



MILES CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT
Doug Colombik, Chief of Police

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To: City Council

From: Chief Doug Colombik

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As Chief of Police, my primary responsibility is to ensure the safety and security of the City of Miles City. Each year, our department faces the challenge of providing essential services with a budget that falls short of what is necessary to meet our community's needs. The recent budget overages are a direct result of justifiable expenses required to maintain public safety. Despite being allocated insufficient funds, I strive to be as efficient as possible, and the safety of our citizens will always be my top priority.

Each year for the last several years my budget has been cut more and more. We have been cut to the bone. Even City Clerk Mary Rowe stated to me last week "you have been cut down to the bone and each year it is the same, I do not know how you manage to run the department with what you have."

I have informed previous finance committees and councils for the last several years of our budget crisis for the police department. The simple fact of the matter is the very high demands for our law enforcement services has exceeded the city's ability to fund those services. We have record volume crime, record volume of drugs and interstate crime coming into Miles City, with more demand to be properly trained to even investigate many of these crimes.

Last year, I was awarded two brand new patrol vehicles with the Coal Board Grant, but we have no funding to equip those new cars. Our current fleet is constantly broken down and our repair expenses are excessive. Our vehicle repair budget was \$40,000 but it cost the department \$54,497 this past fiscal year. In 22/23, we used \$65,850.00 for vehicle repairs and maintenance. I am currently sitting on two vehicles in our fleet that need a total of \$8,500.00 to repair them and the city shop is not capable of doing these repairs as they do not have the proper tools to work on them. These maintenance costs are beyond my control. We have to have cars to patrol. It is part of the basic function of what we do. Currently, I have told Captain Sloan to hold off on repairing one of these two cars as that will have a major impact on our repair and maintenance line item.

Our fuel expenses are excessive as well. We were budgeted \$30,000.00 but we used \$38,650.00 in fuel. This again is beyond my control. The year before in 22/23, we spent \$35,808.00 in fuel. We have to put fuel in the cars to patrol. We can only estimate the price of fuel within the next several months. If the price per gallon goes up to over \$4.00 a gallon, we can expect to see a bigger expense at the end of the year.

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Our Professional Services expenses increase every year while we are cut every year in multiple categories. We spent \$30,012 in professional services (IT computer costs, repairs, DUI blood draws, PD cleaning, social media archiving and car and body camera license and user fees and other services). I have to pay these expenses.

Our operating expenses, like the professional services, continues to increase. For example, we were budgeted \$20,000 but spent \$25,943 this past fiscal year and \$27,187 the year before in 22/23. Continuing to cut down on our police budget in multiple categories does not stop the invoices from coming in for the multiple minimum necessary expenses we have just to function at a basic level for law enforcement services.

We have to have dependable cars to drive, we have to be able to afford to put fuel in those cars, we ourselves have to be properly equipped with body armor, handguns and rifles, and we have to have ammo for those weapons. I have to be able to buy printer ink cartridges, office paper, pay officers to be properly trained and pay for their meals and lodging while at training. This is not a job where you go through a simple training and be done. We require constant advanced training to meet the demands of the cases we have to investigate. There is a high expectation from prosecutors with work with and we have to follow case law on these high-level cases.

As one of the county commissioners stated in a previous meeting we had in August, personnel costs are the biggest expenses. The \$124,329.00 in the red this past fiscal year was the result of comp time cash out (the officers receive this twice a year) and holiday pay adding up to this expense. Those are line items 133 and 134. We have a contractual obligation to our union members to pay these benefits. The overtime expenses added up to \$63,033.00. This is necessary to keep our shifts properly staffed and both our officers and the citizens safe. Combined this overtime expense with the holiday pay and comp time cash out, that total was \$187,362.00.

Shifts have to be filled, and overtime is how that is done if we have officers that are sick, on vacation, at training or if we simply have vacancies. Our officers, on their own, came up with a 12-hour shift work schedule in 2021 to save the city on overtime as we were averaging over \$100,000 a year in some years. We cut our overtime expenses in one year from \$108,315 to \$41,637. Then in 22/23 we used \$68,173 and this past year we used \$63,033. The overtime expenses are unavoidable.

With a loss in officer numbers, we can expect a large increase in overtime costs. If we start to lose officers to other agencies then expect that number to increase more. It is impossible to cut officers and not expect overtime costs.

I plan on reading this same letter to you and the other council members on Thursday as these meetings are recorded. I want all council members to understand how things work when it comes to the finances and budget for our department. I have given multiple speeches on these same budget issues almost every year as Chief of Police, and with the majority of council members being new, it is important for everyone to understand and be on the same page.

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I expect that by early spring 2025, we will have specific line-item categories close to being out of funds such as fuel expenses, vehicle maintenance and professional services. I expect our overtime expenses to reach the budgeted amount of \$30,000 by this late fall. I do believe that the planned

monthly finance meetings to review department budgets will be very helpful as it will show members of council and the mayor how the money is being spent and where it is going.

On positive note, I met with the county commissioners this afternoon and we had a very good discussion on the SRO program. They are willing to review the costs of having SRO Fenner in the school system and possibly increase their contribution. I plan on attending the next school board meeting on Tuesday September 10th and discuss the same option with them to keep Steve in the schools as an SRO. We also discussed the county contributing to Officer Mark Winkley's roll up costs and having him assist with public nuisance and code enforcement issues in the county. This is something that can be added to the city-county interlocal agreement.

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