Hayworth was killed in a car crash and Chief Capps delivered a powerful and sincere presentation about his personal and departmental experiences and challenges.

9. Community Outreach and Special Events

- 9/15 – Officers participated National Emergency Preparation event at the Louisburg Senior Services Center.
- 9/24 – Officers participated in the annual S.Main St Baptist Church Back to School Event.
- 9/29 – Officer Dylan Moore (and K9 Justice) were invited to speak to first- graders at Edward Best Elementary for Community Helpers Week.
- 10/5 – Officers participated in Coffee-With-A-Cop events at Packhouse Coffee and Blue Collie Coffee.
- 10/11 – Officers were treated with a meal from Big & Small Peer Support Group led by former FC Deputy Wayne Daniels.
- 10/15 – Officers assisted with the Downtown 5K Run and event this past Saturday.

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10. **Special Request from Councilman Russel** : Present information to the Council regarding the number of employees who will be eligible for retirement within the next five (5) years, as well as current staffing challenges.

I. Snapshot of the Department

- A. The Police Department is comprised of 17 full-time positions: two (2) positions are currently vacant-

1. Chief of Police – Jason Abbott
2. Captain – Cliff Stephens
3. Detective – Travis Lincoln
4. Community Resource Officer (CRO)/Sergeant – Joe Sherrill
5. Patrol Sergeant – Greg Alston
6. Patrol Sergeant – Elliott Coker
7. K9 Officer - Adam Eldridge and Lennox
8. K9 Officer – Dylan Moore and Justice
9. School Resource Officer (SRO) – Shari Brinkley
10. School Resource Officer (SRO) – Derek Bowden
11. Officer – Lamont Burchette
12. Officer – Noah Bartholomew
13. Officer – Lamar Hargrove
14. Officer – Adam Rooker
15. Administrative Assistant – Katie Davis
16. Officer – VACANT (new hire is scheduled to start this month)
17. Officer – VACANT

- B. Reserve Officers: Ralton Harris, Ray Patterson, Steve Hall, Daniel Bucklin, Matt Bailey, Brandon Vajanyi, and Andy Castaneda.

- C. Department Employees eligible for retirement within five (5) years.

1. Shari Brinkley – eligible now
2. Cliff Stephens – eligible next year 2023
3. Joe Sherrill – eligible 2024
4. Greg Alston – eligible 2024
5. Jason Abbott – eligible 2025

D. Historical perspective: In 2017, the Police Department had five (5) vacant positions. My focus at that time was on staff and I immediately began recruiting. The following list represents the number of Officers hired and number of officers who have left the department in the past six (6) years:

1. 2017 - Lost 0, Hired 3
2. 2018 – Lost 0, hired 2
3. 2019 – Lost 0, hired 0
4. 2020 – Lost 1, hired 1
5. 2021 – Lost 0, hired 0
6. 2022 – Lost 4, hired 2

II. Snapshot of the Recruiting Environment

- A. Almost all of the law enforcement agencies in our area are currently short staffed. Some agencies are dangerously low on staff.
- B. The source of staff for the Police Department has historically come from the area community colleges, primarily the Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) classes from VGCC and Nash Tech. Within the past several years, the number of recruits coming from the community colleges have dwindled. I do not have the exact numbers, but it has been common to have 25-30 recruits to choose from. Today, it is common to have 6-8-10 graduates from the community colleges. In short, it seems that young people are not entering law enforcement in significant numbers.
- C. The shrinking number of people entering law enforcement is a local, regional, state, and national issue. A *City Journal* report from 2021 found that hiring fell 6% while retirements and resignations were up 18%. Given this reality, law enforcement agencies have shifted recruiting efforts away from new cadets to experienced officers currently serving. Agencies are essentially recruiting talent from each other.
1. This recruiting effort among agencies and a short supply of new talent has driven salaries up for police officers. This is happening rapidly in our area and we have fallen behind. Agencies are increasing pay out of necessity due to critically low staffing.
 2. In order to recruit from each other, it has become common for large and small agencies to offer recruiting bonuses.
 - a) Pinetops PD - \$1000
 - b) Rocky Mount PD - \$5000
 - c) Winston Salem PD - \$10000

