

Robert Williams named new police chief

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If Robert Williams becomes Springfield's next police chief, he faces a severe budget crisis, possible layoffs and the ever-present challenge of diversifying the police force.

Williams, a Springfield native who has been assistant police chief for the past two years, was nominated Thursday to succeed Ralph Caldwell as chief of the Springfield Police Department.

Mayor Tim Davlin, who selected Williams, said Thursday he is unsure exactly when Williams' appointment will be presented to the city council for approval.

"I told Bobby earlier today I'm not looking for a 'yes' man. I want to be challenged in the decisions I make," Davlin added. "Certainly, the last two chiefs have done that for me, and I think that's the kind of person he is. Don't do something because I say. If you don't think it's right, stand up and tell me that."

Williams did not identify any particular goals he has for the department or specific needs he thinks the department has. He also did not say if he intends to reallocate people or resources.

"One of the things I'm going to do as the interim chief is get with the staff ... and we'll be addressing some of those concerns," he said.

Diversity a priority

Williams, who is black, did say one of his personal missions with the Springfield Police Department is to increase diversity.

"I don't look at it as far as specific numbers, but I do think as an agency we do need to be more reflective of the community that we serve," he said. I also know the many assets that it brings, and I'm a firm believer and supporter of that.

"I will continue to not only formally – if I'm chosen to be chief of police – but also informally be a recruiter for the Springfield Police Department."

Caldwell, who has been chief since 2007, is leaving in mid-December to become director of the Metropolitan Computer-Aided Dispatch service, which provides police, fire and emergency service dispatching for most of Champaign County.

No changes in command staff will take place immediately, and an assistant chief has not been named. Williams and Caldwell will work together during the upcoming weeks to ensure a smooth transition, they said.

Davlin said a salary has not been set for the new chief. He said officials are working on the city's budget and noted that he suspended 3-percent raises that staff was to receive. As of August, Williams' salary was \$105,638 and Caldwell's was \$114,716.

Davlin said Williams, 46, is a "true asset to the entire organization."

"He has been part of the command staff. When decisions have been made ... we've all pretty much just been right in line and right in step," Davlin said.

Morale 'high'

Williams has overseen the police department's internal affairs division and said he has had to make some "tough decisions." However, he added that he believes he has been fair and he thinks employees will be "overwhelmingly behind me." He described police morale as "extremely high."

Caldwell said running the Springfield Police Department has been an honor.

"The staff that I have ... I would put them up against any staff that I've been part of or I've seen over my career," he said. "Anytime anybody's called and needed anything – whether you're an alderman, a citizen or elected official – we respond instantly, and I couldn't have done it without the staff. The only reason I was successful was because I had great people around me."

He said Williams will be good for the community.

"This is Bobby's day," Caldwell added, "but I've loved what I've done. I've had a great career."

Sangamon County Sheriff Neil Williamson, whose department works closely with Springfield police on a variety of matters, described Williams as an "outstanding choice" for chief.

"I've watched him come up through the ranks over the last 20 or so years. He's extremely professional and non-controversial as far as everything I've

seen. He's fair, he listens, and he's everything you would want in a chief of police," said Williams, a former Springfield police officer.

Jayette Bolinski can be reached at 788-1530.

Robert L. Williams

Age: 46

Date of hire: April 9, 1987

Current job: Springfield police chief-designate

Career: Promoted to sergeant, 1994; lieutenant, 1999; assistant chief (currently titled deputy chief) over internal affairs, 2002; assistant chief (second in command), 2007.

Education: 1982 graduate of Southeast High School, associate's degree from Lincoln Land Community College, bachelor's degree in social justice from the University of Illinois at Springfield, master's degree in organizational behavior from Benedictine University.

Family: Wife, Sherry; daughters, Christina Gutierrez, 24, and Shelby Williams, 9.

Interests: Athletics, coaching, volunteering

Quote: "My management style is a lot of like Chief Caldwell's. It's participative, but a lot of times I let the situation dictate it. But because we are quasi-military there are times when we have to be completely autocratic, depending on what the situation is.

"When (outgoing Chief Ralph Caldwell) knew he would be leaving shortly, one of the things he was able to do was relinquish a little bit of his power and allow me to gain even more technical confidence. I thank him for that, and I think the real winners are going to be the citizens that we serve."

Chief choice has backing of Springfield aldermen

Mayor Tim Davlin's selection of Robert Williams as the city's new police chief appears to have the backing of the Springfield City Council.

A majority of aldermen reached Thursday say they plan to vote in favor of Williams' appointment next month. Until then, Williams will be acting chief.

He will replace Ralph Caldwell, who is retiring to take a better-paying job in Champaign.

Ward 4 Ald. Frank Lesko called Williams a "solid choice."

"I've had many dealings with Mr. Williams," Lesko said. "He's very good. ... He's got a very calm head. He's very professional and very analytical, and I think that leads to a good police chief for Springfield."

Ward 2 Ald. Gail Simpson said she's comfortable with the appointment.

"I think he'll do a good job," she said. "I think he has an excellent handle on how the department is run, he knows the personnel."

Simpson said she thinks Williams needs to make recruiting minority and women officers a priority, along with pursuing unsolved murders and making neighborhoods safer.

Other aldermen hadn't had many interactions with Williams, but said from what little they know, they are supportive.

"I would hope he has similar background that Ralph has and the same rapport with the troops that Ralph has," said Ward 7 Ald. Debbie Cimarossa. "If he does, he will be successful."

Ward 1 Ald. Frank Edwards said he will support the mayor's pick as long as he meets the qualifications for chief and lives in the city.

Ward 3 Ald. Frank Kunz said he, too, will support the mayor's choice.

Asked what Williams' priority should be as chief, Kunz said: "Just good police work."

"That's all I've ever cared about," Kunz said. "I want more cops on the streets. Less special units, less management and more cops on the street — that's the only thing that's going to keep crime down."

Ward 6 Ald. Mark Mahoney said from what he knows about Williams, it "looks like he'll be a great chief."

Mahoney said Williams seems open and forthcoming, and he hopes the new chief remains committed to the city's neighborhood policing efforts.

Ward 9 Ald. Steven Dove said he plans to vote in favor of Williams. Dove called him well-rounded and qualified. "He's done his time and gone up the ranks," Dove said.

"It's good to have somebody who's a Springfield native serve in that capacity," Dove added.

Ward 5 Ald. Sam Cahnman said he's been impressed with Williams' professionalism and commitment to law enforcement.

Cahnman also urged Williams to strengthen the city's neighborhood policing program.

Williams' appointment is expected to come before the city council next month. It appears to be much less controversial than Caldwell's 2007 appointment, which languished for more than two months before being approved.

Aldermen originally expressed concerns about Caldwell's selection because his name was mentioned in a 30-page summary of an Illinois State Police investigation of the police department that alleged some officers and their supervisors failed to follow department rules.

-- Deana Poole

Springfield police chiefs

Robert Williams 2009 –

Ralph Caldwell 2007 – 2009

Don Kliment 2003 – 2007

John Harris 1995 – 2003

Harvey Davis 1993 – 1995

Kirk Robinson 1992 – 1993

Daryle Williamson 1990 – 1992

Mike Walton 1987 – 1990

Stan Troyer 1983 – 1987

Howard Rogers 1978 – 1983

William Ascher 1975 – 1978

Bill Hall 1971 – 1975

Thomas Howarton 1970 – 1971

Silver Suarez 1963 – 1970

Charles Blumle 1960 – 1963

Silver Suarez 1955 – 1959

* Does not include interim chiefs



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