



What is Meet-and-Confer: Why it matters!

Austin addresses police misconduct, along with officer salary and benefits, in a multi-year agreement with the Austin Police Association. The contract needs major revision to provide Austin with a civilian oversight system worth the high cost.

Community groups have recommended eight priority reforms and ALL must be included in any final agreement. Civilian oversight cannot be improved by trading one aspect of a better system for another – as city negotiators offered to do at the last meeting.

The current agreement is among the most costly and inflexible items in the General Revenue budget. Many cities and counties do not do business this way.

- Dallas excludes misconduct and oversight.
- Most Counties do not enter such agreements with trooper associations in the first place.
- Austin launched this experiment in 1997 and can end it this year.

Newly elected Austin Council Members quickly discover that 68% of general revenue is allocated to public safety, and 40% of that is allocated to police. This contract specifies exactly how most of that police money must be spent for the next five years. It locks into place pay and benefit increases that must be paid by future Councils and an approach to public safety heavily dependent on solving social problems with patrol officers. How? Council cannot weigh the costs and benefits of a police-patrol model against the cost and benefits of alternative staffing or technology approaches.

This year, BETTER BEFORE MORE. Without the eight priority reforms to oversight and accountability, Austin should allow the agreement to expire and move money to other safety approaches.

Mental health and substance abuse: we currently send patrol officers to address people in mental health crisis, people considering suicide, and people suffering from addiction. In order to do something different, we need the flexibility to move money from patrol officer salaries to civilians (social workers, emergency medical technicians.)

Solving crimes: To increase case closure rates we need to move resources from patrol – especially the tens of thousands of false alarm security system calls – to forensics. Austin’s crime lab needs to be independent, revitalized with new scientific talent, and given the resources needed to expand the use of forensics to solve property crimes.

Austin police officers benefit

- High base pay (highest in comparable cohort of cities)
- High step pay (significant pay increases with seniority)
- Faster accrual of sick and vacation time than allowed under state civil service law
- High termination payout of accrued sick and vacation time compared to state civil service law
- Additional longevity bonus, pay for certifications, high hourly rate for court time
- Association Business Leave time not available under civil service.

So what did the rest of us get?

- Civilian oversight surrounded by too much secrecy, without enough authority.
- Rules like the 180 day rule – limiting the Chief’s ability to address misconduct if discovered six months after an incident – no better than state law.
- Rules like the automatic reduction of suspensions to written reprimand that create more leniency towards misconduct than allowed under state law.