

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of Merit System Commission

Held April 16, 2025

Call to Order

Meeting called to order 9:01 AM.

Mary Woeste	Chair	Present
Jim Kempe	Vice Chair	Present
Tom Watts	Member	Present
Gina Delph	Member	Absent

Staff Present:

City Manager Michael Davis	Fire Chief Trazi Kuzminski
Police Chief Craig Richardson	Deputy Fire Chief Mike Guadagno
Public Information Officer Aaron Vietor	Clerk of Council Karen Powell

Mrs. Woeste moved to excuse the absence of Mrs. Delph; Mr. Watts seconded the motion.

RESULT: Passed (*Yes 3, No 0, Abstained 0*)
MOVER: Mary Woeste
AYES: Mary Woeste, Jim Kempe, Tom Watts
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None

Approval of Minutes - None

Business

Fire Lieutenant Promotional Process - Certification of List

Deputy Chief Mike Guadagno reviewed the list with the commission members.

Mrs. Woeste moved to certify the Fire Lieutenant Promotional Assessment Center; Mr. Kempe seconded the motion.

RESULT: Passed (*Yes 3, No 0, Abstained 0*)
MOVER: Mary Woeste
AYES: Mary Woeste, Jim Kempe, Tom Watts
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None

Mrs. Woeste moved to release all three names for the next process; Mr. Watts seconded the motion.

RESULT: Passed (*Yes 3, No 0, Abstained 0*)
MOVER: Mary Woeste
AYES: Mary Woeste, Jim Kempe, Tom Watts
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None

Mr. Watts asked Chief Traci Kuzminski how long she wanted to hold the list and confirmed that she is comfortable in holding the list for one year.

A Motion to rescind the April 1, 2025, vote to certify the list for Full-Time Police Officer (Entry Level, No OPOTA Required).

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Mrs. Woeste reported that at the last Merit System Commission meeting the commission certified the Entry Level list by mistake as the registration had not ended. She said the ad was listed as ending once the position was filled. She said the position has not been filled, and Chief Richardson would like to extend the date to July 1, 2025. She said last month the list was closed because the commission certified the list. She said this needs to be redone to certify the names on the list now and then next month if more names are added they will certify those names to continue on the list until July 1, 2025.

Chief Richardson said this is a different practice than what Mr. Watts experienced in the past.

Mrs. Woeste reviewed that in the past a test was given, the scores were certified, and the list was closed. She explained that now the process is being left open because the Chief has found that personnel have graduated from high school or college and are looking for a job now, not when the City decides to give a test.

Chief Richardson explained that last year the commission worked with Mrs. Dillon and it was decided to change some of the Merit System Commission rules. He said the existing rules allowed for what they wanted to do, but the basis was that the Police Division wanted to have a job description open, take applications, and leave the ad open until filled and run the ad on a continuous basis because there have been continuous vacancies for so long. He stated the open competitive exam can be anything and does not have to be a written test. He said the Police Division has used a scored interview panel, and that under ORC qualifies as the open competitive exam. He said the Police Division determined a few months ago to continuously accept applications until the position was filled and to use the board interview as the first step for the test. He said the commission would receive updated lists monthly, and the commission could either certify the list each month or wait until a six-month period or so was over and then certify the entire process and then start over. He said this process is different than what has been done in the past. Chief Richardson reported that he and Mr. Vietor picked July 1, 2025, to close the process at which time the MSC could certify whatever has been done in the past six months, and the Police Division could open up another process. He said applications are still being accepted and background checks are in process. He said there was a conditional offer to a Cadet who did not pass the final stage of the background check. He said another Cadet is going through the polygraph and background process now. He said on the Lateral Entry side, the personal history questionnaire has been handed out, and no one has returned the questionnaires. He noted a couple of Entry-Level officers are in the pipeline with background checks in progress.

Mrs. Woeste said if the Police Division offers a position, nothing will be certified. She said the commission has always certified incoming people. She stated the monthly basis would be best to certify and continue the process.

Mr. Kempe asked if the City hires and makes offers from certified lists?

Mrs. Woeste replied the City always has, and every list and every test had to be certified. She said if the list is certified on a monthly basis, the list can still remain open, and if someone is offered a position, that would be from a list that was certified before it was offered instead of skipping a step.

Mr. Watts asked how long the Police Division expects the ads to run?

Chief Richardson said the ad gets stale, so the ad does need to be closed and opened again frequently. He said the Police Division also goes out to the academies to recruit.

Mrs. Woeste explained the process of scoring an interview as a test for the purpose of hiring.

