

Mayor: Police respond slowly

Aldermen change plan, opt to add officers at patrol level

**By Scott Williams
Of The Examiner**

Plans for revamping the Blue Springs Police Department took a fundamental change in direction Tuesday night after Mayor John Michael publicly complained that he has trouble finding a police officer when he needs one.

During a budget-making session with the Board of Aldermen, the mayor said he had difficulty summoning officers to his neighborhood on three separate occasions over the Memorial Day weekend.

"I can't find them when I need them," Michael said, his voice rising and echoing in a nearly empty City Hall meeting room.

The mayor said he witnessed incidents of reckless driving and vandalism near his home. But police officers did not arrive either time, he said, until 20 minutes after he telephoned for help.

"We saw the crime committed," he said, referring to the vandalism. "And yet in that time, they (the suspects) were gone."

Michael, who lives less than a block from police headquarters, said he lost his temper when officers later arrived and told him that just six patrolmen were on duty at the time.

"I wasn't convinced six months ago," the mayor said Tuesday, "but I'm convinced now — we don't have enough of them (patrolmen) on the street."

Police Chief Howard Brown was not present during Tuesday night's budget session and today said he was unaware of Michael's complaints.

Brown was briefed on the meeting, however, and said during an interview at police headquarters that he disagrees with the actions of the Board of Aldermen.

Following the mayor's remarks, aldermen Tuesday rejected the chief's plan for creating more rank in the department and instead proposed a restructuring that would put more patrolmen on the streets.

Brown's proposal would have promoted to the rank of captain two sergeants who currently work on patrol. Those two sergeants then would have been replaced by officers added to the payroll next year.

The proposed budget for fiscal 1989 calls for four additional patrolmen, but under Brown's plan the police force would have realized an addition of only two patrolmen.

Ward 3 Aldermen Emil Spears raised the first questions about that Tuesday, and other aldermen voiced no opposition when Spears proposed altering the police chief's recommendations.

Aldermen agreed to add the four new officers to the patrol force and to fill the newly created captain positions by eliminating other administrative positions in the Police Department.

According to Spears' plan, one sergeant still would be promoted out of the patrol force. But the two other captain slots would be filled by eliminating the positions of lieutenant and major.

For Lt. Gary Ahern, the move to captain would represent a promotion in rank; for Maj. Jack Thomson, it would not.

Brown today said he agrees with the idea of boosting his patrol force but objects to plans for eliminating Thomson's position as major.

"I don't feel that's a proper structure," Brown said.

Explaining that Thomson assumes command of the department whenever the chief is unavailable,

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