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Drop in overtime aided '09 city payroll

The Boston Globe

Police earned \$11m less; 'significant progress' noted

By Andrew Ryan and Michael Levenson, Globe Staff | February 11, 2010

A steep drop in overtime helped significantly slow the growth of Boston's payroll in 2009, according to records released by the city yesterday, with the Police Department alone cutting more than \$11 million in overtime costs over the prior year.

In all city departments, excluding schools, overtime earnings fell by 20 percent in 2009, a \$15 million drop that is equivalent of the entire annual budget for the city's Department of Parks and Recreation. Though the records still show some earners racking up huge overtime amounts, city officials said their effort to crack down on the once-rampant practice has paid off.

"This reflects all the hard work the city has done in the last two budget cycles," said Lisa Calise Signori, the city's director of administration and finance.

"Earnings have slowed and overtime earnings are down considerably," she said, citing in particular the reduction in overtime at the Police Department. "We have faced our fiscal challenges."

Despite the strides the city has made in attacking overtime costs, there are still scores of employees adding tens of thousands of dollars to their salaries through overtime. In the Police Department, 106 officers made more than \$50,000 in overtime last year, with four pulling in more than \$100,000.

The top overtime earner was Sergeant Michael J. Stratton, who made \$118,546 in overtime pay last year, bumping his total salary to \$240,880. He was followed by Lieutenant Timothy M. Kervin, who made \$107,446 in overtime pay, for a total salary last year of \$265,472.

All but four of the top 200 earners last year were Boston police officers, many of whom augmented their salaries by working police details. Seventy made more than \$200,000, far more than Mayor Thomas M. Menino, who made \$170,687 and ranked 229th on the city's list of top earners.

Police Commissioner Edward F. Davis said yesterday that his department has made "significant progress knocking the numbers way down" while also reducing crime, while acknowledging that "some of the numbers are shocking." But other cost-saving measures, such as delaying promotions, added to overtime because officers were needed to fill vacant positions, Davis said. Those promotions have now been made, however, so those costs should decrease.

Other overtime spikes could be explained by testimony in murder trials, officers working in some of the city's busiest districts, and other realities of police work. "You can't send a detective home in the middle of a homicide investigation because a shift is over," Davis said.

The city's top earner in 2009 was Carol R. Johnson, superintendent of schools, who was paid \$329,528, the data show. She was followed by a long list of police officers, including, in addition to Kervin, Lieutenant Matthew J. Spillane, the city's second-highest earner, who made \$271,883; Captain Paul J. Russell, who earned \$247,921; Captain James M. Claiborne, at \$247,827; and Lieutenant Steven M. Ciccolo, who earned \$247,734.

Davis was 209th on the list, with \$173,256, the same salary as Fire Commissioner Roderick J. Fraser Jr.

The Boston city payroll, which the city said it planned to post on its website, grew by 1 percent to \$1.29 billion

in 2009, a pace of growth well below the 4 percent increase from 2007 to 2008.

This year's slowdown in growth can also be attributed to a 4.5 percent reduction of the city's roughly 19,500-member workforce. The decrease reflects about 300 layoffs, retirements, attrition, and a mandate that allows hiring only for what officials described as essential positions, according to Signori.

In addition, the city saved \$8.7 million when many of its employees agreed to postpone raises until the end of the fiscal year, which closes June 30.

But the most striking element of last year's payroll figures was the \$15 million drop in overtime, from \$75.4 million in 2008 to \$60.3 million in 2009.

"A \$15 million saving shows that people are making serious efforts," said Matthew A. Cahill, executive director of the Boston Finance Commission, a fiscal watchdog agency that released a report last year critical of the city's overtime expenditures. "I certainly hope . . . people continue to make the efforts going forward." ■

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