



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE**  
**MAYOR**

To: Honorable City Council  
Re: Proposed Police Reserve Officers  
Date: January 14, 2021

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On June 11, 2020, Mayor Curtatone submitted requests to the City Council to appoint 9 individuals as Police Reserve Officers. This memo provides important information for the members of the City Council to consider in its deliberation of these requests.

**1. Current vacancies**

There are currently nine patrol vacancies in the Somerville Police Department (SPD) out of a total of 94 budgeted patrol officers. As the Council will remember, Mayor Curtatone, working with former Police Chief David Fallon, submitted to the Council in June 2020 a FY21 budget request that eliminated two patrol officer positions and reduced the total number of patrol officers in the department to 94. There are currently 85 patrol officers working in the department. The department anticipates an additional retirement in January which will bring the total number of vacant patrol positions to ten.

**2. Operational Need**

With nearly 10% of the patrol positions vacant and other officers entitled to vacation, personal, and sick leave, the department regularly faces challenges meeting functional staffing levels for east and west district patrol shifts, which creates the risk of forcing holdovers, or requiring an officer to work two consecutive eight-hour shifts. Forced holdovers can have a detrimental impact on officer wellness, leading to stress, anxiety, family hardship, and low morale. These impacts can affect officers' ability to exercise good judgement, which is critical given that policing requires officers to respond to calls, de-escalate unexpected and at times chaotic situations, and make split-second decisions.

To reduce forced holdovers while meeting staffing levels for district patrol, SPD must reassign officers – including Neighborhood Police Officers (NPOs), School Resource Officers, Crime Prevention Officers, Traffic Safety Officers, Traffic Unit Officers, and Detectives – to the east and west district patrol shifts, diverting resources from other critical units and their work.

For example, only three officers are currently working in the NPO unit, which normally has an officer assigned to each ward in the city. These officers get to know business owners and residents, are a direct contact to assist with issues, and are familiar with individuals who may need additional help dealing with

mental health or substance abuse issues. With inconsistent staffing, the NPOs cannot provide their full attention to building relationships and addressing issues in their community.

### **3. Proposed Police Reserve Officers**

The proposed police reserve officers awaiting confirmation from the Council are a diverse and talented group of individuals. Five out of the nine individuals (56%) are people of color and/or women; in contrast, only 34% of all SPD sworn officers are people of color and/or women. Three of the candidates are people of color, and two are women, one of whom is a dreamer. If confirmed, she will be the first non-citizen ever hired by the department. Three of the candidates are also multilingual.

The best way to learn about the candidates is by hearing from them, which is why they created this video: <https://youtu.be/pjtDg49DUmA>. As you can hear, these individuals are dedicated to helping people and giving back to their community. Most of them were born in Somerville and attended Somerville High School. One worked for the Somerville YMCA and another worked for the Parks and Recreation Department. The diversity and backgrounds of these individuals are a reflection of Somerville, and they will be an asset to our community.

### **4. Funding availability**

At the time of the FY21 budget submission, SPD had six vacant patrol officer positions, and Mayor Curtatone's proposed budget funded these positions for 11.25 months. As a result of the Council's cut of \$650,000 to the SPD personal services budget, however, SPD made the difficult decision to [reduce the funding available for those six vacant positions to one month](#). As such, the FY21 budget assumed that new patrol officers would start working for the City no earlier than June 1, 2021. The City usually pays new officers their salary while they attend the academy, which means the new officers would not have started working in the City until late fall 2021, as academy training takes approximately five months.

In an effort to bring these needed resources into the department as soon as possible to support operational needs and mitigate the challenges discussed above, SPD and the City's finance staff have analyzed SPD's budget to identify any lag funding in salary-based budget objects that can be repurposed in order to hire the recruits earlier than June 1, 2021. As a result of this analysis, the City is proposing to bring on ten new recruits to fill the vacant positions that will exist on March 1, 2021. (There is already one individual on the SPD reserve list.) Seven of the recruits will enter the academy taking place in Plymouth while three recruits will be able to begin work immediately as they have already completed academy training by self-sponsoring.