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City police, fire to add 9 new positions

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Don Roper

The Lancaster Police Department will be adding five new positions and the Lancaster Fire Department will be adding four.

The police positions include a deputy chief, official standards lieutenant, desk sergeant, lead communication officer and police record specialist.

All nine were included in the city's Feb. 28 mid-year budget adjustments, and will be filled in the coming weeks, according to City Administrator Flip Hutfles.

The new positions will cost the city \$305,06 in total annual salaries — \$126,411 for the police department and \$179,294 for the fire department.

Police recruiting and retention plan

Lancaster Police Chief Don Roper had asked for the five new positions as part of the the three-year recruiting and retention plan he presented Jan. 31 at a police department and court administration standing committee meeting. He also asked for salary increases and a career ladder.



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The salary increases would address what Roper called “considerable turnover, due to officers leaving the department to go to other agencies or jobs for higher salaries.”

He said LPD’s starting salary for a certified officer after completing the academy is \$38,998.

Rock Hill Police Department offers starting officers about \$6,000 more for a starting salary of \$45,000. It also offers another \$5,000 if that starting officer is certified. Fort Mill starts police officers at \$44,000 a year, and the Lancaster County Sheriff’s Office starts at \$50,000 a year.

Roper proposed increasing the starting salary for Lancaster Police officers to \$44,000 a year, which puts the city back in a competitive salary range among surrounding areas. He also proposed an incremental salary increase plan.

“Officers with a college degree would receive a 3% increase for an associate degree, 3% for a bachelor’s degree and 3% for a master’s degree,” Roper said. He also wants to increase salaries for officers by another 3% for every three years of service at the department.

“There’s a premium placed on education also, with increases for advanced education because, honestly, we want to train and coach and build and mentor those leaders of tomorrow,” Roper said. “If we get a good employee here, we encourage them to continue that education and to continue that professional development as well.”

Hutfles said he and Roper have met several times to discuss the possibility of increasing the starting salary, within the city’s budget. He said that after looking through the budget, this is something the city has the funds to cover.

The proposed salary increases will be brought to City Council during the next few months, and were marked as a priority at the City Council budget goals meeting Wednesday, March 8.

“It’s one of those costs of doing business to stay competitive,” Hutfles said of the proposed salary hikes. “This is, I think, the second or third time since I’ve been here (that salaries have been adjusted).”

Roper said he is aiming to have the salary increase take effect July 1, the start of the new fiscal year.

“We (the city) can never compete with the sheriff’s department (on salaries), just because of the mill levy the county has. But we have to stay somewhat competitive because there are advantages,” Hutfles said.

He admitted to being biased in favor of the city.

“To me, there’s more job security,” Hutfles said of the city police force. “We have more flexibility. The territory is smaller (compared to the county).”

Haley