

SANTA PAULA POLICE DEPARTMENT

INTRODUCTION

During the last few years, the Santa Paula City Council (Council) has discussed alleged problems associated with the Police Department. Newspaper articles have also disclosed concerns relating to the Department's administration, budget and manpower needs.

A community group comprised of business and civic leaders reported that the police officers were overworked and underpaid. Subsequently, police officers picketed the city council to express their concerns about delayed contract negotiations between the Santa Paula Police Officers Association (SPPOA) and the city.

In July 1997, police administrators concluded that the alleged problems with the police department were not as bad as first perceived and they indicated that many beneficial changes had been put into effect. There appears to be an opposing viewpoint from the majority of members of the SPPOA.

We decided to conduct an investigation of the Santa Paula Police Department to determine if problems do exist and to develop recommendations which could be used to ameliorate the working environment.

INQUIRY

Officials from the Ventura County Sheriff's Department for the city of Moorpark, and police chiefs from the cities of Port Hueneme and Santa Paula were interviewed. Former and current members of the Santa Paula City Council, the interim city manager and some officers of the police department and a former city administrator were also interviewed.

FINDINGS

The Santa Paula Police officers take pride in their work and are dedicated in their efforts to reduce crime in the city.

In comparing cities of similar size, we found that the Santa Paula Police officers are on the low end of prevailing pay scales.

The city's crime rate over the last four years is higher than other Ventura County cities of comparable size. Of note is that the ratio of crimes to each officer is somewhat higher in the City of Santa Paula when compared to the other similar sized cities.

The Crime Index Total of serious crimes cited below was obtained from the Ventura County Sheriff's report "Crime in the United States - Uniform Crime Reports."

1993

CITY	POPULATION	CRIME INDEX TOTAL	NUMBER OFFICERS	RATIO OF CRIMES
Moorpark	27,639	519	22	23.59
Port Hueneme	21,421	650	23	28.26
Santa Paula	25,783	1,593	30	53.10

1994

CITY	POPULATION	CRIME INDEX TOTAL	NUMBER OFFICERS	RATIO OF CRIMES
Moorpark	27,833	528	22	24.00
Port Hueneme	21,572	785	23	34.13
Santa Paula	25,964	1,406	30	46.87

1995

CITY	POPULATION	CRIME INDEX TOTAL	NUMBER OFFICERS	RATIO OF CRIMES
Moorpark	29,163	538	22	24.45
Port Hueneme	23,084	752	23	32.69
Santa Paula	25,823	1,314	30	43.80

1996

CITY	POPULATION	CRIME INDEX TOTAL	NUMBER OFFICERS	RATIO OF CRIMES
Moorpark	29,429	513	22	23.32
Port Hueneme	23,295	777	23	33.78
Santa Paula	26,059	1,288	30	42.93

The SPPOA members have, over the last three years, requested an increase of three additional police officers. Apparently due to budget constraints, the city has not been able to meet this request.

There are four major gangs in the city, yet there are no task forces dedicated to gang and drug related problems. Upon request by the city, the services of a specialized narcotics task force made up of Oxnard and Ventura police officers are employed.

The police chief is eligible to retire after 30 years of loyal and dedicated service. The process for selecting a successor needs to be addressed.

There have not been administrative policies in place for evaluation of city department heads over the last few years, nor have there been any written evaluations.

The city, under the direction of the Interim City Manager, has adopted substantial changes to its municipal code to restructure its administration from a long standing city administrator type to that of a city manager. This will allow the new city manager the authority to employ and remove officers and employees of the city, except the City Attorney and elected officials.

CONCLUSIONS

There is friction between the SPPOA and city management regarding attainment of a professional work environment.

There is near unanimity among police officers that more effective leadership is needed to bring the department up-to-date and regain the confidence of the police officers.

There is a general consensus among the SPPOA that lacking a permanent city manager, the relationship with current management will continue to deteriorate.

The interim city manager has done a commendable job during his 15 month temporary assignment. It therefore becomes incumbent for the city to expedite the process for selecting a permanent city manager to help guide the future direction of the city

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the city expedite its efforts to select a permanent city manager.
2. That the city recognize the existing friction between police officers and its administration and that it initiate a course of action to ameliorate the situation.
3. That the city should consider setting in place a recruitment process for selecting a new police chief prior to the current police chief's retirement.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

Santa Paula City Council

Santa Paula Interim City Manager