

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-office Communication

DATE: 11/12/2021
TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, County Board of Supervisors
FROM: Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation
SUBJECT: From the Director, Department of Transportation, requesting approval for recruitment and retention bonuses for various critical infrastructure positions (permanent and seasonal) in the Divisions of Airport, Fleet Management and Highway Maintenance for the 2021-2022 winter season.
FILE TYPE: Action Report

BACKGROUND

The Department of Transportation has been continuously recruiting for permanent and seasonal critical infrastructure workers including Airport Maintenance Workers, permanent and temporary assignment Highway Maintenance Workers, and permanent Fleet Mechanic and Fleet Parts positions since implementation of the new Ceridian recruitment system. The Airport and Highway Maintenance Divisions have significantly more vacancies this year than in previous years and Fleet has vacant Parts positions. While Fleet Mechanic positions are filled, there is frequent turnover.

Low wages, in comparison to the regional marketplace, and the County's vaccine mandate are the main reasons for recruitment and retention challenges for these positions. For example, the City of Milwaukee recently increased pay bands for similar positions that are now higher than the County's.

The Department is responsible for winter maintenance of Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport's and Timmerman Field's runways, State Trunk Highways and Interstate Highways as well as County Trunk Highways (CTH's). With the exception of CTHs, Milwaukee County has contractual requirements with federal agencies, state agencies and the airlines to maintain safe and reliable transportation infrastructure. The Department and County need to be able to fulfill its federal and state obligations as well as its obligations to its taxpayers and the driving public. Adequate and timely staffing is required to perform these critical functions.

REQUEST

The Department of Transportation requests approval of a one-time \$300 sign on bonus for new hires (permanent and seasonal) and a one-time \$300 retention bonus for existing critical infrastructure positions including: Airport Maintenance Workers, Airport Maintenance In-Charges and Airport Maintenance Supervisors, Highway Maintenance Workers, Assistant Supervisors, Highway Maintenance Supervisors, Fleet Mechanics, Fleet Mechanic Supervisors, Fleet Parts Assistants and Fleet Parts Manager, Fleet Welder, Fleet Iron Workers, Fleet Maintenance Worker and Fleet Supervisors. The \$300 incentive the same as the City of Milwaukee's recently adopted bonus and salary adjustment structure for similar Department of Public Works employees.

Additionally, the Department is requesting \$200 monthly retention bonuses for those critical infrastructure employees who have complied with Milwaukee County's vaccination mandate and

remained in their positions for the entire month. The retention bonuses would be given at the end of the winter season for the months of December, January, February, and March for a maximum of \$800.

Airport, Fleet Management and Highway Maintenance Divisions are experiencing significant difficulties in recruiting and/or retaining permanent and seasonal employees due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Milwaukee County's vaccine mandate. This is in addition to existing recruitment/retention challenges for Fleet Mechanic and Highway Maintenance Worker positions because Milwaukee County does not offer a competitive wage compared with other municipalities.

Per funding agreements with the Federal Aviation Administration and State of Wisconsin, the Department is required to perform snow removal and winter maintenance at the airports, state trunk highways and the Interstate system throughout Milwaukee County. Without the appropriate levels of manpower to operate and maintain the necessary equipment, the County's transportation infrastructure will be vulnerable to delays, shutdowns, and federal fines.

POLICY

The County Board recently approved File No. 21-556, which authorized the Parks Department and Comptroller's Office to provide similar incentive pay for new and incumbent lifeguards in order to staff pools for the summer season. In 2016, the County Board adopted File No. 16-676, authorizing the Chief Human Resources Office to implement specific strategies to provide flexibility in recruiting for and retaining staff in "difficult-to-fill" positions. Sign-on and retention bonuses were two of the approved strategies.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the strategic plan:

- 3B: Enhance the County's fiscal health and sustainability.
With appropriate staffing levels, Milwaukee County will be able to fulfill its federal and state contractual obligations and avoid potential fines for being unable to clear snow and perform other winter maintenance activities.
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities.
The Department is working very diligently, and with success, in hiring diverse staff. We are becoming less of an attractive employer to all current and perspective employees by not providing a competitive wage.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors approve a sign-on bonus of \$300 to new recruits and to existing employees in the above identified positions, in addition, a \$200 per month retention bonus (for the months of December, January, February and March of the 2021-2022 winter season) to position incumbents who work the entire month and have met Milwaukee County's vaccine mandate.

FISCAL EFFECT

The estimated cost of \$248,600, will be offset by non-county revenues of \$214,500. There will be a zero net tax levy effect for the Airport bonuses, a net county cost of \$25,080 for Highway Maintenance bonuses, and \$9,020 tax levy impact for Fleet Management. The Department will submit a January 2022 fund transfer request to cover these expenditures.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Donna Brown-Martin, Department Director, donna.brownmartin@milwaukeecountywi.gov, Julie Esch, Deputy Director, julie.esch@milwaukeecountywi.gov, John Blonien, Fleet Management

Director, Brian Dranzik, Airport Director, bdranzik@mitchellairport.com, Eduard Santiago,
Highway Maintenance Director, Eduardo.santiago@milwaukeecountywi.gov

PREPARED BY: Julie Esch, Deputy Director

APPROVED BY:

Donna Brown-Martin

Donna Brown-Martin
Director, Department of Transportation

ATTACHMENTS:
Resolution/Ordinance, Fiscal Note

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk