



“Excellence in Police Service”

**Chief Todd Thomas**  
**Appleton Police Department**

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To: **Safety and Licensing Committee**

From: Chief Todd Thomas

Date: April 7, 2022

Subject: **Informational Item – Traffic Safety Unit**

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Our community members have identified traffic and pedestrian safety as a significant concern. In the Appleton Police Departments Community Surveys on Public Safety that were completed in 2017 and 2020, the top four issues in our city for our community members were:

1. Drug Abuse
2. Speeding and Reckless Driving
3. Inattentive and Distracted Driving
4. Operating while Under the Influence

We are all aware of the increasing problem with vehicle and pedestrian safety in all areas of our city. Our council members have been involved and interested in developing initiatives to address this issue. Additionally, Mayor Woodford has been actively engaged in these discussions and in the development of this initiative.

When the pandemic began, most communities across the country experienced a significant increase in aggressive driving behaviors. There have always been vehicle enthusiasts in our community, but there is also a cyclical life to the popularity of this hobby. During the pandemic there was a dramatic increase in both responsible enthusiasts, and irresponsible ones. As you know, this is not just a College Avenue issue, these behaviors occur across the 25 square miles of the city. From our neighborhood streets to our highways, the issues of dangerous driving and nuisance vehicles affects all of us.

Traffic safety will always be a priority for the police department, and we took additional steps to try and curb illegal behavior. We obtained additional state grant funding to bolster our enforcement efforts, made enforcement a priority for our patrol officers, and created a formal response plan for College Avenue cruising which included shutting down the avenue for vehicle traffic. Our response also included saturation patrols, when we had officers available, and asking other local police agencies to join us in high visibility policing. We also worked with organizers of planned events to try and mitigate issues, and with businesses that supply some of the equipment that is a concern.

When we have had extra officers available to focus illegal behavior, they have been extremely productive, and we believe it has sent a strong message to the community. As an example, on one Saturday night in November of 2021, we assigned officers to a traffic safety initiative and in four hours they conducted 26 traffic stops and enforced 16 loud or illegal exhaust violations.

Cruising and moving car shows have become almost weekly events in the summer, which has drained our resources as they typically occurred during our busy weekend nights. When our officers are busy dealing with traffic problems or cruising events, they are pulled out of their districts and our normal calls for service are held longer and not responded to as quickly.

Core Values of the Appleton Police Department: “Compassion, Integrity, Courage”



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Our staff has been researching how others have been addressing this issue, not only in Wisconsin but across the country. We know we must be creative, while also being fiscally responsible, to get the biggest impact from the resources we have. We have been researching different traffic safety unit initiatives and specialty officer positions that others have implemented to determine what may be possible, and what would be the best fit for Appleton. These units and officers' sole duties are to address traffic issues and complaints, strictly enforce laws and ordinances, and work with community members and engineers to develop strategies to address areas of concern. They also make community education and promoting safe driving and pedestrian behavior one of their core duties.

With the retirement of a civilian Police Communications Specialist (front desk service) in April, we can use the salary savings from that position to fund an additional police officer position, from June 1<sup>st</sup> to the end of the year, and create a pilot program for a **Traffic Safety Unit Officer**. We will adjust the hours of our front desk to minimize the impact of the open position and adjust work schedules as needed. We estimated the cost savings for this position being left to be approximately \$52,000. We are going to use that to pay for an additional officer to work in the position of **Traffic Safety Officer** from June 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

During this pilot period we will develop what a permanent program may look like and gather data on the effectiveness and productivity of the unit. The data, and feedback from the council, community members, and officers on the position, would be used to determine if we should request to continue the initiative, eliminate it, or do planning to expand the unit.

I have attached a job description to explain the purpose of the *Traffic Safety Unit* and the duties of the officer. We know this is just a framework to start with and that adjustments and changes will be necessary and should be expected.

Our message to the community: We want to grow and support a community wide commitment to improve pedestrian and traffic safety so that Appleton can continue to be a safe and amazing place for us and our families to live and play.

“**Making Traffic and Pedestrian Safety a Shared Community Responsibility**” will be one of the mantras of this unit.

Thank you all for your support and patience while we worked on developing this initiative.

Chief Todd Thomas