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General Fund Budget Hearings Day 2, Morning: Finance, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

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Agency: [Cleveland City Council](#)

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Summary

- Paramedics must pay for their own training.
- EMS continues to grapple with staffing shortages. Council members worry that lack of staff leads to longer wait times for service, possibly endangering residents.
- The city expects to take delivery of four new ambulances this year; it is finalizing the purchase of 15 more.
- Animal Control representatives described efforts to control populations of nuisance animals such as groundhogs. Traps are available to all Cleveland residents, but must be picked up from a West Side location.

Follow-Up Questions

1. How are residents notified if the money not spent on budgeted items is redistributed or saved?
 2. If the money is redistributed, who decides where it goes and why?
 3. Can some of the lag in EMS response times be related to the systematic racism that exists in Cleveland?
 4. Why do paramedics have to pay for their own training? Council members expressed concern that paramedics have to pay for their training out of their own pockets and one member suggested that the city pay and then mandate a certain number of years of service to the city once training is complete.
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Notes

The meeting began at 9 a.m. and ended at 12:22 p.m. The following committee members were present at roll call:

Blaine A. Griffin, Chair

Kerry McCormack, Vice Chair

Kevin L. Bishop

Kevin Conwell

Anthony T. Hairston

Brian Kazy

Michael D. Polensek

Jasmin Santana

Jenny Spencer

The agenda listed eight items, under the Department of Public Safety, but only three were covered during this session and covered pages 235 to 241 of [the Budget Book](#); Department Administration, Division of Animal Control and Division of Emergency Medical Service.

Department of Public Safety

When asked about the increase in salaries and wages and if they were for civilians or police, council was told the salaries were mostly civilians and a mix of salary and union hourly wages. Safety Director Karrie Howard and his staff were asked about overtime, given the desire to cut the \$57 million budget shortfall and to explain the \$20 million needed for overtime. Howard's assistant said the overtime is in the budget for unforeseen events. Administrators said the rent of \$203,000 is for the [Family Justice Center](#) in Erieview Tower.

Officials said the line item for separation payments was a placeholder for if and when employees leave. When asked to explain the major jump in maintenance payments from \$585,000 to \$788,000, the response was that it includes all major systems. The increase in capital outlay on Page 238 of the Budget Book was for a drone purchased in 2021.

Council members asked how much money is allocated for recruiting police. That answer was deferred for later. Howard said a new position filled in December will oversee recruiting for all public safety forces. Spencer said recruitment and retention is important and suggested the new recruiter meet with individual council members to help identify potential candidates. The committee showed a lot of concern and frustration with the

lack of police and expressed concern that residents are not being protected. Council Member Joe Jones was frustrated by the Division of Police's inability to keep staffing at the stated 1,640 officers. "It hurts us in our communities," he said.

Animal Control Services is responsible for responding to all calls for services or complaints concerning dogs, cats and nuisance wildlife. The division is committed to reducing the city's nuisance animal population of skunks, raccoons, opossums and groundhogs. The division is also committed to reducing the number of euthanized animals at the kennel by locating owners of lost dogs and promoting animal adoptions, rescues and transfers to other shelters. Volunteers help capture wild cats, spay or neuter them, and then release them.

There was a lot of discussion on Animal Care and Control. The department's staff shortage is a big concern. Council President Griffin noted that people laugh when he brings up the problem of groundhogs, but he said the critters "are terrorizing people," mostly older homeowners.

Keller said residents should make sure they don't create a good environment for these animals. The city has traps that residents can pick up and return. It also will send department staff out to set traps and collect them, but he noted that the volume of calls can be overwhelming in certain seasons.

Keller also noted that trapping was largely on hold during 2020 because of the pandemic. Keller listed how many wild animals the city trapped in 2021: 215 groundhogs, 116 possums, 347 skunks and 134 raccoons.

The Division of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) is responsible for providing advanced life support, pre-hospital care and transportation to the appropriate medical facility for the City of Cleveland through a coordinated communications network in cooperation with the Division of Fire.

EMS Commissioner Nicole A. Carlton discussed how COVID-19 has challenged her division. In 2021, it fielded 124,841 calls for service, compared with 2020, when it received 19,272. From those calls last year, 109,000 ambulances were dispatched, she said.

The department is grappling with a staff shortage—it is currently down 40 people for field operations and is experiencing high turnover. One of the questions was why employees

have to pay for EMS training out of their pockets. The amount is about \$5,500, and they are required to get the training on their own time.

Council members asked how the division expected to attract and retain people with this requirement. Council Member Jenny Spencer suggested the city replace the current structure with one that pays for the training and then requires employees to work for the city for a certain number of years.

Council Member Brian Kazy noted that the division has put a target staffing level of 332 in its budget request every year since 2018 but has never gotten up to that level. "This council has given the Department of Emergency Services everything that it needs in order to maintain staffing levels," he said. Not maintaining those levels, he said, "puts residents ... at risk."

Council Member Anthony Hairston suggested the city increase salaries for EMS staff. Council Member Charles Slife noted that he and his wife pay \$20 an hour for their baby-sitter, but EMT dispatch trainees only make \$15 an hour.

Council members also questioned Carlton and Howard about the ambulance fleet. They said two new ambulances are to be delivered at the end of March and two more at the end of July. Fifteen more are in the process of being purchased.

Members of the council said vehicle maintenance and replacement are a priority.

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