

**IN THE MATTER OF FACT FINDING
BETWEEN
THE CITY OF OBETZ
AND
FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE, CAPITAL CITY LODGE 9
SERB CASE NO. Case No(s). 2025-MED-10-1249 and 2025-MED-10-1250
Barton A. Bixenstine, Fact Finder**

**FACT FINDER'S
REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
February 2, 2026**

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INTRODUCTION

The parties to this matter are the Fraternal Order of Police, Capital City Lodge 9 (hereinafter the “FOP” or the “Union”) and The City of Obetz (the “City” or “Obetz”). The City and the Union are currently operating under the terms of a collective bargaining agreement that expired December 31, 2025.

On December 8, 2025, pursuant to Ohio Revised Code 4117.14(C)(3), SERB appointed me as the Fact Finder to conduct a hearing as required by Ohio Administrative Code, OAC 4117-9-05 (G) for Fact-Finding and make recommendations on open issues for the Agreement. The Parties agreed to extend the dates for holding hearings. A Fact-Finding hearing was conducted on January 12, 2026, and was held open thereafter so that the parties could address follow-up questions from the Fact-Finder.

GENERAL/STATE/LOCAL ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

The City of Obetz (the “City” or “Obetz”) is located in Franklin County, Ohio, approximately six miles southeast of the central business district of Columbus, the State's capital. The population of Obetz grew 21 percent from 2010 to 2020, with a population of 5,489 as of the 2020 United States census, surpassing the 5,000 resident requirement to qualify as a city in Ohio. Originally formed in 1838 as a stagecoach junction named Obetz Junction in honor of settler Charles Obetz, the community was incorporated in 1928 and officially transitioned from village to city status following the 2020 census. Obetz has grown significantly since 2020, thanks in part to annexations and industrial development. Today, Obetz is home to approximately 7,306 residents, has a workforce of 14,900 resident employees and over 300 employers.

The City operates under a Mayor-Council form of government as established by its Charter. A six-member elected Council holds the legislative power of the City, and the Mayor is also elected by citizens for a four-year term. The City Administrator manages the day-to-day operations of the City.

Trends in Obetz General Fund income, expenditure and debt – 2020 to 2024:

The following description of Obetz General Fund spending is obtained from the Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports for 2020 through 2024:

As of the end of 2020 (when Obetz was still a village):

- **Two and one-half percent income tax:** “whose proceeds are placed into the General Fund, the General Obligation Debt Service Fund, the Park Improvement Debt Service Fund (a nonmajor governmental fund), and the Infrastructure Debt Service Fund (a nonmajor governmental fund).”¹
- **\$44,875,220 in long-term obligations outstanding** as of December 31, 2019 (excluding net pension liability, net OPEB liability, and compensated absences.) “Of the total, \$3,960,000 will be retired using service payments received in lieu of property taxes and developer contributions. The remaining \$40,915,220 will be retired with income tax revenue.”²
- **Bonds issued in 2020 with A+ rating from Standard & Poor’s.** “The rating is excellent for an Ohio Village and is better than many large cities, enabling the Village’s debt to be issued at lower interest rates, resulting in substantial reductions in future debt service payments. The Village’s

¹ VILLAGE OF OBETZ, OHIO, ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2020, p. 77, http://www.auditor.state.oh.us/AuditSearch/Reports/2021/Village_of_Obetz_2020-Franklin_FINAL.pdf

² Id., p. 11.

diverse and growing economic base, strong regional and local economies, history of operating surpluses and the continued use of that surplus to fund capital projects; and, continued long-term planning efforts will help maintain high credit ratings.³

For the year 2021:

- **Tax revenue represented 66.26% of all General Fund revenue**, which “increased due to increased collections during 2021. Charges for services increased due to the City hosting more events resulting in more rental income and concession sales at Fortress Obetz. Fees, licenses and permits revenue increased primarily due to an increase in building permit revenue. Fines and forfeitures revenue increased due to higher court costs and fines. Intergovernmental revenue increased due to more local government funds distributed. Investment income decreased as there were declining interest rates due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Other revenues increased due to an increase in refunds and reimbursements.”⁴
- **The City increased total expenditures by 50.04%**. The most significant changes from the prior year were in the areas of general government, leisure time activity, and capital outlay. General government expenditures increased due to the City losing a property tax valuation lawsuit and owing the money back. Leisure time activity expenditures increased due to the City hosting more events and activities compared to the prior year. Capital outlay increased as the many capital outlay expenditures that were halted and/or decreased due to the COVID-19 Pandemic were started again. Security of persons and property increased due to increased wages of police officers. Community environment expenditures increased due to more costs associated with other contractual agreements. Transportation increased primarily due to increased expenditures related to street maintenance and repair.⁵
- **General Fund revenues and other financing sources came in \$1,394,741 higher than projected** “in the final budget, primarily due to increased revenues received from fees, licenses, and permits caused by increased building permits. Budgeted revenues increased slightly from the original budget to the final budget.”⁶
- **General Fund actual expenditures were \$5,107,363 less than projected** “in the final budget due to conservative budgeting practices.”⁷

For the year 2022:

- **Tax revenue represented 67.51% of all General Fund revenue**, which “increased due to increased collections during 2022. Charges for services increased due to the City hosting more events resulting in more rental income and concession sales at Fortress Obetz. Fees, licenses and permits revenue increased primarily due to an increase in building permit revenue. Fines and forfeitures revenue increased due to higher court costs and fines. Intergovernmental revenue increased due to more local government funds distributed. Investment income increased as

³ Id.

⁴ CITY OF OBETZ, OHIO, ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2022, p. 32, https://ohioauditor.gov/AuditSearch/Reports/2022/City_of_Obetz_2021_Franklin_FINAL.pdf

⁵ Id., p. 33.

⁶ Id., p. 35.

⁷ Id., p. 36.

interest rates began to rise. Other revenues decreased due to a decrease in refunds and reimbursements.⁸

- **The City decreased total expenditures by 10.51%**, with the “most significant changes from the prior year were in the areas of general government, leisure time activity, and capital outlay. General government expenditures decreased due to the City not having a property tax lawsuit in 2022. Leisure time activity expenditures increased due to the City hosting more events and activities compared to the prior year. Capital outlay decreased as there were less expenditures on projects during 2022. Security of persons and property increased due to increased wages of police officers. Community environment expenditures decreased due to less costs associated with other contractual agreements. Transportation increased primarily due to increased expenditures related to street maintenance and repair.”⁹
- **General Fund revenues and other financing sources came in \$1,528,455 higher than projected** “in the final budget, primarily due to increased revenues received from fees, licenses, and permits caused by increased building permits. Budgeted revenues increased slightly from the original budget to the final budget.”¹⁰
- General Fund expenditures were \$5,266,483 less than projected “in the final budget due to conservative budgeting practices.”¹¹

For the year 2023:

- **Tax revenue represented 58.10% of all General Fund revenue**, which “decreased due to decreased collections during 2023. Charges for services increased due to the City hosting more events resulting in more rental income and concession sales at Fortress Obetz. Fees, licenses and permits revenue decreased primarily due to a decrease in building permit revenue. Fines and forfeitures revenue decreased due to less court costs and fines. Intergovernmental revenue increased due to higher local government funds distributed. Investment income increased as interest rates began to rise. Other revenues decreased due to a decrease in refunds and reimbursements.”¹²
- **The City increased total expenditures by 18.71%**. “The most significant changes from the prior year were in the areas of general government, leisure time activity, transportation, and capital outlay. General government expenditures increased due to due to increased wages of City employees. Leisure time activity expenditures increased due to the City hosting more events and activities compared to the prior year. Capital outlay increased as there were more expenditures on projects during 2023. Security of persons and property increased due to increased wages of police officers. Community environment expenditures increased due to more costs associated with other

⁸ CITY OF OBETZ, OHIO, ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2022, p. 34, https://obetz.oh.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/City_of_Obetz_2022_Franklin_FINAL.pdf

⁹ Id., p. 34.

¹⁰ Id., p. 35.

¹¹ Id., pp. 35-36.

¹² CITY OF OBETZ, OHIO, ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2023, p. 34, https://ohioauditor.gov/auditsearch/Reports/2024/City_of_Obetz_2023_Franklin_FINAL.pdf

contractual agreements. Transportation increased primarily due to increased expenditures related to street maintenance and repair.¹³

- **General Fund revenues and other financing sources came in \$411,678 higher than projected** “in the final budget, primarily due to increased revenues received from investments caused by increased interest rates on investments. Budgeted revenues decreased slightly from the original budget to the final budget.”¹⁴
- **General Fund expenditures were \$3,850,370 less than projected** “in the final budget due to conservative budgeting practices.”¹⁵

For the year 2024:

- **Tax revenue represented 58.94% of all General Fund revenue**, which “increased due to increased collections during 2024. Charges for services increased due to the City hosting more events resulting in more rental income and concession sales at Fortress Obetz. Fees, licenses and permits revenue decreased primarily due to a decrease in building permit revenue. Fines and forfeitures revenue increased due to more court costs and fines. Intergovernmental revenue increased due to higher local government funds distributed. Payments in lieu of taxes increased as they received TIF money from a local business during the fiscal year. Investment income increased as interest rates began to rise. Other revenues increased due to an increase in refunds and reimbursements.”¹⁶
- **The City increased total expenditures by 7.81%**. “The most significant changes from the prior year were in the areas of security of persons and property, leisure time activity, transportation, and capital outlay. Leisure time activity expenditures increased due to the City hosting more events and activities compared to the prior year. Capital outlay increased as there were more expenditures on projects during 2024. Security of persons and property increased due to increased wages of police officers. Community environment expenditures increased due to more costs associated with other contractual agreements. Transportation increased primarily due to increased expenditures related to street maintenance and repair. 34
- **General Fund revenues and other financing sources came in \$1,950,486 higher than projected** “in the final budget, primarily due to increased revenues received from investments caused by increased interest rates on investments. Budgeted revenues increased slightly from the original budget to the final budget.”
- **General Fund expenditures were \$2,885,562 less than projected** “in the final budget due to conservative budgeting practices. 36

As shown below, Obetz’s total General Fund spending jumped 72% from 2020 to 2024 (from \$10.45 M to \$17.97 M) as the village-then-city invested in expanding services and development projects. This led to shifts in its budget composition: while public safety spending grew in absolute terms (from \$2.44 M to \$3.51 M), it declined as a percentage of overall General Fund spending. Over the first two years of the

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Id., p. 36.

