



# OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

BIANCA L. TIRADO, CITY CLERK

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## PERSONNEL & FINANCE

SEPTEMBER 11, 2025 5:30 P.M.

Committee Members Present:

Sheila Niezgodski, Karen L. White, Rachel Tomas Morgan

Committee Members Absent:

Dr. Oliver Davis

Councilmembers Present:

Canneth Lee\*, Ophelia Gooden-Rodgers

Others Present:

Bianca L. Tirado, Jasmine Jackson, Matthew Neal, Veronica Pitt-Payne, Lari'onna Green, Bob Palmer

Presenters:

Carl Buchanon, Scott Ruszkowski

Agenda:

2026 Police Department & Fire Department Budget Overview

Members marked with an asterisk (\*) are in virtual attendance.

**Please note the attached link for the meeting recording:**

<https://docs.southbendin.gov/WebLink/browse.aspx?dbid=0&mediaid=399558>

**Please note the attached link for the meeting presentations:**

<https://docs.southbendin.gov/WebLink/Browse.aspx?startid=395495&row=1&dbid=0>

Committee Chair Sheila Niezgodski called to order the Personnel & Finance Committee meeting at 5:30 P.M.

Committee Chair Niezgodski thanked City emergency responders for their service and held a moment of silence to honor the lives lost on September 11, 2001.

Committee Chair Niezgodski provided information regarding the 2026 Budget Overview process. City Residents can access the City Budget Survey to provide their input using the following link: <https://southbendin.gov/budget>. Additional questions pertaining to this meeting or the budget hearing can be emailed to the Personnel and Finance Committee Chair, Sheila Niezgodski, at [sniezgod@southbendin.gov](mailto:sniezgod@southbendin.gov) and they will be directed to the appropriate department. The Final Budget Hearing is scheduled for October 13, 2025.

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Jasmine Jackson  
CHIEF DEPUTY CITY CLERK / CHIEF OF STAFF

Matthew Neal  
DEPUTY CITY CLERK / DIRECTOR OF POLICY

Margaret Gotsch  
DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL PROJECTS

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Chief Carl Buchanon, South Bend Fire Department (SBFD), 1222 South Michigan Street, South Bend, IN 46601, presented a PowerPoint providing an overview of the proposed 2026 SBFD budget. He discussed staffing needs, the increased cost of supplies and services, and gave a detailed breakdown of the capital schedule through 2030.

Committee Vice Chair Karen L. White asked Chief Buchanon to explain the impact of the shift from seventy percent (70%) of staff with more than ten (10) years of experience in 2022 to fifty-two percent (52%) of staff with more than ten (10) years of experience in 2025.

Chief Buchanon responded that this was due to several retirements and the transfer of a group of captains and senior engineers to another fire department. He said this has resulted in a loss of leadership and experience in SBFD.

Committee Vice Chair White inquired about the decrease in local option income taxes (LOIT).

Chief Buchanon called upon Kyle Willis, City Controller, with offices on the twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) floor of the County-City Building, South Bend IN, 46601, to respond. Kyle Willis stated that LOIT revenues are used to fund the salaries of public safety officers. He said the City will be receiving a lower amount this year and that he can follow up with exact numbers.

Committee Member Rachel Tomas Morgan asked Chief Buchanon to confirm that SBFD is considered fully staffed at two-hundred-fifty-three (253) employees.

Chief Buchanon confirmed that is correct.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan asked whether the number of recruits projected for 2026 is an estimate or if these recruits have already been identified.

Chief Buchanon said that they have identified candidates to begin the official recruitment process in March.

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked if the proposed two-point-five percent (2.5%) salary increase has already been negotiated.

Kyle Willis replied that the two-point-five percent (2.5%) salary increase is a placeholder value until an agreement is reached.

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked if SPFD has budgeted for an increase in benefits.

Kyle Willis stated that the proposed budget only accounts for an increase in salaries and wages. He said that the budget will be updated to reflect any negotiated changes to benefits.

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked Chief Buchanon to confirm that the proposed SBFD budget for 2026 is forty-seven-million dollars (\$47,000,000), a year-over-year increase of four-point-nine percent (4.9%), plus any additional wages and benefits that are yet to be negotiated.

Chief Buchanon confirmed that is correct.

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked the current number of SBFD personnel on staff.



Chief Buchanan replied that there are two-hundred-thirty-nine (239) individuals on staff.

Committee Chair Niezgodski held the public hearing, and nobody spoke. Committee Chair Niezgodski returned to the Committee for final questions.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan inquired about the non-bargaining communications director role.

