



CITY OF SAINT PAUL

ALASKA

NEWS RELEASE

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SUBJECT: Status of Department of Public Safety

The City of Saint Paul (City) is charged with providing public safety services (e.g. law enforcement, emergency medical, dispatch, fire, and search and rescue) per City Code of Ordinance Title 8, Chapter 8.05 for the community of Saint Paul Island. Over the past year the City has had a difficult time recruiting and retaining quality police officers that are a good fit for our community, maintaining emergency medical (EMS) services and finding volunteers to participate on EMS and fire squads.

Village Public Safety Officers

In the early 1990s our community was served by Village Public Safety Officers (VPSO) and around the mid 1990s we transitioned to certified police officers under the Department of Public Safety (Department). Over the subsequent years we have had many police officers serving our community and it has been difficult to retain them.

In August of 2021, the City Council approved a policy requiring all City employees to be vaccinated for COVID-19. In fall of 2021, the entire police force and EMS personnel resigned due to this requirement. City administrative began to rebuild the department but has had a difficult time recruiting and retaining quality police officers that are a good fit for our community. The police officer turnover has been extremely high.

In combination with high police officer turnover, the City is faced with fiscal challenges due to no snow crab season which has impacted the City's tax revenue significantly. Due to less revenue the City Council approved reducing the number of police officers in our community from four to two. Many police departments in Alaska and the lower 48 have significantly increased the pay and incentives to recruit and retain officers. Additionally, many police departments in Alaska are moving to a rotating schedule for officers such as a two week on, two week off schedule. Since January of this year the City administration has been advertising for a police officer position on Indeed, ZipRecruiter, iHireLawEnforcement, Police One, and AML websites. The dashboard statistics from ZipRecruiter show that since January the City received 350 views on the posted police officer position resulting in three interested candidates. In contrast, the City advertised for an EMT position on ZipRecruiter for 16 days and received 201 views and 18 interested candidates.

The City made an offer to one of these police officer candidates and hired them. After a lengthy background check, reference check and interview process, the candidate was hired and arrived on island May 1, 2023. The next day they informed me that this was not a good fit for him, and he left on May 4, 2023.

On May 5, 2023, the City informed the community that we would be without law enforcement until we could hire a police officer. City administration requested assistance from the Alaska State Troopers but has not received a response. City administration also reached out the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association (APIA) to see if they could provide our community with a VPSO. On Tuesday, May 16, 2023 the Saint Paul City Council approved a resolution to enter into a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with APIA to provide VPSO to Saint Paul Island. The MOA was reviewed by City's and APIA's legal counsel and was signed by the City and APIA on May 30, 2023. The intention is to have one VPSO on island as quickly as possible, and then in the next state fiscal year budget ask for and hire a second VPSO.

The transition from police officers to VPSOs is beneficial in a couple of ways. First, VPSOs focus not only on law enforcement but will also perform EMS, fire and search and rescue functions. Second, with the reduced tax revenue due to no crab fishery the City will be able to save money with VPSOs, since the funding for the VPSO program is through the State. The City would be obligated to provide housing, utilities, officer space, etc. for VPSOs but this is already factored into the City's budget and provided for potential police officers, so there would be no additional impact to the budget. Additionally, the City would not have to fund a police officer or police sergeant position which could result in an annual savings to the City ranging from \$100,000 to \$200,000 per year.

Community Service Officer

Community Service Officer David Mercurieff was hired in April 2023 to assist with police officers at the time. CSO Mercurieff is still patrolling throughout the community but not responding to law enforcement calls for service unless it is just delivering of papers. CSO Mercurieff did get sworn in by the Aleut Community of Saint Paul Island to enforce tribal ordinances. Anything minor that comes up we are having him cite tribal members into tribal court. CSO Mercurieff is also responding to EMS calls along with our one volunteer ambulance driver.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

As a result of the closure of the crab fisheries and the complete loss of fisheries tax revenues for approximately \$2.5 million, the City of Saint Paul had to implement budgetary cuts, hiring freezes, and other painful measures to withstand the loss of revenues and continue to provide essential municipal services.

One of the difficult cuts the City was forced to make is to the EMS contract with Delta Medical Transport, who has provided 24/7 services to the residents and the Bering Sea fishing fleet, including transport to the Saint Paul Health Center or to the airport for Medevacs, since November of 2021. The cost to bring one rotating EMT to the island for the whole year is \$165,000, or \$13,750 each month.

Thanks to generous initial donations from the Aleut Community of Saint Paul Island and the Central Bering Sea Fisherman's Association (CBSFA), the City was able to fund EMS services by Delta Medical Transport for the month of January 2023. The City then started a DonorBox campaign for to help fund EMS services. Through this campaign a total of 17 donations totaling \$2,580 were received. The City submitted an additional request to CBSFA to assist with funding EMS services and they graciously agreed to providing \$50,111 to help fund EMS services for our community. The City submitted two grant

applications to the State of Alaska Department of Health; at this time one grant in the amount of \$15,000 has been approved to help fund EMS services. We are awaiting notification on the second grant proposal.

In April 2023, the City received notice that Delta Medical Transport would no longer provide service to Saint Paul Island. As soon as the City heard this news, we started advertising for an EMT position. After a couple weeks of advertising and a few interviews, the City hired an EMT-3, Zacarias (Zack) Nason. Zack will be on island on June 15, 2023. Upon his arrival the City will resume regular EMS service at the BLS level. Zack will be assigned to recruit more volunteers to assist with EMS. Additionally, based on Zack's EMS certification level, the City will be able to offer advance life support (ALS) services in the future.

Thank you to the community for working with the City during this time of transition with public safety. Thank you also to all the individuals and organizations for donations to help fund EMS services.

The City and Department look forward to Zack's arrival and resuming BLS EMS services and the transition to VPSOs.