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ CITY OF OBETZ, OHIO, ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024, p. 34, https://ohioauditor.gov/AuditSearch/Reports/2026/City_of_Obetz_2024_Franklin_FINAL.pdf

parties’ Collective Bargaining Agreement and over the larger 2020-2024 time period, Public Safety spending increased at a lower overall rate than General Fund Spending overall, and at a lower overall rate than spending on Leisure activities and spending on Capital Projects.

Year	Gen Fund Expenditure Total	Public Safety (Gen Fund)	% Public Safety (GF)	Leisure (Gen Fund)	% Leisure (GF)	Capital Outlay (Gen Fund)	% Capital Outlay (GF)
2020	\$10,454,849	\$2,444,982	23.4%	\$1,625,091	15.5%	\$788,032	7.5%
2021	\$15,686,100	\$2,750,497	17.5%	\$2,466,163	15.7%	\$1,725,050	11.0%
2022	\$14,037,486	\$3,090,663	22.0%	\$2,911,848	20.7%	\$1,296,338	9.2%
2023	\$16,664,525	\$3,240,492	19.4%	\$3,498,979	21.0%	\$1,719,048	10.3%
2024	\$17,965,470	\$3,509,774	19.5%	\$3,778,120	21.0%	\$2,130,066	11.9%
% change 2022-24		13.6%		29.7%		64.3%	
Change 2022-24		\$419,111		\$866,272		\$833,728	
% change 2020-24		43.6%		132.5%		170.3%	
Change 2020-24		\$1,064,792		\$2,153,029		\$1,342,034	

Assessments of the Financial Health of the City:

In its 2023 Annual Report, issued February 2024, the City’s Mayor wrote that “[i]n the past year, Obetz has continued to thrive,” and “has not only sustained its momentum but has accelerated its journey towards a prosperous future.”¹⁷ The Mayor’s optimistic view was echoed in the City’s Annual Comprehensive Financial Report For The Fiscal Year Ended [sic] December 31, 2023:

- “[T]he City has witnessed remarkable expansion, both residentially and commercially, over the last couple of decades. This growth is largely credited to several factors such as a business-supportive electorate, accommodating business regulations, a robust economic development squad, and an optimal location.”¹⁸
- “Obetz also boasts top-notch logistics and e-commerce centers, reasonably priced, high-quality housing, renowned public education, and a reputation as a regional frontrunner in job attraction and retention.”¹⁹
- “Obetz distinguishes itself among most Ohio cities by operating its own Water, Gas, Sewer (both Storm and Sanitary Sewer), and Electric utilities. The City leverages these resources to be competitive in attracting and retaining quality businesses.”²⁰

In the view of the City, there were several indicators that reflected positively on the City’s financial health as of the end of 2023:

¹⁷ 2023 Annual Report of the City of Obetz, p. 4, <https://obetz.oh.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2023-Annual-Report-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁸ CITY OF OBETZ, OHIO, ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2023, p. 6, https://ohioauditor.gov/auditsearch/Reports/2024/City_of_Obetz_2023_Franklin_FINAL.pdf

¹⁹ Id., p. 8.

- **Strategic Location:** “Its location near Interstate 270 and the Rickenbacker Inland Port, along with easy access to downtown Columbus and the John Glenn Columbus International Airport, makes it a prime location. ... The unemployment rate in Franklin County has consistently been lower than the unemployment rates for the State of Ohio”²¹
- **“[T]op-notch logistics and e-commerce center:”** “Obetz also boasts top-notch logistics and e-commerce centers, reasonably priced, high-quality housing, renowned public education, and a reputation as a regional frontrunner in job attraction and retention.”²²
- **A strong, varied and consistent nonresidential tax base:** “Obetz serves as a home to more than three hundred companies. The City Council understands the need to maintain a diverse tax base. Considering the City's dependence on income tax revenues, non-residential development plays a pivotal role in providing the services and facilities needed by its inhabitants and visitors. ... This tax base continues to stay relatively consistent, with withholding taxes in 2024 seeing a decrease of \$645,372 or 5.54% less than the previous year. Corporate net profit income tax receipts accounted for 10.09% of the total collected. The 2024 net profit tax receipts of \$1,260,938 resulted in an increase of \$290,086, or 29.88% from the prior year. ... Existing enterprises are a vital component of Obetz’ ongoing economic success. Notable public and private corporations such as Amazon (AMZN), Tech Data (TECD), Shiseido (SSDOF), United Parcel Service, Inc. (UPS), Art.com, Inc., Zenni Optical, Inc., and Luxottica Retail North America, Inc. (LUX) continue to form a solid foundation of the City's tax base. ... The City keeps up its competitiveness in drawing in new businesses while maintaining existing business patrons. Its economic base is varied, and no singular company holds sway over its tax base, resulting in a robust, well-rounded corporate atmosphere.”²³
- **Rickenbacker Inland Port:** “The Port is a global, multimodal logistics hub that offers an unparalleled location for distribution to consumers in the U.S. and Canada. Serving as the entrance for the Ohio Valley, Rickenbacker Inland Port houses a range of air, road, and rail transport companies, bolstered by an assortment of freight forwarders, consolidators, customs brokers, and third-party logistics providers.”²⁴
- **The Buckstone project.** “Buckstone remains a cornerstone of the City’s long-term development strategy, driving sustained economic growth and enhancing quality of life for current and future residents. ... As the residential and commercial development buildings are completed, the revenue captured through the City’s layered incentive plan will help fund the necessary infrastructure to realize Buckstone's complete vision. That layered incentive includes a New Community Authority (NCA), a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA), and two Tax Increment Finance Districts (TIFs). These financing structures are expected to conservatively generate over \$100 million over the next 30 years, further fueling our City's economic growth and will be complemented by the income taxes the project generates.”²⁵

As of early 2024, the City was “confident that its strategy for attracting and retaining suitable companies will foster sustained growth. Opportunities for commercial development in Obetz continue to expand, and our thriving economy is attracting a host of commercial and institutional investors.”²⁶ As its Financial Report issued February 2024 explained:

²¹ CITY OF OBETZ, OHIO, ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024, pp. 6,8,

https://ohioauditor.gov/AuditSearch/Reports/2026/City_of_Obetz_2024_Franklin_FINAL.pdf

²² Id.

²³ Id., pp. 6,7, 8.

²⁴ Id., 8.

²⁵ Id., pp. 8, 9.

²⁶ Id., p. 11.

The City remains vigilant regarding the activities of state and federal governments and their potential impact, positive or negative, on Obetz' local economy. Obetz is well-prepared to manage any such challenges, thanks to a substantial financial reserve and a robust economy—as demonstrated by Obetz' amazing resilience and financial performance during the pandemic.

The City is aware of the financial implications of anticipated future growth over the coming years. As the City succeeds in enhancing its stature as a regional employment hub, its current revenue structure will work to maintain service levels for both existing and new developments. Unlike many communities, Obetz expects that new growth will yield net revenue surpluses in the City's operating budget.²⁷

According to the City of Obetz, Ohio, Annual Comprehensive Financial Report For The Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2024:

The existing tax base, coupled with ongoing, forward-looking, development initiatives, should continue to fortify the City's future financial position.²⁸

However, going forward, the City faces economic challenges:

- **Legislative changes impacting income tax collections.** “[S]tate-level policy changes have created lasting financial strain for municipalities across Ohio. Cuts to the Local Government Fund, centralized income tax collection, and the rapid implementation of net operating loss (NOL) refunds have reduced local revenue and increased unpredictability. Proposals to cap or eliminate property taxes would further undermine municipal stability. For Obetz, where income tax provides over half of all General Fund revenue, these external pressures threaten long-term sustainability. Without new revenue tools or relief from state-imposed constraints, the City will face difficult trade-offs in service levels and infrastructure investment.”²⁹
- **Potential limits on income tax collections tied to limits on e-commerce expansion:** As acknowledged by the FOP's economic expert, the financial wellness is tied to the success of the City's corporate residents, who accounted for 88.12% of total income tax receipts in 2024.³⁰ Yet, “most developable land is now built out. With limited space remaining, future growth depends on increasing job density, redeveloping existing sites, and targeted annexation. Without new revenue or additional buildable land, income tax growth is expected to flatten. At the same time, core expenses, especially in public safety, wages, and infrastructure—continue to rise faster than revenue. Without action, costs are projected to outpace income within the decade.”³¹
- **Debt Incurred to Finance Commercial Expansion:** Over many years, Obetz has made strategic use of debt in pursuit of the goal of transforming itself from a small village into a major regional

²⁷ CITY OF OBETZ, OHIO, ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2023, p. 11,

https://ohioauditor.gov/auditsearch/Reports/2024/City_of_Obetz_2023_Franklin_FINAL.pdf

²⁸ CITY OF OBETZ, OHIO, ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024, p. 9,

https://ohioauditor.gov/AuditSearch/Reports/2026/City_of_Obetz_2024_Franklin_FINAL.pdf

²⁹ CITY OF OBETZ, OHIO, ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2024, p. 12.

https://ohioauditor.gov/AuditSearch/Reports/2026/City_of_Obetz_2024_Franklin_FINAL.pdf

³⁰ Steen Fact Finding Presentation PowerPoint, slide 21.

