



## CITY OF WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS

### Committee of the Whole Agenda Communication

**Meeting Date:** May 12, 2025

**Prepared By:** Dennis Carr – Interim City Administrator/City Engineer

**Agenda Item:** Residency Requirements for the Chief of Police

**Explanation:** In 1991, the City of Washington adopted an ordinance requiring the Chief of Police to establish residency within city limits within six months of appointment. This requirement was introduced as the City hired Bill Witmer, a retiring Rock Island Police Department Captain, as Chief. The ordinance's preamble emphasized the need for the Chief to be available for emergencies on a 24-hour basis:

*WHEREAS, the Police Chief in the chain of command in the City of Washington is the only member of the Police Department that is considered a management employee; and*  
*WHEREAS, it is essential that the Police Chief be available for emergencies occurring within the City on a 24-hour-a-day basis...* (Ordinance 1657, February 4, 1991)

The 1991 ordinance remains today, while the structure and capabilities of the Washington Police Department (WPD) have significantly evolved. In 1991, WPD employed three patrol sergeants to cover three patrol shifts. Sometimes, patrol shifts were covered by auxiliary officers trained to a less than modern standard. In 1999, WPD employed three patrol sergeants, who were first-line supervisors for three patrol shifts. A fourth sergeant was an investigator with no regular subordinate. No auxiliary officer would staff a police district. On each patrol shift, there was no sergeant at least two days per week. When a shift sergeant was out for training, illness or injury, vacation, or other reasons, the number of unsupervised shifts could increase. The Chief of Police or a sergeant would be available by landline telephone or a visit to their respective homes (in 1999, three of four sergeants lived in Washington).

WPD today, as a matter of course, operates with 24/7 supervision. The chain of command has changed so that sergeants and a Deputy Chief are recognized as management employees. WPD employs six full-time sergeants, one of which is the Detective Sergeant, who supervises several sworn officers but also regularly supervises the daytime patrol shift. Any patrol supervisor vacancy is filled by another supervisor. In an emergency, there is an established chain of command.

Communication technology has obviously changed. Every supervisor has a cell phone. Some have City-issued computers with VPN access. Supervisors regularly communicate remotely when otherwise "off duty." Remote coordination and after-hours communication are now routine.

Other municipalities, whether of similar population or just nearby geographically, have less onerous restrictions for a Chief of Police. Of note, Pekin prefers all employees reside in the city, but allows the City Manager to authorize any exception when approved by Council. East Peoria, which at one time required residency, changed its requirement to accommodate an internal candidate for a fire

department promotion, crafting a radius requirement (and adding that a Chief living outside the city must reside in an unincorporated area). Morton has no restriction for the Chief of Police.

WPD Administrative Assistant Linda Storer sent inquiries to the 40 Illinois municipalities with populations between 15,000 and 20,000. 22 responded: 15 had no Chief of Police residency restriction. Three required residencies within 20 – 25 miles. None of the 22 required residence in the municipality.

The City of Washington does not require employees, aside from the City Administrator and Police Chief, to reside in the City. Thus, a long-time employee may serve the City well but eventually be required to move to accept an otherwise mutually beneficial work assignment. A change of residence could typically involve the costs of selling a home (agent commission alone is generally 5-6% of the gross sale amount), moving expenses, a new mortgage with rate adjustments, and the market forces of a highly desirable location.

Promoting from within, when there are qualified personnel available, is ideal to maintain healthy Police Departments. The same can be said for the Chief Position. The Deputy Chief has acted as the Chief of Police many times in the past, with no issues arising from his current residency. With no residency requirement for the Deputy Chief position, the existing residency requirements could be adjusted to allow for internal candidates to maintain their current residence while external candidates be required to relocate within 6 months. The residency requirements for an internal candidate could also be enforced if the employee were to decide to relocate from their current residence.

**Action Requested:** City Council is asked to consider whether the existing residency requirement for the Chief of Police continues to serve the City's best interests. If not, Council may wish to amend the ordinance—potentially replacing it with a more flexible approach, such as a distance-based or discretionary policy consistent with those of comparable municipalities.