

# MIAMI BEACH

## COMMITTEE MEMORANDUM

TO: Finance and Economic Resiliency Committee Members

FROM: Eric Carpenter, City Manager

DATE: May 7, 2025

TITLE: EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF PURCHASING A MOBILE POLICE SUBSTATION TO ENHANCE LAW ENFORCEMENT RESOURCES, INCIDENT REPORTING, HIGH VISIBILITY AND CRIME DETERRENCE THROUGHOUT MIAMI BEACH.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Administration recommends the Mayor & Commission consider allocating resources for the acquisition of a Mobile Police Substation to enhance law enforcement presence, improve community engagement, and provide a flexible operational platform for addressing public safety concerns in key areas throughout Miami Beach.

The Administration recommends that while the Finance and Economic Resiliency Committee evaluates acquiring a Mobile Police Substation, it also carefully considers several critical factors that will significantly impact the General Fund budget, beginning in FY 2026:

1. The City's increasing unfunded capital improvement program
2. Long-term General Fund financial projections indicating a potential shortfall in upcoming fiscal years
3. The passage of Amendment 5 in November 2024, which increases the homestead exemption and further constrains the growth of taxable property values

These considerations are essential to ensure that decisions regarding the Mobile Police Substation align with the City's broader long-term financial stability and strategic priorities. If the Committee recommends funding the substation acquisition, the Administration recommends it be considered as part of the FY 2026 budget process.

### **BACKGROUND/HISTORY**

At the May 15, 2024 City Commission meeting, at the request of Commissioner Alex Fernandez, the Mayor and City Commission approved a referral (C7 AK) to the Public Safety and Neighborhood Quality of Life Committee ("PSNQLC") to report the findings and proposals related to the viability of creating police substations.

The item was heard at the July 10, 2024 meeting and was slated to return to the September 18, 2024 PSNQLC meeting to provide an update with possible plan phased out in fiscal years and including the possibility of substations in the City owned property in Altos del Mar, and partnering with Miami Dade County Schools.

This item was heard at the September 18th PSNQLC meeting, and the item was slated to return to the October PSNQLC meeting. The Police Department was asked to return with three (3) possibilities with cost and resources needed to be included for the following locations: 1. City Hall 2. Collins Park Area 3. A Mobile Station.

The item was subsequently heard at the November 13, 2024 PSNQLC meeting where the item was moved to the City Commission with a favorable recommendation to refer the item to the

Finance and Economic Resiliency Committee (FERC) to explore the possibility of purchasing a mobile station. The Mayor and City Commission approved the subsequent referral (C7 AF) to FERC at the February 3, 2025 City Commission meeting and the item was deferred to the April 16, 2025 FERC.

## **ANALYSIS**

The Miami Beach Police Department (MBPD) has been exploring strategies to optimize police operations and community engagement efforts. A mobile substation provides a dynamic solution by enabling officers to establish a presence in various locations without the constraints of a fixed facility. Previous discussions have underscored the need for a visible and responsive policing mechanism, particularly in high-traffic and event-prone areas.

Additionally, ongoing efforts by the Administration are also focused on identifying a viable office space to relocate the MBPD Internal Affairs Unit. However, City Facilities have not been able to identify potentially viable, City-owned facilities at this time. If one is identified and the Internal Affairs Unit is relocated, the current facility at 225 Washington Avenue can be remodeled and repurposed as a permanent substation serving the South of Fifth neighborhood. This initiative, combined with a Mobile Police Substation, would further enhance law enforcement's accessibility and visibility in key areas.

MBPD currently has one (1) police substation in North Beach that provides limited in-person services for walk-in reporting during business hours. The remainder of the facility serves as a police briefing facility for North Beach police roll calls and houses offices for the Area Captain, Neighborhood Resource Officer (NRO), Beat Officers and the PD's Boston Whaler Marine Patrol Vessel.

With the exception of the units assigned to North Beach, all MBPD personnel are deployed from the main HQ building located at 1100 Washington Ave. This location is staffed 24 hours a day to provide full-service, in-person reporting capabilities. Deploying personnel are briefed during shift roll calls throughout the 24-hour shift cycle and full investigative services are available at the MBPD headquarters as well.

MBPD additionally has the capability and routinely takes reports from residents and visitors via telephone and through an online reporting system called Desk Officer Reporting System (DORS). The DORS system allows the public to create police reports for certain enumerated minor crimes and be issued a MBPD case number.

### **Mobile Police Substation (MPS)**

A Mobile Police Substation offers a strategic advantage by providing:

- **Increased Law Enforcement Presence** – Enhances police visibility in high-crime areas and during major city events.
- **Community Engagement Opportunities** – Serves as a direct point of contact between officers and the public, fostering trust and communication.
- **Operational Flexibility** – Can be deployed in response to emerging crime trends, large gatherings, or special initiatives.
- **Support for Emergency Response** – Functions as an on-site command post during critical incidents or natural disasters.

The MPS would be equipped with necessary law enforcement tools, including communication systems, workstations, and community outreach materials, and also be prominently marked with MBPD branding for clear identification as a public safety resource.