³¹ CITY OF OBETZ, OHIO, ANNUAL COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2023, p. 11.

https://ohioauditor.gov/auditsearch/Reports/2024/City_of_Obetz_2023_Franklin_FINAL.pdf

logistics and employment center, leveraging borrowed capital to build infrastructure and make utility improvements and land acquisition that would attract businesses and generate the tax revenues needed to service the debt. For the 2026-2030 time period, according to the 2020 Comprehensive Financial Report, it is obligated to pay principal and interest in the amount of \$3,580,975 arising from its General Obligation Bonds, \$1,845,105 arising from its TIF Revenue Bonds, \$11,315,135 arising from Income Tax Revenue Bonds, and \$49,192 arising from OPWC Loans. These amounts, in total, are \$3,052,865 more than the total of the corresponding amounts paid over the 2021-2025 time period. As the FOP's economic expert acknowledged, the City's 2020 bond rating of A+ indicates that the City has a "strong capacity to meet financial commitments, but ... is more vulnerable to economic changes than higher-rated entities."³²

THE OBETZ POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Police Department is charged with providing law enforcement and safety services within the City. The Department has a rank structure consisting of a Safety Director, Chief, Deputy Chief, Sergeants, Corporals, and Officers. The current collective bargaining agreement, the first between the City and the FOP following the conversion of Obetz from a village to a city, was effective for calendar years 2023, 2024, and 2025, and expired December 31, 2025.

The bargaining units represented by the FOP consist of (1) all sworn officers below the rank of Corporal and (2) all sworn officers of the rank of Corporal and Sergeant within the Police Department in the City of Obetz. There are currently nine (9) officers, three (3) Corporals and four (4) Sergeants within their respective bargaining units.

Over the 2017-2025 time period, the City expended the following amounts on its Police Department.

	Total	% inc	Police Pay & Benefits	% inc	Payroll Only	% inc
2017	\$2,219,688		\$1,973,933		\$1,207,704	
2018	\$2,345,194	5.7%	\$2,082,496	5.5%	\$1,270,252	5.2%
2019	\$2,581,562	10.1%	\$2,298,009	10.3%	\$1,384,912	9.0%
2020	\$2,497,932	-3.2%	\$2,297,379	0.0%	\$1,443,219	4.2%
2021	\$2,717,783	8.8%	\$2,444,328	6.4%	\$1,443,492	0.0%
2022	\$3,044,633	12.0%	\$2,791,458	14.2%	\$1,710,562	18.5%
2023	\$3,143,344	3.2%	\$2,807,199	0.6%	\$1,682,393	-1.6%
2024	\$3,425,726	9.0%	\$2,983,235	6.3%	\$1,741,377	3.5%
2025	\$3,802,109	11.0%	\$3,058,808	2.5%	\$1,782,317	2.4%

Looking at the percentage increases in Police Department spending during the 2023-2025 period relative to 2022 (the time frame of the first collective bargaining agreement), compare to the percentage increases during the 2020-2022 period relative to 2019, the results are as follows:

Police Dept. Spending	Total	Police Pay & Benefits	Payroll Only
2022 versus 2019	17.9%	21.5%	23.5%

³² Steen Fact Finding Presentation PowerPoint, slide 29.

2025 versus 2022	24.9%	9.6%	4.2%
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These figures show that while the City’s spending on the Police Department as a whole increased over the time period of the collective bargaining agreement by a larger percentage than the increase over the prior three years, the increase in Police Pay & Benefits and in Payroll only increased by a substantially lower amount over the last three years compare the three prior years.

FACT-FINDING CRITERIA

In fact-finding proceedings, Ohio Revised Code Section 4117.14(C)(4)(e) establishes the criteria to be considered by fact-finders. The criteria are:

- (1) Past collectively bargained agreements, if any, between the parties;
- (2) Comparison of the unresolved issues relative to the employees in the bargaining unit with those issues related to other public and private employees doing comparable work, giving consideration to factors peculiar to the area and classification involved;
- (3) The interest and welfare of the public, the ability of the public employer to finance and administer the issues proposed, and the effect of the adjustments on the normal standard of public service;
- (4) The lawful authority of the public employer;
- (5) Any stipulations of the parties;
- (6) Such other factors, not confined to those listed above, which are normally or traditionally taken into consideration in the determination of issues submitted to mutually agreed-upon dispute settlement procedures in the public service or in private employment.

These criteria have not been prioritized by the legislature and therefore have been followed by the Fact-Finder in the aggregate in rendering the recommendations in this report. I have also followed The Fact O.A.C. Rule 4117-9-05(J), which requires in making findings of fact, I shall take into consideration all reliable information relevant to the issues before me.

BARGAINING HISTORY

As to bargaining history, the FOP stated:

The parties engaged in bargaining sessions on April 16, August 13, November 12, and December 2, 2025.

From the outset the FOP asserted that bargaining unit members deserved a very substantial wage increase. The City’s only wage offer has been a one-year contract extension with a three percent (3%) wage increase for 2026. Ultimately the FOP

proposed the same wage increase which is being offered by the FOP in this fact finding. That proposal has been rejected by the City.³³

From the perspective of the City:

Discussions during bargaining were somewhat limited. Although the parties “generally” discussed wages, Obetz did not receive a formalized wage proposal in writing from the FOP until January 5, 2026. More specifically, though, the parties met to bargain on April 16, 2025; June 5, 2025; August 13, 2025; November 13, 2025; and December 1, 2025.³⁴
...

When discussing wages, the City communicated its wage position of a 3% increase across-the-board at the table. The Union acknowledged the City’s position [but] it ended the bargaining sessions without presenting a wage counterproposal.

In June 2025, after the City advised the FOP it would pursue a police levy, the Union chose to defer further discussions until the levy outcome was known. Following the levy’s defeat by a substantial amount, the parties reconvened on November 13, 2025 [but] no wage proposal was offered at the table by the Union for the City’s consideration. The Union did not transmit its first wage proposal until ... December 1, 2025, and it transmitted a revised proposal on January 5, 2026³⁵

According to the FOP, “The parties have agreed to maintain current contract language for all sections of the Contract with the exception of Section 15.1 – Wages.”³⁶

Although the parties have not signed tentative agreements, their presentations were confined exclusively to the compensation and time-off terms of their collective bargaining agreement, so my recommendations are confined to those terms. Although it appears that the parties are prepared to continue without change all terms of the contract other than those pertaining to compensation and time off, the parties have NOT agreed to an “EXTENSION AGREEMENT AND LIMITED WAIVER OF APPLICATION OF R.C. 4117.14(G)(11).”

THE COMPENSATION AND LEAVE TERMS OF THE PARTIES’ EXPIRED COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT

The City asserts that its first collective bargaining agreement with the FOP was deliberately structured to be a highly distinctive and “unique” “total-compensation and lifestyle package in which wages, hours, and time-off are interdependent.”³⁷ From the point of view of the City:

[A]ny material wage adjustment should be considered in conjunction with other economic benefits in the expired agreement. A Recommendation that materially increases wages, while leaving intact the expired collective bargaining agreement’s atypical reduced work-time and days-off structure would create an unsustainable total-compensation package. Accordingly, if the Factfinder concludes that significant wage movement is warranted, the City submits that the appropriate and administrable path is a

³³ FOP Fact Finding Prehearing Statement, pp. 2, 3-4.

³⁴ 1.9.26 Obetz Factfinding Position Statement, p. 2.

³⁵ 1.9.26 Obetz Factfinding Position Statement, p. 3.

³⁶ FOP Fact Finding Prehearing Statement, p. 3.

³⁷ 1.9.26 Obetz Factfinding Position Statement, p. 2.

comprehensive, contemporaneous rebalancing of the related scheduling, wellness time, and leave provisions -- not a wage-only adjustment layered onto the existing lifestyle framework.³⁸

The City has some valid grounds to characterize its first collective bargaining agreement with the FOP as “unique.” That agreement stands out, among the jurisdictions offered by both the FOP and the City for purpose of making comparisons, in the amount of time off it made available to police officers over the course of the year.

I find merit in the City’s contention that “[t]he most important structural feature of that agreement between Obetz and the FOP is a three-day, 36-hour workweek, with officers meeting the balance of a 40-hour framework through four hours per week of Physical or Mental wellness time (“PM time”).”³⁹ By far, the most substantial contributor to the comparatively high amount of time off available to City police officers is their 12-hour workdays, and neither party indicated a desired to make a change to the length of the workday.

Comparing the City’s 12-hour police officer shifts to the 8-hour shifts used in every jurisdiction offered by the parties as potentially comparable yields the following results:

- Over the course of a year, 12-hour shifts require about a third fewer workdays for each police officer compared to 8-hour shifts.

To work 2080 hours in a year in 8-hour shifts requires 260 work days, while working 2080 hours in a year in 12-hour shifts requires no more than 173 1/3 work days (156 work days for Obetz police officers due to “PM Time”). Thus, without regard to vacation time off or other forms of paid time off, City police officers, by incurring the physical and mental burden of working 50% more time each work day, work at least 86 2/3 less days a year than their counterparts in jurisdictions in which police officers work an 8-hour shift.

- 12-hour shift scheduling saves officers preparation time, commuting time, and commuting costs, over the course of a year, due to working less days.
- Since officers complete their full-time work in a compressed work schedule, they have more days off to spend recreationally or with their families.⁴⁰

The time off provided to Obetz police officers via their 12-hour shift schedule is augmented by the weekly 4 hours of paid “PM time,” and, for officers with 10 years seniority, 20 days yearly of paid vacation time. Overall, and not including the comparatively generous rate at which officers accrue the entitlement to paid sick leave (higher than any jurisdictions offered by the parties as potential comparators), a 10-year Obetz police officer works as few as 136 days a year, at least 96 work days less than 10 year police officers in any jurisdiction offered by the parties as a potential comparator.

³⁸ 1.9.26 Obetz Factfinding Position Statement, pp. 2-3.

³⁹ 1.9.26 Obetz Factfinding Position Statement, p. 4.

⁴⁰ The City also benefits from a 12-hour work shift. Twelve-hour shifts cover a full day with 1/3rd fewer handoffs and overlap, making deployment simpler, and reducing the likelihood of overtime costs arising from shift transitions, or incidents that extend beyond the end of a particular shift. Since officers have more days off per year, there is less likelihood of overtime arising from officers contracting illnesses or minor injury.

Even at the work hour level, which puts to the side the impact of working a 12 hour workday compared to an 8 hour workday, a 10-year Obetz police officer, due to vacation time and other paid time off, works as few as 1632 hours a year, at least 220 work hours less than 10-year police officers in any jurisdiction offered by the parties as a potential comparator.

The City is also correct that its police officers obtain additional compensation and benefits beyond base salary, that must be taken into account. Obetz top level base salary for police officers ranks next to last when compared to the top-level base salaries of police officers in the 12 other jurisdictions with 2020 populations below 15000 that were offered by the parties as potential comparators. But, once other compensation sources – e.g., holiday pay and personal time off pay -- are taken into account (and ignoring cash out opportunities for the moment), the amount paid by the City for actual hours worked (taking into account the City’s top rank in the number of days off that police officer get) ranks it 9th, with most of the jurisdictions that rank higher than Obetz having substantially larger annual General Fund Revenue to work with.

In addition, the City offers other significant monetary and non-monetary benefits that are highly competitive with other jurisdictions offered by the parties as potential comparators:

- Vacation time that is ranked first among all jurisdictions offered as comparators other than the City of Columbus, enhanced by vacation accrual with five-year carryover
- Personal time off that is ranked first (although tied with some other jurisdictions)
- Yearly sick leave accrual that is ranked first
- 155-hour sick and vacation leave conversion
- Very competitive health care benefits

Thus, under its first collective bargaining agreement with Obetz, by mutual agreement, and without the need for fact finding (other than as to a single non-economic issue), Obetz police gained the benefit of working substantially less days a year in regular work assignments than any other jurisdiction being compared, along with other significant fringe benefits. In turn, Obetz gained the scheduling and cost benefits arising from 12-hour workdays, and from the comparatively low base salary it pays its police personnel.

FACT-FINDER RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposals of the parties, their respective rationales for their proposals, and my analysis and recommendations, are set forth below. Any added language in a proposal is denoted by bold italics, and any deleted language by double strikethrough.

1. Article 15, Section 15.1 – Wages

a. FOP Proposals

Modify Section 15.1 to provide for the following wage increases:

Year 1 – Commencing January 1, 2026

For Officers below the rank of Corporal: \$5,000.00 equity increase plus seven percent (7%), retroactive to January 1, 2026.

For Corporals and Sergeant: seven percent (7%), retroactive to January 1, 2026.

Year 2 – Commencing January 1, 2027

For all bargaining unit members: seven percent (7%);

Year 3 – Commencing January 1, 2028

For all bargaining unit members: seven percent (7%).

b. City Proposal(s):

The City offers a 3% increase for all bargaining unit members for 2026; 2.5% for 2027; and 2.0% for 2028.

c. Analysis and Recommendation

i. Ability to pay

The City and the FOP present sharply different views as to the economic health of the City. The City does not assert an inability to pay, but both sides present a view the economic health of the City that bears on the reasonableness of their competing contractual proposals.

(1) The FOP point of view

The FOP asserts in its pre-hearing submission, “Obetz is a growing, thriving municipality which is very well off financially. ... [T]he City is in a very good financial position with more than sufficient funds to accommodate this increase.”⁴¹

At the hearing, the FOP presented testimony and supporting materials of Wade Steen in support of its contention that the City’s financial condition would not be adversely affected by implementing the wage increased proposed by the FOP. Mr. Steen presented evidence that:

- Over the 2020-2024 time period, the City’s General Fund has shown healthy growth in assets, the General Fund Balance, and the Asset to Liability Ratio, as follows:

Date	Total GF Assets	Cash and Investments	Total GF Liabilities	Asset to Liability Ratio	General Fund balance
12/31/2024	\$15,516,156	\$11,424,823	\$3,428,000	4.53	\$12,088,156
12/31/2023	\$15,575,191	\$11,561,072	\$4,396,579	3.54	\$11,178,612
12/31/2022	\$16,494,094	\$12,838,379	\$4,109,646	4.01	\$12,384,448
12/31/2021	\$14,211,301	\$10,453,337	\$5,885,032	2.41	\$8,326,269
12/31/2020	\$11,954,291	\$7,424,778	\$2,795,315	4.28	\$9,158,976

- Though not as high as it was at the end of 2020 and at the end of 2022, the City’s General Fund balance, as a percentage of expenditures, was still at a healthy level of 67% at the end of 2023 and at the end of 2024.
- General Fund Revenues in 2024 were over \$4 million higher than in 2020, and over \$2 million higher than in 2023.
- General Fund Expenditures in the first two years of the parties 2023-2025 collective bargaining agreement increased substantially each year, to a level in 2024 that was nearing \$4 million higher than in 2022.

⁴¹ FOP Fact Finding Prehearing Statement, pp. 5, 6.

Although Mr. Steen considered the overall financial health of the City to be good, he acknowledged several challenges facing the City moving forward, which he characterized as follows:

- “Concentrated tax base – the top five taxpayers (primarily in distribution, warehousing, and logistics) account for more than 35% of revenue collections.
- Tax base is strong but still growing suggesting potential volatility.
- Direct debt has grown significantly.
- Maintaining stable reserve levels due to population loss or reduced economic activity.”⁴²

As the FOP’s economic consultant acknowledged in his presentation, these circumstances all dictate that Obetz maintain stable reserve levels to address the risk of population loss or reduced economic activity.⁴³

(2) The City’s point of view

As is to be expected, the City has, in recent years, publicly portrayed the City as economically vibrant and growing. In its 2023 Annual Report, issued February 2024, the City’s Mayor wrote that “[i]n the past year, Obetz has continued to thrive,” and “has not only sustained its momentum but has accelerated its journey towards a prosperous future.”⁴⁴ Here, two years later, the City asserts, “The City maintains a sound, but weakening, financial position and currently could finance reasonable wage increases consistent with fiscal responsibility. Without question, as explained above, and as acknowledged by the FOP’s economic consultant, the City’s financial position going forward, while healthy at the moment, is not without risks that require continued prudent financial management

(3) Ability to Pay -- Analysis

As stated by Conciliator Novak, “[t]here is a significant statutory difference between ‘inability’ to pay and ‘unwillingness’ to do so. Put simply, the former involves not having the financial resources to pay or fund various cost increases while the latter means the party has resources but would rather not spend them.” The City has not asserted inability to pay. The City is financially healthy and stable, due to its “commitment to responsible management,” even as, in common with other municipalities in Ohio, it faces risks of legislation that would have an adverse impact on its revenue sources, the impact of inflation and/or declining interest rates, and potential volatility in its primary revenue source, income taxes. As stated in the City of Obetz, Ohio, Annual Comprehensive Financial Report For The Fiscal Year Ended December 31, 2024, p 12, “With sound planning, targeted investment, and disciplined leadership, the City can remain a resilient and vibrant community in the heart of Central Ohio.”

The Fact-Finder’s task is to apply the statutory criteria to the facts and data. One of those criteria is ability of the employer to finance proposals. Since the City does not aver inability, at issue are reasonable adjustments to the current Agreement between the parties consistent with the other established guidelines I am to follow. These include “[t]he interest and welfare of the public ... and the effect of the adjustments on the normal standard of public service.”

ii. Comparability and Reasonableness

According to the FOP:

⁴² Steen Fact Finding Presentation PowerPoint, slide 30.

⁴³ Steen Fact Finding Presentation PowerPoint, slide 30.

⁴⁴ 2023 Annual Report of the City of Obetz, p. 4, <https://obetz.oh.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2023-Annual-Report-FINAL.pdf>

- “The current wage rate is abysmal when compared to comparable police departments, or, more accurately, in comparison to any and all police departments whose members are represented by FOP, Capital City Lodge No. 9 in Franklin County. The City of Obetz is currently ranked at the very bottom of base wages for city and township police departments in the Franklin County and Columbus metropolitan area. Indeed, it’s wage rate ranks far below the next highest ranking municipality.”⁴⁵
- “The FOP’s year one proposal of \$5,000 plus 7% would bring the 2026 top step officer rate to \$84,314. That will still leave Obetz at the bottom of the wage rankings of all Franklin County departments. However, it is at least a step in the direction of achieving a base wage that is closer to the lowest ranking departments above them. Without such an increase Obetz officers will continue to fall even further behind all other police officers in the County.”⁴⁶
- “The reason for the proposed \$5,000 equity adjustment for the police officers only is that the current police officer annual wage of \$73,798 is even farther below other area police departments than Obetz’s corporals and sergeants. Moreover, Obetz corporals currently have a base wage that is approximately twenty-five percent (25%) higher than the officers base wage. Comparable police departments typically have a gap of 10%-15% between the base wage of police officers and the next highest rank. The \$5,000 equity adjustment plus 7% for police officers would reduce the gap between officers and corporals from 25% to 17%.”⁴⁷
- “[G]iven that the rate of inflation over the three year term of the current contract totaled approximately 9%, the FOP proposal is certainly further justified.”⁴⁸

The Union concludes, “The time is now to improve the wages and leave benefits of the Independence Firefighters. The City has the clear financial ability to do so, and the comparative pay and leave of professional firefighters throughout Cuyahoga County warrants recommendation of the Union’s proposals.”⁴⁹

The City counters:

- “When comparing Obetz compensation to comparable jurisdictions, it is essential to consider total compensation value, not merely hourly or annual wage rates in isolation. The submission of a “top-step wage rankings” chart, like the one above ... would be a fundamentally misleading exhibit because it reduces the statutory fact-finding criteria to a base-wage leaderboard, not the entirety of the compensation received by employees, as well as, other non-wage benefits, such as time off. As will be discussed more fully below and at the Fact-finding hearing, the collective bargaining agreement between Obetz and the FOP is “rich” with additional compensation and other non-wage benefits.”⁵⁰
- The City’s offer outpaces the 2.7%, 2.2%, and 2.2% CBO cost of living projections for the same years

Analysis:

The City and the FOP have very different perspectives on the reasonableness and fairness of the City’s current compensation and benefits package reflected in its expired collective bargaining agreement with

⁴⁵ FOP Fact Finding Prehearing Statement, p. 4.