3. Recruiting bonuses alone can become problematic for an agency. It must be accompanied with retention bonuses. The goal is to acquire and keep talent. The recruiting bonus can help acquire, but enacted alone will discourage current staff who have been loyal to the agency and the town. Recruiting and retention bonuses must be enacted simultaneously.
 4. Because staffing levels are so low in policing today, new marketing tricks and gimmicks (such as bonuses) will continue.
 5. Career development can be a double-edged sword for smaller agencies. We can hire officers, train them, pay for their education through an education incentive program, and lose them to another agency that pays more. We become a stepping stone. It takes time, years, and a significant financial commitment to adequately train and educate an officer to our standard. This is a tremendous investment for an agency to make to, in turn, lose that investment to another agency.
 6. Other serious challenges for a smaller agency that affect pay & retention:
 - a. Limited promotional opportunities
 - b. Limited specialized training & operations opportunities
- D. A number of police related publications and articles indicate another disturbing trend. Up to half of the recruits who enter the law enforcement profession today will leave the profession altogether within five (5) years. We have experienced this here in Louisburg. Two (2) of the officers we lost this year, who I hired in 2017, left to pursue another trade with higher income.
- E. The “Wake County Effect”
1. Proximity: Louisburg seems to be getting closer to a growing Wake County. With Hwy 401 opening to four lanes and the Wake Forest city limits now inside Franklin County, we will continue to see Franklin County/Louisburg directly impacted by the growth of our southern neighbor.
 2. Wake County law enforcement agencies pay significantly more to police officers than Franklin County agencies. Because of this reality, I do not recruit at all in the Wake County area. Our recruiting efforts are generally focused here in Franklin County and in areas north, east, and west. I cannot compete with the pay rates of the Wake Co agencies.
 3. There are 18 law enforcement agencies in Wake County, and some are considered large agencies. Some of the larger agencies conduct police academies in-house. However, Wake Tech Community College generally supplies new officers for that area. WTCC is also experiencing a decrease in BLET enrollment and can’t keep up with demand in that area.
 4. These Wake Co agencies are also experiencing staffing shortages.

5. Because of the size of the demand for officers in Wake County, it has created a vacuum of talent from the surrounding counties, including Franklin. Many officers in Franklin County are leaving for better pay. (This is true with Adam Eldridge)
6. Wake County's demand is directly affecting our supply.

III. Louisburg must prepare.

- A. The Town of Louisburg is on the verge of significant growth, and the demand on all local government services will increase drastically in a relatively short amount of time.
- B. By the end of 2025, the Louisburg Police Department will have five (5) long serving, ranking employees with 25-30 years of service who will be eligible for retirement. We could potentially lose a combined 150 years of experience.
- C. Rapid growth, retirements, and industry-wide staffing shortages are our main challenges.
- D. My vision for public safety in Louisburg is centered around the principles of community-oriented policing. My ability to deliver policing services to the town is greatly affected by staffing shortages and high turnover rates:
 1. Low morale
 2. Less training/opportunities
 3. Added stress that could affect performance, attitude, and personal life.
 4. Agency reputation among potential recruits
 5. Affects ability to build a healthy culture
 6. Limits ability to build new leaders

*Do you want this officer patrolling your streets? - low morale, unprepared & ill trained, stressed, bad attitude, negative reputation, unhealthy work culture, can't lead.

- E. To successfully hire and retain quality staff, Police Officers must be given competitive pay that is sufficient for them to support their families.
 1. We must invest in our people to maintain staff and deliver adequate services. It is a very competitive market right now, more competitive than I have seen in my 27 years in the profession.

2. Officers will stay if they are supported financially. No matter where I go to recruit, no matter the place, no matter the quality of the presentation I give, the first two questions I get from recruits – What is your pay? Do you have a take-home car program? Every time, without exception. This clearly tells me that Officers are concerned about financial stability & comfort, and they will go wherever they can achieve this.

- 3. The goals and expectations of the Town for its Police Department will be met only to the extent that the Town is willing to invest in its staff.**

IV. Conclusion

It will be extremely difficult to recruit the number of officers we need to prepare for and keep up with the coming growth with the pay rate that we currently have. This is why I have previously stated that this comp/class study is vital to our future. I am eagerly awaiting the results. I anticipate the results will be an eye-opener for many of us since we have not had one in 20 years.

I understand that the results of the study will be presented to the Council in a range. I am not sure where we will fall in this range, but I propose to you, from the standpoint of someone who has his finger squarely on the pulse of recruiting and retention of police officers for our area, that our starting salary for a new police officer should fall in the \$50,000/year range. Furthermore, retention efforts must focus on maintaining competitive pay as the officer accumulates experience, training, education, and advancement within our agency. This must be our goal if we are going to meet the challenges I have outlined for in this report.