

CITY OF GREAT FALLS

Great Falls Police Department

112 1st Street South
Great Falls, MT 59401
Phone: (406) 727-7688
Fax: (406) 453-8141



City Commission Report: GFPD Public Safety Update, November 19, 2024

During fall of 2023, the voters of Great Falls chose not to approve the Public Safety Mill levy and bond request. Since then, the members of the Great Falls Police Department have continued to provide the best service to our community members within our capacity to do so. Despite the failure of the public safety levy and bond, the workload has not subsided, and the challenges have not gone away. We continue to review our processes and prioritize our response posture both in the Patrol and Investigations Bureaus. Our public safety needs have not changed since the levy vote and the expectations from the community have not subsided.

Currently, the Great Falls Police Department has seven sworn officer vacancies and six 911 Center vacancies. I am anticipating 2 to 3 retirements from sworn personnel and 1 resignation from the 911 Center during the 2025 calendar year. We have held 2 vacancies in our Investigations Bureau for over a year (1 General Case and 1 Russell Country Drug Task Force) due to the inability to backfill those assignments.

The GFPD continues to recruit both sworn officer and 911 Center applicants. We have streamlined our hiring processes for a smoother transition between the application process and conditional offer of employment. However, we will not supersede our hiring standards even though we are short staffed in both areas.

We continue to hire those applicants that meet the necessary qualifications, however, we are challenged by limited slots available at the Montana Law Enforcement Academy for entry level hires. This means our ability to hire is predicated upon the number of reserved training slots allowed to our agency by MLEA.

The Patrol Bureau is averaging 115 calls per service per day, which equates to nearly 5 calls per hour, with an average of 14 officers on duty during a 24 hour time period. It should be noted that many of these calls for service require multiple officers on scene. Depending on the nature of the call, every officer on duty may be dispatched to one incident. It is not uncommon for our Patrol Bureau to make 30 to 40 arrests in a week. Because of the staffing levels and call loads, this places our Patrol Bureau in a reactive, not a proactive, policing model.

The Special Victims Unit so far this year has had 230 assigned cases, the General Case Unit has had 106 assigned cases and the School Resource Officers average 100 calls for service per week. Because of the workload with the SRO's, we had to make an internal staffing change and assign a Sergeant to only supervise that specific group of investigators. It should be noted that the SRO Supervisor also responds to calls to assist her team.

To date, the Russel Country Drug Task Force, which the Great Falls Police Department is the parent agency and has investigators assigned to, has seized 111 pounds of methamphetamine, ¼ pound of fentanyl powder, 37,370 fentanyl pills and 4.5 pounds of cocaine.

Regarding the 911 Center, to date, they have handled 73,304 calls for service. As a reminder, the 911 Center provides service to the Great Falls Police Department, Cascade County Sheriff's Office, Great Falls Fire Rescue, Great Falls EMS, and Rural Fire. Over the last week, the 911 Center has handled 1467 calls for service, with an average of 251 calls per service per day, in a 24 hour time frame. Due to staffing shortages, that workload is being handled by six dispatchers over that 24 hour time period.

We continue to rely heavily on limited availability of grants and the Great Falls Police Community Foundation to assist us in acquiring needed equipment and training for our staff due to budgetary constraints.

We do have several achievements that are worth noting:

Kelly Johanneck was recently appointed as the Deputy Director at the 911 Center. This was a newly created position that will benefit the operations at the center and service to our community.

The Evidence Expansion Project, funded through ARPA, is on schedule and has been shut down for the winter months. We anticipate the project resuming construction in early March 2025, with a completion date tentatively scheduled for November, 2025.

And lastly, the Front Counter Project, funded by a State and Local Infrastructure Partnership Act (SLIPA) grant, is on schedule, with the bid opening process starting on November 20, 2025. These two projects have been sought after for years, and both are coming to fruition.

I will conclude by stating I am extremely proud of the team at the Great Falls Police Department, and we will continue to provide the best service we can within our capacity to do so. I appreciate the support of the Mayor, Commissioners, City Staff and many of our community members.

Sincerely,

Jeff Newton
Chief of Police