⁴⁶ FOP Fact Finding Prehearing Statement, p. 5.

⁴⁷ FOP Fact Finding Prehearing Statement, p. 5.

⁴⁸ FOP Fact Finding Prehearing Statement, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Independence IAFF Fact-Finding Stmt (24-MED-10-1319), p. 21.

⁵⁰ 1.9.26 Obetz Factfinding Position Statement, p. 6.

the FOP. In support of its compensation proposals, each side relies heavily on comparative data – to what it views as the relevant comparisons to police compensation and benefits in other jurisdictions.

The City contends that the most appropriate jurisdictions to compare to Obetz are Sunbury (in Delaware County), Granville and Johnstown (both in Licking County). These three jurisdictions, like Obetz, were recognized as cities in 2020 because of the federal decennial census, and have populations less than 7,500. According to the City, “Obetz’s size and ‘age’ are both distinctive and special characteristics that distinguish it from other Franklin County cities such as: Columbus, Dublin, Westerville, Worthington, New Albany, Gahanna, Reynoldsburg, and Bexley, as a non-exhaustive listing of examples.”⁵¹

The City also includes Granville, a city that obtained city status after the 2010 census, within the following table that the City submitted:

2025 Top Step Patrol (By Wage)⁵²

Rank	City	Population 2020 Census	County	City Status		Current K ends:
1	Groveport	6,009	Franklin	2010	\$108,401	6/30/2027
2	Sunbury	6,614	Delaware	2020	\$79,477	12/31/2025
3	Granville	5,946	Licking	2010	\$77,605	12/31/2028
4	<i>Obetz</i>	5,489	<i>Franklin</i>	2020	\$73,798	12/31/2025
5	Johnstown	5,182	Licking	2020	\$70,200	12/31/2025

In the view of the City:

“[T]he question presented in this dispute is not whether Obetz can simply replicate the cash wage outcomes of larger, richer cities with significantly more mature collective bargaining agreements, but whether the parties’ deliberately negotiated compensation design remains reasonable and competitive when evaluated as a total package and normalized to the work-time actually required. “When compensation design and total compensation package received by bargaining unit employees in Obetz is compared to other ‘similarly-sized’ and ‘similarly-aged’ jurisdictions in the area, it is apparent its wage proposal is more appropriate.”⁵³

According to the FOP, the most comparable jurisdictions are those it represents in Franklin County. The FOP asserts, accurately, that “[t]he City of Obetz is currently ranked at the very bottom of base wages for city and township police departments in the Franklin County and Columbus metropolitan area.⁵⁴ The FOP point, in particular, to Groveport and Perry Township:

- “The City of Groveport is a city with a population the same or somewhat less than Obetz. Groveport and Obetz share a boundary, and their departments sometimes interact with each other in the performance of their duties. Groveport’s top step officers had an annual salary of \$108,401

⁵¹ 1.9.26 Obetz Factfinding Position Statement, pp. 5-6.

⁵² 1.9.26 Obetz Factfinding Position Statement, p. 6.

⁵³ 1.9.26 Obetz Factfinding Position Statement, p. 4.

⁵⁴ FOP Fact Finding Prehearing Statement, p. 4.

in 2025. Groveport’s 3% pension pick up brought their annual income to \$111,653. That is \$34,603 annually more than Obetz officers, and \$37,855 more when the pension pick up is factored in.”

- “Perry Township, with a population of significantly less than Obetz, had a base wage for top step officers of \$91,624 in 2025. That is \$18,075 more than Obetz officers.”

State-Wide, Columbus Area and State-Wide Police Unit Wage Increase Trends:

Looking the 2015-2024 trend in average negotiated wage increase percentages over the entire duration of the contract⁵⁵:

Average Negotiated Wage Increase Percentage (%) Over The Entire Duration of The Contract										
Comparison Group	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Statewide	2.02%	2.18%	2.20%	2.31%	2.31%	2.26%	2.33%	2.79%	3.24%	3.42%
Region										
(4) Columbus	2.19%	2.30%	2.19%	2.63%	2.60%	2.49%	2.65%	2.97%	3.43%	3.66%
Unit Type										
Police (Safety/Security)	2.22%	2.36%	2.20%	2.50%	2.51%	2.44%	2.51%	3.04%	3.50%	3.76%

Looking at the cumulative 2023-2024 percentage wage increases, compared to Obetz, yields:

	2023	2024	Cumulative % Inc.	Inc. applied to Obetz 2022 top officer salary	Diff. vs Obetz
Statewide	3.24%	3.42%	6.77%	\$72,109	\$460
Columbus	3.43%	3.66%	7.22%	\$72,409	\$760
Police	3.50%	3.76%	7.39%	\$72,528	\$879
Obetz	3.00%	3.00%	6.09%	\$71,649	
Obetz top officer salary 2022:			\$67,536		

As a frame of reference, the following are the inflation rates for the same years:

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
0.1	1.3	2.1	2.4	1.8	1.2	4.7	8	4.1	2.9

⁵⁵ SERB 2024 Wage Settlement Report, p. 5. https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/serb.ohio.gov/PDF/Wage_Settlement/Wage_Settlement_2024.pdf. This percentage includes all the percent wage increases that went into effect during the contract duration, including years one, two, and three (if available). If a wage reopener, lump sum, or hourly increase is mentioned in the labor contract, those are excluded from this table.

The above data suggests that the City’s link of its proposals to estimates of cost-of-living increases over the 2026-2028 time period is not justified by the data on 2015-2024 wage increases cost of living increases. Indeed, the above evidence, as well as evidence on the percentage increases in Police Officer contracts already in place covering the 2026-2028 time period, suggests that unions obtain higher percentage wage increases to make up in part for past cost-of-living increases, rather than to anticipate future cost of living increases. This is shown by the significant increase in percentage increase levels for 2023 and 2024 shown above that followed the 8% cost of living increase in 2022, compared to 2021 and 2022 percentage wage increase levels. It is also shown by the wage percentage increases in 2020 compared to 2021 that followed the 4.7% cost of living increase in 2021.⁵⁶

With this data in mind, the following is data on the yearly percentage wage increases for police officers in some (if not all) the Ohio jurisdictions that have in place contracts with police officers covering 2026-2028:

	2026	2027	2028
Struthers	3.50%	3.50%	3.50%
Portsmouth	5.00%	3.00%	3.00%
Poland Township	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
Oxford City	5.00%	4.00%	4.00%
Ontario City	4.00%	4.00%	4.00%
Lawrence Township	3.00%	3.00%	4.00%
City of Lakewood	2600 then 3%	3.00%	4.00%
Green Township*	4.00%	4.00%	4.00%
Grandview Heights	\$500 then 5%	3.75%	3.75%
Forest Park City	5.50%	4.75%	4.50%
Blendon Township	\$10000 then 3%	3.00%	3.00%
Bazetta Township	4.50%	4.00%	4.00%
City of Deer Park	4.00%	4.00%	4.00%
City of Blue Ash	5.00%	4.00%	3.00%
City of Toronto	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%
City of Oakwood	3.75%	3.75%	3.75%

- Market adjustments of \$.32 in 2026, \$.33 in 2027, and \$.35 in 2028 will be effective on January 1 of each year.

The following sets forth the trends over 2023-2025 in average negotiated wage increases for contracts entered into in 2023, state-wide, in the Columbus area, and in police contracts state-wide:

⁵⁶ See Michael Shields, “State of Working Ohio 2022,” September 5, 2022 (“In the four decades ending in 2019, wages comprised 61.8% of inflation, as workers successfully bargained to recapture much of the cost of inflation in their pay.) <https://policymattersohio.org/research/state-of-working-ohio-2022/#:~:text=Unlike%20past%20periods%20of%20inflation,Corporate%20profits%20comprised%20just%2011.4%25.>

Average Negotiated Wage Increase Percentage (%) By Calendar Year						
Comparison Group	2023		2024		2025	
	Average	#	Average	#	Average	#
Statewide	3.75 %	669	3.09%	763	2.93%	698
Region						
(1) Akron/Canton	3.85%	106	3.05%	125	2.89%	115
(4) Columbus	3.66%	99	3.33%	120	3.33%	109
Unit Type						
Police (Safety/Security)	4.29%	202	3.29%	248	3.07%	243

Looking at the cumulative 2023-2025 increases, compared to Obetz, yields:

	2023	2024	2025	Cumulative % Inc.	Inc. applied to Obetz 2022 top officer salary	Diff. vs Obetz
statewide	3.75%	3.09%	2.93%	10.09%	\$74,350	\$552
Columbus	3.66%	3.33%	3.33%	10.68%	\$74,748	\$950
Police	4.29%	3.29%	3.07%	11.03%	\$74,984	\$1,186
Obetz	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	9.27%	\$73,798	
Obetz top officer salary 2022: \$67,536						

The following sets forth the trends over 2024-2026 in average negotiated wage increases for contracts entered into in 2024, state-wide, in the Columbus area, and in police contracts state-wide⁵⁷:

Average Negotiated Wage Increase Percentage (%) By Calendar Year						
Comparison Group	2024		2025		2026	
	Average	#	Average	#	Average	#
Statewide	3.86 %	758	3.24%	818	3.19%	778
Region						
(4) Columbus	4.10%	111	3.43%	122	3.49%	124

⁵⁷ SERB 2024 Wage Settlement Report, p. 2.

https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/serb.ohio.gov/PDF/Wage_Settlement/Wage_Settlement_2024.pdf. The table displays the average wage increase percentage negotiated in labor contracts that went into effect in the calendar year 2024. The wage increases were grouped by effective date and filtered by each comparison group below. If a wage reopener, lump sum, or hourly increase is mentioned in the labor contract, those are excluded from this table.