Chief Buchanan stated that this position was previously held by a full-time exempt (FTE) employee and upon their retirement, the role was filled by a non-bargaining employee. He said that this has enhanced SBFD media presence, recruiting, and retention.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan asked for a summary of the other non-bargaining positions.

Chief Buchanan responded that ambulance billing is handled by non-bargaining employees. He said this has made SBFD more successful in recouping funds from residents who have used emergency medical services (EMS).

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked how many ambulance calls SBFD handled this year.

Chief Buchanan stated that seventeen-thousand-eight-hundred-forty-two (17,842) calls were handled in 2024 and that he expects the 2025 number to be higher once data is available.

Chief Scott Ruszkowski, South Bend Police Department (SBPD), 701 West Sample Street, South Bend, IN 46601, presented a PowerPoint providing an overview of the proposed 2026 SBPD budget. He noted that employee salaries and capital expenditures are the largest budget items and detailed where the funding is coming from.

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked Chief Ruszkowski to confirm that the total 2026 budget is fifty-six-million dollars (\$56,000,000), with six-million dollars (\$6,000,000) in state-funded wages, resulting in a net proposal for fifty-million dollars (\$50,000,000) from the City. She asked if the seven-hundred-seventy-five-thousand dollar (\$775,000) increase in pension costs will also be coming from the state.

Chief Ruszkowski confirmed the net fifty-million dollar (\$50,000,000) budget for 2026 and clarified that the six-million dollars (\$6,000,000) from the state is a reimbursement for wages paid in 2025. He stated that the seven-hundred-seventy-five thousand-dollars (\$775,000) would be spent in 2026 and reimbursed in 2027. Chief Ruszkowski finished the presentation.

Councilmember Ophelia Gooden-Rodgers asked for an explanation of the contracted wage increase for three (3) teamsters.

Chief Ruszkowski replied that wage increases for teamsters are negotiated separately from FTE employees. He stated that there are three (3) teamsters working in the SBPD building whose salaries are paid out of the SBPD budget.

Councilmember Gooden-Rodgers asked what training SBPD officers receive for interacting with community members who are on the autism spectrum.



Chief Ruszkowski said that the state mandates two (2) hours of training on this topic and SBPD requires additional training twice per year.

Committee Vice Chair White asked why the three (3) Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) positions approved by the Council have not been added.

Chief Ruszkowski said he did not recall the reason and was unsure if the request was submitted for 2025 or 2026.

Committee Vice Chair White asked for an update on SBPD social media initiatives.

Chief Ruszkowski said they have been successful and are an integral part of RTCC.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan asked if staffing improvements have allowed SBPD to reduce overtime.

Chief Ruszkowski said he would follow up with data for a year-over-year comparison.

Tim Lancaster, SBPD Logistics Division Chief, 701 West Sample Street, South Bend, IN 46601, clarified that the overtime budget has increased due to the double-time stipulation in the new contracts.

Chief Ruszkowski added that state-mandated training and training for specialized units often contributes to overtime hours.

Committee Member Tomas Morgan asked Chief Ruszkowski to explain the eighty-four percent (84%) year-over-year decrease in grants and subsidies.

Chief Ruszkowski said these grants are reimbursements for purchases that have already been made and that the application process was more complex than in previous years.

Tim Lancaster added that the dollar amount listed in the budget proposal is a placeholder value since they do not know how much grant money will be distributed each year. He stated that they receive approximately four-hundred-thousand dollars (\$400,000) in grant money annually.

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked if SBPD is still in contract negotiations and whether the proposed salary increase is a placeholder value.

Chief Ruszkowski confirmed that negotiations are ongoing, and the two-point-five percent (2.5%) salary increase for sworn officers is a placeholder value. He stated that the three percent (3%) salary increase for civilian employees is final.

Committee Chair Niezgodski asked Chief Ruszkowski to confirm that forty-three-point-five-million dollars (\$43,500,000) of SBPD funding comes from property taxes. She asked how that would change considering upcoming changes to property tax rates.

Chief Ruszkowski confirmed the dollar amount.

Kyle Willis stated that funds would be drawn from the general fund and the LOIT fund.



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Chief Ruszkowski announced that SBPD responded to one-hundred-two-thousand (102,000) calls for service last year and encouraged the Committee and members of the public to visit the transparency hub.

Committee Chair Niezgodski held the public hearing, and nobody spoke.

With no further business, Committee Chair Niezgodski adjourned the Personnel & Finance Committee meeting at 6:46 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheila Niezgodski".

Sheila Niezgodski, Committee Chair

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