

STAFF REPORT

Business Agenda Item

DATE: March 2, 2026

TO: Honorable Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Jason Kadle- Police Lieutenant

THROUGH: Amy Nilsen, City Manager

SUBJECT: Hiring Freeze Exception for Vacant Part-Time/On-Call Public Safety Dispatcher Position

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve an exception to the current hiring freeze to allow recruitment and appointment of the currently vacant Part-Time/On-Call Public Safety Dispatcher position.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Fortuna Police Department utilizes a Part-Time/On-Call Public Safety Dispatcher position to assist with filling full-time shifts.

The position of Public Safety Dispatcher is a highly specialized position which requires significant training and certifications. Maintaining a trained and qualified Part-Time/On-Call Public Safety Dispatchers is critical for the ongoing successful operations of the Communications Center and the Police Department. This position is fully capable of fulfilling the role of a full-time Public Safety Dispatcher and is utilized on a temporary on-call basis, providing the department with the ability to maintain coverage and operational status when needed. The position is primarily utilized to provide coverage during times of increased need, unforeseen emergencies, full-time vacancies, employee leave and special event coverage.

An understaffed police department communications center increases risks to first responders and the community. The position of Part-Time/On-Call Public Safety Dispatcher assists in mitigating these risks.

DISCUSSION:

The longtime employee working in the position of Part-Time/On-Call Public Safety Dispatcher resigned from the position on February 24, 2026, creating a vacancy.

The position of Part-Time/On-Call Public Safety Dispatcher requires applicants to have specialized experience and training in Public Safety Dispatching, which greatly limits the pool of applicants. With the required experience, training and flexibility this position requires recruitment may be affected.

The department is forecasting that with a Public Safety Dispatcher planned retirement in approximately 15 months and other anticipated employee leaves on the horizon the need for this position is even more critical.

Currently the City is operating under a Hiring Freeze. Per the Council's adopted staff report, vacancies in General Fund departments require explicit Council approval before recruitment may begin, unless automatically exempt.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No additional appropriation is requested. Salary for this position is on an on-call basis and will be offset by filling vacancies when dispatchers are on leave, injured or sick. The Part-Time/On-Call Public Safety Dispatcher position will minimize the need for full-time dispatchers to have to work, ultimately saving on budget constraints on overtime.

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Deny the exception – Not recommended. This would delay the recruitment, background and hiring process that takes months to complete if one of the full-time Public Safety Dispatchers utilizes extended leave or leaves the city's employment.
- Delay recruitment until freeze is lifted – Not recommended. This would delay the recruitment, background and hiring process that takes months to complete if one of the full-time Public Safety Dispatchers utilizes extended leave or leaves the city's employment.

RECOMMENDED COUNCIL ACTION:

1. Receive staff presentation and review Council questions
2. Open Public Comment
3. Close Public Comment
4. Motion to approve an exception to the hiring freeze for the Police Department part-time/on-call Dispatcher position and begin recruitment/hiring process. Roll Call vote.