Unit Type				
Police (Safety/Security)	4.35%	192	3.55%	210
			3.45%	218

Looking at the cumulative 2024-2026 increases, compared to Obetz using the Obetz 3% offer for 2026, yields

	2024	2025	2026	Cumulative % Inc.	Inc. applied to Obetz 2023 top officer salary	Diff. vs Obetz
statewide	3.75%	3.09%	2.93%	10.09%	\$76,581	\$568
Columbus	3.66%	3.33%	3.33%	10.68%	\$76,990	\$978
Police	4.29%	3.29%	3.07%	11.03%	\$77,234	\$1,221
Obetz	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	9.27%	\$76,012	
Obetz top officer salary 2023:				\$69,562		

2025 -- Comparison of Obetz to other jurisdictions put forward as potential comparators by the parties which have 2020 populations less than 15,000

The following compares Obetz to the jurisdictions put forward as potential comparators by the parties which have 2020 populations less than 15,000:

2025 WAGE RANKINGS-POLICE OFFICER (TOP SET)

Department	Officers	Pop'n 2020	GF Revenue LYR	Max Base Hourly Rate	Max HR Rank	Max Total Annual Salary	Max TAS Rank	52 Wk Total Days Off	Min Wk Days in 52 Wks	Min Wk Days in 52 Wks Rank	Min Work Hrs in 52 Wks	Min Work Hrs in 52 Wks Rank	Total Pay/wk hr	TNPH Rank
Bexley	33	13,928	\$25,209,433	\$55.14	2	\$120,695	2	23	237	3	1896	3	\$63.66	1
Worthington [2]	33	14,786	\$40,639,452	\$55.51	1	\$122,876	1	18.5	242	7	1932	8	\$63.60	2
Grandview	22	8,085	\$25,598,850	\$53.99	3	\$118,003	3	20.25	240	6	1918	6	\$61.52	3
New Albany	33	10,825	\$54,164,398	\$53.98	4	\$117,035	4	22	238	5	1904	5	\$61.47	4
Groveport	26	6,009	\$25,692,589	\$51.11	5	\$114,004	5	17	243	8	1944	8	\$58.64	5
Perry Township	16	3,929	Not available	\$44.17	7	\$104,964	6	25.15	235	2	1879	2	\$55.87	6
Blendon	14	10,152	Not available	\$44.37	6	\$97,202	7	23	237	4	1896	4	\$51.27	7
Obetz	18	5,489	\$17,375,014	\$35.48	11	\$82,103	10	37	136	1	1632	1	\$50.31	8
Clinton T'nship	16	4,499	\$7,917,426	\$42.76	8	\$92,709	8	15	245	10	1960	10	\$47.30	9
Sunbury	15	6,614	\$6,759,814	\$38.21	9	\$84,338	9	16	249	11	1995	11	\$42.28	10
Granville	22	5,946	\$6,028,983	\$37.31	10	\$80,888	11	16	249	12	1995	12	\$40.55	11

Johnstown	11	5,182	\$4,280,976	\$33.75	12	\$74,190	12	23	245	9	1957	9	\$37.90	12
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As the FOP correctly asserts, the Obetz maximum base hourly rate for police officers in 2025 was the lowest of all the jurisdictions in Franklin County and was the second lowest among all jurisdictions offered by the parties as potential comparators, with only Johnstown having a lower rate. Even when all sources of monetary compensation are considered – longevity pay, holiday pay, and pension pick-up – Obetz ranks 10th, higher only than Granville and Johnstown among the jurisdictions offered as potential comparators with 2020 populations of less than 15000.

The result is that in 2025, the base hourly wage cost to the Obetz of each hour of work by a top-ranked police officer ranked the City 8th compared to the 11 other jurisdictions submitted as comparators with 2020 populations of less than 15000. The four jurisdictions having lower base hourly wage costs (Clinton Township, Sunbury, Granville and Johnstown) all had General Fund Revenue in 2025 of less than half that of Obetz (and, as to Sunbury, Granville and Johnstown, less than 40% of the General Fund Revenue of Obetz). Groveport, also cited by the City, incurred a base hourly wage cost in 2025 of \$58.64, which is \$8.33 or 16.6% higher than that of Obetz.

When the focus turns from compensation to hours worked, after taking into account all the hours of paid time off to which Obetz police officers are entitled -- physical and mental wellness time (called the “PM Time”), vacation time, personal time and base physical test time -- Obetz police officers work the least number of regularly assigned work days of any jurisdiction being compared, by a huge margin – 136 days minimum, with the next lowest a full 99 days more. The largest contributor to this statistic is the fact that Obetz is the only jurisdiction among those being compared where police officers work a 12-hour shift. However, Obetz also stands alone in using a 36-hour work week. Moreover, even ignoring the weekly 4 hours less that Obetz police officers work each week before consideration of others source of paid time off, Obetz still ranks 6th of 12 in paid days off arising from vacation days, personal days and the physical test day.

Nothing presented to me suggests that time off can be translated into salary for purposes of comparing Obetz salaries to salaries of other jurisdictions, at least when the differences are as large as they are between Obetz and other jurisdictions. The extensive time off that Obetz police officers are entitled to under the expired collective bargaining agreement, which neither side seeks to adjust, is an independent benefit of the parties’ expired collective bargaining agreement, distinct from monetary compensation, that, at least at the time the parties entered into that agreement, the FOP found of significant value.

Although it may be that the FOP no longer values as highly the extensive amounts of time off it obtained in the 2023-2025 contract, it has not proposed any trade-off of reducing time off in exchange for higher compensation. In negotiations three years ago, the City could have offered a 12-hour work day, using two-week work periods within which it could have proposed to schedule officers 84 hours without incurring an overtime obligation. Instead, Obetz officers work 72 hours every two weeks.

There are very few jurisdictions in Ohio where police work a 12-hour schedule, but the following reviews data from some (if not all) the jurisdictions that do:

Jurisdiction	2024 % Inc.	2025 % Inc.	2026 % Inc.	2027 % Inc.	2025 Top Level Office Wage	Holidays	Vacation hrs at 10 years	Work Schedule	OT
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City of Obetz	3.00%	3.00%			\$73,798	17	180	36 hours per week	Over 40 hours per week
City of Beavercreek	-	5.00%	4.75%	4.50%	\$98,800	11	120	84 hours in two weeks	Over 80 hours in 2 weeks
City of Mentor	4.00%	3.00%			\$98,283	12	160	84 hours in two weeks	over 40 hours in a week
Mentor-on-the-Lake	\$2 then 4%	4.00%	4.00%		\$80,080	14	120	84 hours in two weeks	Over 84 hours in 2 weeks
Colerain Township	-	5.00%	5.00%		\$90,563	11	120	6-wk schedule averaging 80 hours per 2 weeks	Over 171 hours in 28 days

2026 -- Comparison of Obetz to other jurisdictions put forward as potential comparators by the parties which have 2020 populations less than 15,000, using City 3% offer

Department	Officers	Pop'n 2020	2025 GF Revenue LYR	2026 Max Base Wage	2026 % inc.	2026 Max Hourly Rate	HR Rank	2026 Total Annual Salary	TA Rank	Min Wk Days in 52 Weeks	Min Work Hrs in 52 Weeks	Min Work Hrs in 52 Weeks Rank	Total Pay/wk hr	NPH Rank
Bexley	33	13,928	\$25,209,433	\$119,281	4.00%	\$57.35	1	\$125,477	2	237	1896	3	\$66.18	1
Worthington [2]	33	14,786	\$40,639,452	\$118,923	3.00%	\$57.17	2	\$126,526	1	242	1932	8	\$65.49	2
Grandview	22	8,085	\$25,598,850	\$118,441	5.50%	\$56.94	3	\$124,402	3	240	1918	7	\$64.86	3
New Albany	33	10,825	\$54,164,398	\$115,934	3.25%	\$55.74	4	\$120,839	4	238	1904	6	\$63.47	4
Groveport	26	6,009	\$25,692,589	\$110,569	4.00%	\$53.16	5	\$118,564	5	243	1944	9	\$60.99	5
Blendon	14	10,152		\$105,366	14.20%	\$50.66	6	\$110,824	6	237	1896	4	\$58.45	6
Perry Township	16	3,929		\$95,089	3.50%	\$45.72	7	\$108,621	7	235	1879	2	\$57.81	7
Obetz	18	5,489	\$17,375,014	\$76,012	3.00%	\$36.54	11	\$84,534	10	136	1632	1	\$51.80	8
Clinton Township	16	4,499	\$7,917,426	\$91,614	3.00%	\$44.05	8	\$95,490	8	245	1960	12	\$48.72	9
Sunbury	15	6,614	\$6,759,814	\$84,053	5.80%	\$40.41	9	\$89,134	9	244	1952	10	\$45.66	10
Granville	22	5,946	\$6,028,983	\$79,933	3.00%	\$38.43	10	\$83,315	11	244	1952	11	\$42.68	11
Johnstown	11	5,182	\$4,280,976	\$75,114	7.00%	\$36.11	12	\$79,331	12	237	1896	5	\$41.84	12

2026 -- Comparison of Obetz to other jurisdictions put forward as potential comparators by the parties which have 2020 populations less than 15,000, using FOP \$5000 then 7 3% offer