Several advantages of this MPS option were identified, particularly when compared to leasing or purchasing a fixed brick-and-mortar facility:

- **Lower Cost:** The cost of purchasing and maintaining a mobile unit is significantly lower than the expenses associated with acquiring, leasing, or maintaining a permanent, physical structure. The MPS eliminates the need for long-term property leases, construction, renovation costs, and utility expenses tied to a fixed location, offering a more budget-friendly solution.
- **Citywide Flexibility and Visibility:** Unlike a stationary location, the MPS offers the unique ability to be deployed across various neighborhoods, increasing police presence and visibility throughout the entire city. This versatility allows the MPS to act as a proactive deterrent in high-crime areas, provide a temporary police presence at community events, or assist in ongoing investigations by positioning close to active incidents or concerns.
- **Rapid Relocation and Targeted Deployment:** The MPS can be relocated at any time, enabling law enforcement to respond to emerging issues dynamically. Whether addressing sudden spikes in crime, traffic concerns, or community needs, the MPS provides an agile response that a brick-and-mortar facility cannot match. This mobility ensures resources are placed where they are needed most, at any given moment.
- **Backup Mobile Command Center for Emergencies:** In the event of a natural disaster, large-scale incident, or other emergencies, the MPS can serve as a secondary or supplemental Mobile Command Vehicle. This dual functionality enhances operational readiness and provides the department with additional flexibility to coordinate response efforts in critical situations, ensuring continuous operations even if primary facilities are compromised.
- **Operational Efficiency with Minimal Staffing:** Unlike maintaining multiple fixed substations, the MPS requires fewer staff to operate effectively. This means that essential personnel can remain focused on patrols, investigations, or other duties without being tied to a single location. The MPS can deliver the same or enhanced police presence without the overhead of staffing multiple physical locations across the city.
- **Minimal Footprint:** The MPS requires minimal space for deployment, allowing for quick setup in various urban environments without causing significant disruptions to the surrounding area.
- **Public Engagement:** The vehicle can be designed to allow for public entry and direct engagement with police staff. This feature enhances community relations by providing an approachable, mobile space for interaction with officers.
- **Dedicated Staff Space:** The MPS will include a separate enclosed area specifically for police staff. This section would offer privacy and the ability to handle administrative tasks, meetings, or sensitive conversations away from public view.
- **Customizable Floorplan:** The layout of the MPS is entirely customizable, allowing the department to design a configuration that meets its specific operational needs. Whether the focus is on community interaction, field operations, or emergency response, the floorplan can be tailored accordingly.
- **Startup Costs:** The initial costs associated with designing and purchasing an MPS would be approximately \$450,000. The vehicle will be serviced and maintained by the City Fleet, and it will come with a warranty from both the vehicle manufacturer and the vendor responsible for the upfit to meet the city's design specifications.



To better gauge and decide upon the explored options, the Administration would benefit from a clear definition of the goals and desired outcomes for the police substation expansion project. This collaboration would enable input from all stakeholders, allowing the exploration of alternative strategies that can achieve similar outcomes without negatively affecting MBPD's current staffing capabilities or disrupting other high-priority initiatives already identified by residents, elected officials, and MBPD leadership.

By adopting a collaborative approach, innovative strategies can be developed to meet these goals, potentially through public-private partnerships, minimizing the financial burden on taxpayers while expanding MBPD's presence across the city. Rather than opening multiple permanent substations, the City could simultaneously explore alternatives such as establishing Neighborhood Engagement Offices or Police Field Workstations, which offer enhanced community engagement with reduced operational impact.

### **FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

The estimated cost for acquiring and outfitting the Mobile Police Substation is approximately \$400,000 to \$450,000, which includes:

- Vehicle purchase and customization
- Communication and technology integration
- Equipment and operational outfitting

Potential funding sources include:

- **Grants** – Federal and state programs supporting community policing initiatives
- **Public-Private Partnerships** – Local businesses benefiting from improved safety
- **City Budget Allocations** – Reallocation of underutilized resources and or budget enhancements.

The conversion of the current Internal Affairs Unit office at 225 Washington Ave into a permanent neighborhood substation for the South of Fifth Neighborhood requires securing a viable office space for IA, as well as additional unbudgeted funding for monthly rent, relocation costs, and renovations for both the new IA office and the 225 Washington Ave space. The total fiscal impact of this project remains undetermined, pending the identification of a suitable office space.

### **CONCLUSION**

The preferred option at this time is the acquisition of a Mobile Police Substation (MPS), as it offers the greatest return on investment and the flexibility to be deployed anywhere in the city. The MPS will significantly enhance MBPD's ability to proactively address public safety concerns across all neighborhoods while minimizing costs and staffing requirements compared to a fixed facility.

While establishing a permanent substation in South of Fifth could provide a sustained police presence, the mobile option is the most cost-effective and operationally flexible solution. The MPS option offers several advantages over a traditional brick-and-mortar substation, including lower initial costs, enhanced flexibility, increased visibility, reduced staffing requirements, versatility in emergencies, minimal deployment footprint, customizable floor plans and public accessibility.

This strategic approach aligns with the City's commitment to strengthening community-oriented policing and improving public safety outcomes. By investing in a Mobile Police Substation, MBPD can maximize its presence throughout Miami Beach while maintaining fiscal responsibility and operational efficiency.

**Applicable Area**

Citywide

**Is this a "Residents Right to Know" item,  
pursuant to City Code Section 2-17?**

No

**Is this item related to a G.O. Bond  
Project?**

No

**Was this Agenda Item initially requested by a lobbyist which, as defined in Code Sec. 2-481,  
includes a principal engaged in lobbying?** No

If so, specify the name of lobbyist(s) and principal(s):

**Department**

Police

**Sponsor(s)**

Commissioner Alex Fernandez

**Co-sponsor(s)**

**Condensed Title**

Discuss Purchasing a Mobile Police Substation.