

More cops for Fresno schools, city buses in Mayor Swearingin's budget plan

By George Hostetter



Fresno police recruits take the oath of service at a City Hall ceremony in May 2014.

JOHN WALKER — FRESNO BEE FILE PHOTO

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Fresno's public safety system will get a big boost in Mayor Ashley's Swearingin's proposed 2016 budget.

Swearingin, Police Chief Jerry Dyer, Fire Chief Kerri Donis and other top city officials gathered at City Hall on Tuesday to review exactly what this means.

In a nutshell:

- Forty-three police officers will be added over the course of the 2015-2016 fiscal year. Most will be on patrol duty.
- Two school resource officers will work in the Fort Miller Middle School area in central Fresno. Their hiring comes in direct response to parents' concerns that student safety at the campus had badly deteriorated, the mayor said.



- Four officers will support Fresno Area Express buses, especially in the Manchester Center/Blackstone Avenue corridor.
- Thirteen firefighters will be added, raising the minimum staffing at any given hour to 73 from 70.
- A truck company will be added to Station 9, increasing service in the downtown area.
- City officials are committed to replacing the Fire Department's aging fleet at an estimated cost of \$10.5 million over the next eight years.

Many of these promises were aired Monday afternoon when Swearingin unveiled her \$1.2 billion budget. The spending plan of 300-plus pages heads to the City Council later this month. Budget hearings begin in June.

What made Tuesday's news conference different was City Hall's focused effort to explain how the numbers fit into a system of improved service to Fresno's 112 square miles.

Dyer said more cops on neighborhood patrol will mean faster response to calls for service. He said beefed-up patrols will keep gangs in check while building the sense of well-being among citizens.

Donis said replacing aging equipment with new equipment only makes sense.

Swearingin said better police and fire protection will combine with City Hall's efforts to revive older neighborhoods and spur the economy to transform Fresno's quality of life.

Much has changed at City Hall in the past six years of economic woes, Swearingin said.

One thing that has not changed, she added, is the city's "commitment to public safety."

Council Members Esmeralda Soria, Paul Caprioglio and Lee Brand said they support the rebuilding of public safety services. City Manager Bruce Rudd joined the group.

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