Department	Officers	Pop'n 2020	2025 GF Revenue LYR	2026 Max Base Wage	2026 % inc.	Max Hourly Rate	HR Rank	Total Annual Salary	TA Rank	Min Wk Days in 52 Weeks	Min Work Hrs in 52 Weeks	Min Work Hrs in 52 Weeks Rank	Total Pay/wk hr	NPH Rank
Bexley	33	13,928	\$25,209,433	\$119,281	4.00%	\$57.35	1	\$125,477	2	237	1896	3	\$66.18	1
Worthington [2]	33	14,786	\$40,639,452	\$118,923	3.00%	\$57.17	2	\$126,526	1	242	1932	8	\$65.49	2
Grandview	22	8,085	\$25,598,850	\$118,441	5.50%	\$56.94	3	\$124,402	3	240	1918	7	\$64.86	3
New Albany	33	10,825	\$54,164,398	\$115,934	3.25%	\$55.74	4	\$120,839	4	238	1904	6	\$63.47	4
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Perry Township	16	3,929		\$95,089	3.50%	\$45.72	7	\$108,621	7	235	1879	2	\$57.81	7
Obetz	18	5,489	\$17,375,014	\$84,314	14.25%	\$40.54	9	\$93,651	9	136	1632	1	\$57.38	8
Clinton Township	16	4,499	\$7,917,426	\$91,614	3.00%	\$44.05	8	\$95,490	8	245	1960	12	\$48.72	9
Sunbury	15	6,614	\$6,759,814	\$84,053	5.80%	\$40.41	10	\$89,134	10	244	1952	10	\$45.66	10
Granville	22	5,946	\$6,028,983	\$79,933	3.00%	\$38.43	11	\$83,315	11	244	1952	11	\$42.68	11
Johnstown	11	5,182	\$4,280,976	\$75,114	7.00%	\$36.11	12	\$79,331	12	237	1896	5	\$41.84	12

Comparing Obetz to Sunbury (in Delaware County), Granville and Johnstown (in Licking County)

Although Obetz, Sunbury, Granville and Johnstown are, in common, cities with small populations that achieved city status only after the 2020 census, there are substantial relevant differences between Obetz and the cities of Sunbury, Granville and Johnstown.

- Johnstown and Sunbury are primarily residential communities with limited commercial development, and, correspondingly, a tax base substantially smaller than that of Obetz.
- Granville is a small village known for Denison University, with a limited commercial tax base beyond the university and small-town retail.
- Johnstown, Sunbury and Granville have 1% municipal income tax rates, compared to Obetz’s 2.5% income tax rate. That difference in income tax rates, applied to their comparatively limited commercial base, resulted in a substantial difference in General Fund Revenue in 2025:⁵⁸

Johnstown	\$4,280,976.00
Granville	\$6,028,983.00
Sunbury	\$6,759,814.00
Obetz	\$17,375,014.00

The amount spent by Obetz from its General Fund in Police expenses in 2025 -- \$3,802,109 – is 89% of Johnstown’s 2025 total General Fund Revenue, and 63% of the total 2025 General Fund Revenue of Granville. These three jurisdictions, with their comparatively smaller commercial/corporate tax bases and

⁵⁸ FOP Police Negotiations 08JAN2026 Fact-finder Copy, Comparisons Sheet, Columns B and C.

significantly lower municipal income tax rates, are limited in their ability to compensate public employees.

Comparing Obetz to small townships in Franklin County:

It is also challenging to make comparisons between Obetz and the townships in the Greater Columbus area. While Obetz relies heavily on commercial and industrial income tax payments to fund safety services, townships fund police operations primarily through local property tax levies (in some cases including levies dedicated to police operations), grants, and service fees – they do not levy income taxes.

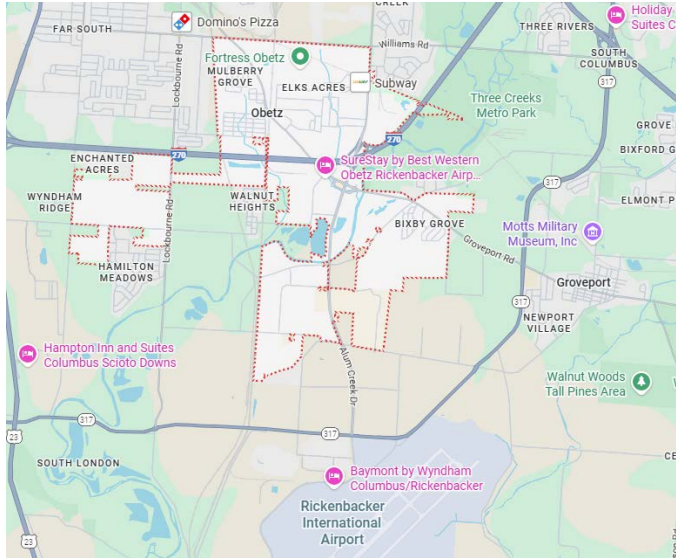
- Blendon Township is a larger, primarily residential community with a modest economic base. It's property tax income was recently strengthened by the passage in November 2025 of a 4.48-mill levy dedicated to police operations, to serve its residents. Although Blendon Township, as of the 2020 census, had a population nearly double that of Obetz, it has 14 full-time police officers, one part-time officer and one unpaid reserve officer.⁵⁹ The police officer wage increase for 2026 is a \$10000 “market adjustment” followed by a 3% increase in base wages.⁶⁰
- Clinton Township is a smaller and primarily residential township with fragmented geography and minimal commercial development. Whereas Obetz benefits from proximity to Rickenbacker International Airport and the Rickenbacker Global Logistics, making it attractive for warehousing and distribution operations, Clinton Township's commercial activity is largely limited to neighborhood-serving businesses and a single Joint Economic Development Zone arrangement. It relies on a Police District Fund that accounts for and reports the receipt of property taxes, charges for services, fines and forfeitures and intergovernmental monies restricted for the operation of Township police protection and law enforcement. Its general fund revenue for 2025 was \$7,917,426, compared to \$17,375,014 for Obetz.
- Perry Township, with a smaller population of around 4000, is an affluent residential enclave with median household income of \$183,462—more than double Obetz's \$81,200. It's property tax revenue benefits from median home values of \$450,600, compared to Obetz's \$191,700.
- Compared to Obetz, Madison Township is a much larger, primarily residential township, with a population over three times that of Obetz, living in a land area over 10 times the area of Obetz. Although it has median household income and median home values comparable to those in Obetz, it benefits financially from its population size, and the financial stability (at least for now) of relying on a property tax base.

Comparing Obetz to other small cities in Franklin County:

As the input of the FOP and the City suggests, Groveport appears to be the jurisdiction within Franklin County that is most comparable to Obetz residentially and commercially. Groveport and Obetz are neighboring municipalities located in Franklin County, southeast of Columbus, and are connected by major roads like Groveport Road. Like Obetz, Groveport capitalizes on logistics and commerce – both are significant logistics hubs in the Rickenbacker corridor.

⁵⁹ https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/local/2025/05/02/find-out-which-franklin-county-townships-have-levies-on-may-6-ballots/83257328007/#:~:text=Blendon%20Township%20is%20seeking%20a%204.48%20mill,part%2Dtime%20of%20*%20One%20unpaid%20reserve%20officer

⁶⁰ Blendon Township CBA_2026-2028_25-MED-10-1247.



There are differences, however, that are noteworthy. Obetz’s population has expanded by one-third since 2020, and its aggressive economic development efforts over the past decade appear to be a major contributor. Groveport, in contrast, is a more established community with a slightly larger land-area. Compared to Obetz, Groveport has a more established and larger commercial base, a wealthier resident base with much higher home values, and a lower tax rate. Groveport residents have higher median household incomes (\$91,545 vs. \$81,200) and substantially higher home values (\$358,000 vs. \$191,700). The Obetz income tax rate is 2.5%, compared to the Groveport income tax rate of 2.0%. These differences are reflected in the difference between Obetz and Groveport in 2025 General Fund Revenue -- in 2025, Groveport had General Fund Revenue of \$25,692,589.00, compared to \$17,375,014.00 for Obetz.⁶¹

iii. Cost of Proposals

Looking first at Officers only, since they are the recipients of the FOP’s proposed \$5000 equity adjustment, the FOP proposal would result in the following estimated increases in overall base compensation (assuming the same personnel remain in place throughout 2026-2028):

FOP - Officer Only	Base Salary	Total Base Pay	\$ Increase	% Increase
2025	\$662,149	\$735,482		
2026	\$771,540	\$855,937	\$120,455	16.4%
2027	\$826,381	\$916,506	\$60,569	7.1%

⁶¹ Nothing submitted to me indicates that there is some significance in the fact that Obetz has been a City for a short period of time, or for substantially less time than Groveport, which gained City status after the 2010 census. Although City status brings with it Civil Service requirements, collective bargaining, greater reporting requirements and enhanced budgeting and fund accounting rules, and other new administrative requirements, I am aware of no relevant differences in legal power or status between villages and cities in Ohio, or any connection between City status and the capacity for economic development. As the Mayor of Obetz stated in an August 24, 2021. article in the Columbus Messenger titled “Obetz has reached city status,” the City had long been planning for growth, so that the change “won’t affect our budget.” Overall, it appears that, in all relevant respects, Obetz was functioning like a city government for years before it was legally classified as one.

