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Paid Detail in Boston Should Be Changed

Detail ordinance should be amended to give the Police Commissioner flexibility

During this economic downturn, the City of Boston should take every opportunity to reduce its own expenses and the cost of doing business in Boston where feasible. For that reason, the Research Bureau believes that the city ordinance mandating a police presence at every project requiring a street work permit should be amended. The Police Commissioner should have discretion to decide for which situations police paid detail is appropriate, such as major arteries and high traffic areas, and where civilian flaggers or digital signs would be acceptable, such as on secondary roads. Written standards should be established to guide the Commissioner in this process.

Mandatory paid detail in Boston is an expensive practice that adds over \$30M to the cost of doing business in Boston. Details are paid by businesses, ratepayers, the City itself and therefore the taxpayers.

Reform of paid detail is not supported by the police unions because the details have become an important income source for most police officers in Boston. Last year, 1,652 officers or approximately 70% of the sworn force earned a total of \$31.9 million in paid detail. The average earnings for officers working paid detail was \$19,322 in 2007. About 50% of the officers were paid between \$10,000 and \$40,000. One police officer earned \$80,761 in paid detail which represented 47% of his total earnings of \$173,792 in 2007. His base salary was \$62,680.

Paid detail hourly rates vary by rank and are augmented by a 10% administrative fee for the City's management of the program. Civilian

flagger rates are based on the prevailing wage for the type of work performed in a specific geographic region. Prevailing wages are officially set by the Commissioner of the state Department of Occupational Safety. The prevailing wage for flaggers in Boston is about 14% less than the lowest-rank police detail hourly rate in Boston as shown below.

Boston Police vs. Flagger Hourly Rate	
Position	Rate
Captain	\$56.10
Lieutenant	\$50.60
Sergeant	\$48.40
Police Officer	\$40.70
Civilian Flagger	\$34.85

City Pays Paid Detail

Like businesses, the City pays for paid detail when contracting for projects such as street paving. The contractors include the paid detail costs in their invoices to the City. Boston is obligated by contract to pay the police officers their detail fees within 14 days after the job, which is usually before payment is received from the contractors. The City is not normally able to collect 100% of receipts owed, and therefore absorbs any unpaid detail expenses.

The annual paid detail expense incurred by the City is not quantified separately now but should be. Financial reporting procedures should be modified to report the City's paid detail expenses by type for each fiscal year.