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Mr. Watts said he is not against the process, but the process would have to include all three departments. He said this practice cannot be for the Police Division only.

Chief Richardson stated that the way the MSC Rules are written, any department can still follow a three-week application advertisement and then written test. He said if the Streets Department or Fire Division wants to use the old school method, they can. He said for the Police Division, because there are always vacancies, it does not make sense to sequester all the applications over and over again.

Mr. Kempe said today we are not changing process, so the City must still hire from a certified list. He said if the commission follows through and uncertifies the two lists, the Police Division has no ability to hire an Entry-Level or Cadet position.

Chief Richardson said the way the rules are written, the list can be certified at the end. He said if the commission prefers that offers go out after a list has been certified, then the list will need to be certified each month with the understanding that the list will be a continual list for four to six months.

Mr. Kempe reiterated that the process is that offers are not made until a list is certified.

Mrs. Woeste explained that applications were received after the list was printed and before the list was certified, and those applicants did not make the list. She explained the application time was to be open until July 1, 2025. She stated the commission certified the list because the Police Division is interviewing and scoring as they go along. She further explained the need to certify month to month so names can continue to be added.

Mr. Watts asked what list is being certified if the list is subject to change and names come off and names go on?

Mrs. Woeste said the MSC is certifying that the applicants have started through interviews. She reminded the commission that Mrs. Dillon said a test can be any number of things.

Mr. Watts said it is getting to the point that the Merit System Commission is a dinosaur and is not effective to what the departments' needs are. He explained that the commission no longer certifies that the applicants meet the qualifications, and now the list is a growing list.

Mr. Watts moved to rescind the April 1, 2025, motion to certify the list for Full-Time Police Officer (Entry Level, No OPOTA Required); Mrs. Woeste seconded the motion.

RESULT: Passed (*Yes 3, No 0, Abstained 0*)
MOVER: Tom Watts
AYES: Mary Woeste, Jim Kempe, Tom Watts
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None

A Motion to rescind the April 1, 2025, vote to certify the list for Full-Time Police Cadet.

Mr. Watts moved to rescind the motion to certify the list for Full-Time Police Cadet; Mrs. Woeste seconded the motion.

RESULT: Passed (*Yes 3, No 0, Abstained 0*)
MOVER: Tom Watts
AYES: Mary Woeste, Jim Kempe, Tom Watts
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None

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Other Business

Ms. Powell said the next Merit System Commission is May 7, 2025, so anything in need of being addressed can be added to that meeting.

Mr. Watts said this issue is not any one person's fault and is a result of the times we are living in.

Chief Richardson said some of the MSC Rules were modified to include what the ORC allows. He said if we, the group, do not like this, we can go back to something else. He said the commission can operate within the rules as they exist today and do some things slightly differently. He said the commission has not outlived its purpose, and he feels there still needs to be a checks and balances system to make sure people are not getting shafted and things are being done fairly.

Mrs. Woeste said if the commission waits until July 1 to certify the list, the Police Division technically cannot make an offer.

Chief Richardson said conditional offers can be made. He said he could try to wrap up the current list by May 7, and it could be certified by the commission, and then all can come up with a new process.

Mrs. Woeste agreed that would be best until the MSC can come up with a better process.

Mr. Watts said there needs to be a meeting soon with Martina Dillon and the Department heads. Mr. Kempe agreed.

The commission discussed Lateral Entry positions.

Mr. Davis said the Street Department is not allowed to use Lateral Entry processes. He said he will talk with Mrs. Dillon to see if there are things the commission can work on to expedite or keep a process open and revolving to eliminate challenges.

Mr. Watts discussed modern hiring practices and said he does not know the longevity of the Merit System Commission. He said the word "list" is the dinosaur; Mrs. Woeste agreed.

Chief Richardson said if he received ten applicants in the month of April, half would be disqualified because of background checks and the other half would have job offers by the end of the month.

Mr. Kempe said Chief Richardson's standards are what need to be met, and he should get what he needs.

Mr. Watts said each step of the process keeps dwindling away.

Mr. Kempe said there is no list for Entry Level or Cadet currently because the list was just decertified. He said the commission needs a list to certify in order for the Police Division to make an offer, and he asked if the commission will have a list to certify on May 7 at the next meeting.

Chief Richardson said he will have a list at the May 7 meeting. He also reported that one person signed up for the Sergeant's exam. He informed the commission that the application process for that position will end in April. He again stated that he believes a process can be certified after being completed and that he can make conditional offers pending the background check.

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Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:41 AM.



Mary Woeste



ATTEST: Clerk of Council, Karen Powell