2028	\$884,228	\$980,389	\$63,883	7.0%
2026-28 Total	\$2,482,149	\$2,752,833	\$244,908	33.3%

The City proposal, as to Officers, would result in the following estimated increases in overall base compensation (assuming the same personnel remain in place throughout 2026-2028):

City - Officers Only	Base Salary	Total Base Pay	\$ Increase	% Increase
2025	\$662,149	\$735,482		
2026	\$695,523	\$772,465	\$36,983	5.0%
2027	\$713,680	\$792,752	\$20,286	2.6%
2028	\$727,954	\$808,788	\$16,037	2.0%
2026-28 Total	\$2,137,157	\$2,374,005	\$73,306	10.0%

Assuming the same personnel remain in place throughout 2026-2028, the estimated additional base compensation resulting from implementing the FOP proposals, compared to implementing the City proposals, as to Officers only, is as follows:

FOP Inc. Over City	Base Salary	Total Base Pay
2026	\$76,017	\$83,472
2027	\$112,701	\$123,755
2028	\$156,274	\$171,601
2026-28 Total	\$344,992	\$378,828
2026-28 % Inc.	16.1%	16.0%

Looking at all FOP employees (Officers, Corporals and Sergeants), the FOP proposal would result in the following increases in overall base compensation (assuming the same personnel remain in place throughout 2026-2028):

FOP	Base Salary	Total Base Pay	\$ Increase	% Increase
2025	\$1,352,944	\$1,504,260		
2026	\$1,510,691	\$1,678,223	\$173,963	11.6%
2027	\$1,617,273	\$1,796,033	\$117,810	7.0%
2028	\$1,730,482	\$1,921,151	\$125,118	7.0%
2026-28 Total	\$4,858,446	\$5,395,408	\$416,891	27.7%

The City proposal would result in the following increases in base compensation for all FOP employees (Officers, Corporals and Sergeants) (assuming the same personnel remain in place throughout 2026-2028):

City	Base Salary	Total Base Pay	\$ Increase	% Increase
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2025	\$1,352,944	\$1,504,260		
2026	\$1,407,043	\$1,564,410	\$60,149	4.0%
2027	\$1,442,987	\$1,604,654	\$40,245	2.6%
2028	\$1,471,847	\$1,637,150	\$32,496	2.0%
2026-28 Total	\$4,321,877	\$4,806,214	\$132,890	8.8%

Assuming the same personnel remain in place throughout 2026-2028, the additional base compensation resulting from implementing the FOP proposals, compared to implementing the City proposals, is as follows:

FOP Inc. Over City	Base Salary	Total Base Pay
2026	\$103,648	\$113,814
2027	\$174,286	\$191,379
2028	\$258,635	\$284,001
2026-28 Total	\$536,569	\$589,194
2026-28 % Inc.	12.4%	12.3%

(1) Recommendation

The above comparative data confirms points made by both the City and the FOP. There appears to be no dispute but that the City’s safety forces employment model is unique. It is an employment model characterized by (i) amounts of time off from work that exceed, by substantial amounts, the amounts of time off from work offered to police officers in any jurisdictions submitted by the parties as potentially comparable, (ii) very competitive health care benefits, and (iii) total compensation levels lower than any Franklin county jurisdiction submitted by the parties as potentially comparable, and higher only than two of the three jurisdictions submitted by the City as comparable that are outside of Franklin County and geographically separated from any Franklin County jurisdictions. Even taking into account all the paid time off that Obetz police officers are granted under the expired contract, the City pays less for every scheduled working hour of its top-paid Police Officers than any jurisdiction offered by the parties as potentially comparable, except for Franklin Township, Clinton Township, and the three jurisdictions outside of Franklin County offered by the City as potentially comparable. The City and FOP mutually agreed on this employment model three years ago, without the need for fact-finding.

The City’s offer of a 3% increase for 2026, even when compared only to potentially comparable jurisdictions submitted by the parties with 2020 populations under 15000, would leave the City with an hourly rate for top-level Police Officers that is less than all jurisdictions except Johnstown. The City top-level Police Officer total annual salary for 2026 (which includes the City’s comparatively generous holiday pay) would be higher only than Granville and Johnstown. The wage cost to the City of an hour of scheduled non-overtime work of a top-level police officer would be higher only than Clinton Township in Franklin County and the three jurisdictions outside of Franklin County, and \$9.19 per hour less than Groveport. The data on wage increases for police officer contracts in Ohio for 2027 and 2028 suggests (but only suggests) that the gap between Obetz and other jurisdictions in police officer salaries would further widen under the City wage increase proposal for those years.

The FOP’s demand, for 2026, would still leave the total annual salary of Obetz top-ranked officers over \$25000 less than the top-ranked officers employed in Groveport, but would substantially bridge the gap

between Obetz and Groveport in the hourly wage cost of an hour of scheduled work, while leaving Obetz officers with their huge advantage in the amount of time off they have each year. It is possible (but cannot be determined definitively) that the 7% increases demanded by the FOP for years 2027 and 2028 would substantially close the wage gap between Obetz and Groveport, while leading to Obetz incurring higher costs than Groveport per scheduled work hour, while preserving the large gap between the cities in the time off that police officers get.

Overall, my recommendation is based on the following:

- The City and the FOP mutually agreed, three years ago, to a comparatively unique employment model based on a enhanced amounts of time away from work, very competitive benefits and comparatively lower compensation, and neither side has proposed to abandon that model.
- For purposes of comparisons to other jurisdictions, it is not possible to place a monetary value on the enhanced amounts of time off from work, at least when the differences are as large as they are here. Some people value substantially enhanced amounts of time off more than others, and some people prefer higher levels of compensation to enhanced amounts of time off.
- Even taking into account the unique features of the parties’ employment model, it remains relevant both (i) to compare the percentage increases in compensation that the Obetz police force have received in the past to the percentage increases obtained by police forces in other jurisdictions, and (ii) to consider the percentage increases to be obtained by police forces in other jurisdictions, as bearing on the percentage increases to recommend for the Obetz police force for 2026-2028.
- Looking at prior percentage increases obtained by public sector unions in other Ohio jurisdictions – in Ohio as a whole, in the Columbus area, and confined to police officers – the Obetz police force has fallen behind most other jurisdictions over the past three years, by around \$1200 on average, as applied to the salary of top-level officers.
- The gap between the compensation of Obetz officers and corporals is very large in comparison to other jurisdictions, justifying some amount of initial wage increase applied to officers only. This is accomplished by focusing a significant portion of the 2026 increase on Police Officers via a lump sum equity adjustment.
- The yearly increases should take into account both the comparisons as to prior increases, and the pattern as to future increases among the jurisdictions submitted by the parties as potential comparators, and other jurisdictions that have entered into contracts covering police officers for 2026-2028.

My recommendation, based on these considerations, is as follows:

Fact-Finder Recommendation	2026	2027	2028
Market Adjustment All Patrol (Dollars)	\$2,000.00	\$ -	\$ -
Market Adjustment Corporals (Hourly Dollars)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Market Adjustment Sergeants (Hourly Dollars)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Raise All Patrol Percentage	3.0%	4.0%	3.5%

Raise Corporal Percentage	3.0%	4.0%	3.5%
Raise Sergeant Percentage	3.0%	4.0%	3.5%

The resulting increases in hourly rates are as follows:

Rank	2026	% Inc.	2027	% Inc.	2028	% Inc.	Spread
1	\$34.75	6.00%	\$36.14	4.00%	\$37.41	3.50%	
2	\$35.77	5.90%	\$37.20	4.00%	\$38.51	3.50%	2.90%
3	\$36.46	5.90%	\$37.92	4.00%	\$39.25	3.50%	1.90%
4	\$37.17	5.80%	\$38.66	4.00%	\$40.01	3.50%	1.90%
5	\$37.53	5.80%	\$39.04	4.00%	\$40.40	3.50%	1.00%
6	\$45.68	3.00%	\$47.51	4.00%	\$49.17	3.50%	21.70%
7	\$50.25	3.00%	\$52.26	4.00%	\$54.09	3.50%	10.00%

The resulting estimated cost to the City, assuming the same personnel remain as police employees, is:

Recommendation	Total Base			% Inc.
	Base Salary	Pay	\$ Inc.	
2025	\$1,352,944	\$1,504,260		
2026	\$1,425,912	\$1,585,130	\$80,869	5.4%
2027	\$1,483,729	\$1,649,391	\$64,262	4.1%
2028	\$1,535,659	\$1,707,221	\$57,829	3.5%
2026-28 Total	\$4,445,300	\$4,941,742	\$202,960	13.5%

The estimated additional cost to the City, compared to its offer, again assuming the same personnel remain as police employees, is:

Recommendation	Base Salary	Total Base Pay
Inc. Over City		
2026	\$18,870	\$20,720
2027	\$40,741	\$44,737
2028	\$63,812	\$70,071
2026-28 Total	\$123,423	\$135,528
2026-28 % Inc.	2.9%	2.8%

Here, “Total Base Pay” consists of base salary, longevity payments, and holiday pay.

The 2.8% overall increase in total compensation costs, relative to the City proposal over the 2026-2028 time period, that I am recommending, appears to be reasonable given the City’s comparatively low cost

per non-overtime police employee work hour, and the amount of City spending on safety forces overall, relative to other General Fund spending.

ACCORDINGLY, I RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING:

- Amend Section 15.1 to read as follows:

Section 15.1 Wages. Retroactive to January 1, 2026, the following wage structure shall be in place for Members:

Rate Increase	\$2000 salary increase to Steps 1 through 5, then 3% Raise	4% Raise	3.5% Raise
Steps	2026 Hourly	2027 Hourly	2028 Hourly
1	\$34.75	\$36.14	\$37.41
2	\$35.77	\$37.20	\$38.51
3	\$36.46	\$37.92	\$39.25
4	\$37.17	\$38.66	\$40.01
5	\$37.53	\$39.04	\$40.40
C	\$45.68	\$47.51	\$49.17
S	\$50.25	\$52.26	\$54.09

RETROACTIVITY

The parties have NOT agreed to an extension agreement and limited waiver of application of R.C. 4117.14(g)(11). I recommend that they do so, and that my recommendations be applied retroactive to January 1, 2026.

TENTATIVE AGREEMENTS

All tentative agreements reached by the parties as well as any current contract language unchanged or unaddressed by the parties shall be considered to be recommended in the successor collective bargaining agreement.

The Fact-Finder respectfully submits the above recommendations to the parties this 2nd day of February, 2026 in Cuyahoga County, Ohio.

_____/Barton A. Bixenstine/*

PROOF OF SERVICE:

The foregoing has been sent via email on the 2nd day of February, 2026, to **RONALD H. SNYDER, Esq.**, lead advocate for the Union, at rsnyder@cloppertlaw.com, and to **BENJAMIN S. ALBRECHT, Esq.**, lead advocate for the City, at balbrecht@fisheldowney.com.

*Authorized Electronic Signature