

East County Jail Closure

Summary

The Ventura County 2004-2005 Grand Jury undertook an investigation into the process used by the Sheriff's Department in establishing priorities with respect to staff reductions, and the elimination of programs when faced with declining financial resources.

Of particular interest was the closing of the East County Jail and the impact of that decision on police services in the areas most affected.

The Grand Jury concluded that the Sheriff's Department's process for establishing priorities was reasonable and prudent and consistent with its mandatory responsibilities. Furthermore, it was concluded that keeping the East County Jail fully operational needs to remain a high priority.

In April 2005, the Board of Supervisors, the Sheriff and the District Attorney settled a lawsuit that allows the jail to be reopened, and subsequently the Sheriff announced plans to have it operational early in 2006.

Background

In August 2004, the Grand Jury initiated an investigation into the closing of the East County Jail.

One of the Grand Jury's responsibilities is to investigate and report on various matters of county government. Pursuant to California Government Code section 925, one duty of the Grand Jury is to investigate and report on the operations, accounts and records of the officers, departments or functions of the county.

The investigation focused on the mandatory tasks of the Sheriff's Department and the process used to establish the department's priorities in an environment of decreasing financial resources. Of particular interest was the closing of the East County Jail and its impact on police services.

Of primary concern was the long delay inherent in transporting suspects from the east end of the county to the Main Jail for booking. For example the driving distance to the jail from Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks is approximately 40 and 24 miles respectively. One issue was the additional time deputies would be away from their patrol area and another was the likelihood that deputies would resort to "citing and releasing" suspects so as to avoid the delay.

Methodology

The Grand Jury conducted interviews and accepted briefings from a number of individuals possessing pertinent information. Some of those appearing before the Grand Jury included all five members of the Board of Supervisors, the County Chief

Executive Officer, the Sheriff, the Under Sheriff, the County Chief Deputy Executive Officer in charge of Finance and Budget, a member of the Thousand Oaks City Council, the Assistant Manager of the City of Thousand Oaks, and personnel from the Sheriff's Department and various city police departments.

In addition the Grand Jury collected and reviewed a variety of documents.

Findings

- F-01.** The Sheriff's Department and the Thousand Oaks Police Department share a facility at 2101 East Olsen Road in Thousand Oaks.
- F-02.** The East County Jail is located within the shared facility.
- F-03.** The shared facility, including the jail, was built under a joint agreement between Thousand Oaks and the Board of Supervisors in 1988.
- F-04.** Budget reductions in FY2003-2004 led to the sheriff making the decision to convert the East County Jail from a 24-hour housing and booking facility to a 12-hour booking-only operation.
- F-05.** Further budget reductions in FY2004-2005 led the sheriff to order the suspension of operations at the East County Jail, beginning in July 2004.
- F-06.** Data provided by the Sheriff's Department show that during the four year period FY1999-2000 thru FY2002-2003, when the East County Jail was fully operational, approximately 12% of all bookings were done at that facility.
- F-07.** Data from the Sheriff's Department show that during FY2003-2004, when the East County Jail was open for only 12 hours, approximately 11% of all bookings were done at that facility.
- F-08.** From July 2004 until the present there have been no bookings at the East County Jail.
- F-09.** Data from the Simi Valley Police Department show that during the four year period FY1999-2000 thru FY2002-2003, when the East County Jail was fully operational, approximately 67% of their bookings were done at that facility.
- F-10.** Data from the Simi Valley Police Department show that during FY2003-2004, when the East County Jail was open for only 12 hours, approximately 49% of their bookings were done at that facility.
- F-11.** Data from the California Highway Patrol show that during the four year period CY2000 thru CY2003, when the East County Jail was fully operational, approximately 15% of their bookings were done at that facility.
- F-12.** During the three year period between FY2002-2003 thru FY2004-2005 the Sheriff's Department has reduced department staff by 196 people.
- F-13.** During the 12 year period between FY1991-1992 thru FY2002-2003 the number of Sheriff's Department personnel, funded with general purpose revenue, was relatively constant.

- F-14.** During the two year period between FY2003-2004 thru FY2004-2005 the number of Sheriff's Department personnel, funded with general purpose revenue, decreased by 27%.
- F-15.** The Sheriff's Department's mandatory and statutory responsibilities are used to set priorities.
- F-16.** The sheriff's stated vision for the department is, "Make Ventura County the safest urban region in the United States."
- F-17.** Public safety is a key element of this community's quality of life.
- F-18.** The Sheriff's Department's published Mission Statement reads in part, "We, the members of the Ventura County Sheriff's Department, are committed to safeguard lives and property of the residents of Ventura County...."
- F-19.** Three programs that survived recent budget eliminations were the drug program, the air unit and the crime lab.
- F-20.** In addition to staff reductions and the closing of the East County Jail, the Sheriff's Department eliminated the following programs:
- Sheriff's Crime Suppression/Gang Unit
 - All unincorporated community oriented policing programs
 - All county area DARE programs
 - All county School Resource Officers
 - All county community storefront stations
 - One fraud/elder abuse investigator
 - One rural/agricultural crimes investigator
 - Three helicopters
 - The sheriff's "honor farm" in Ojai
 - Court security positions
- F-21.** The sheriff's priorities, as stated in 2004, are:
- Protect lifesaving and first responders programs
 - Focus efforts on criminal gangs, drug dealers and terrorists
 - Maintain quality of service in spite of reductions
 - Sustain infrastructure for future growth
 - Build toward restoration of desired services
- F-22.** Twenty-two percent of the Sheriff's Department budget for FY2004-2005 comes from contract cities (Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Ojai and Thousand Oaks).
- F-23.** Forty-six percent of the Sheriff's Department budget for FY2004-2005 comes from the county general fund.

- F-24.** With the closure of the East County Jail, officers patrolling in the east end of the county must drive to the Main Jail to book a suspect.
- F-25.** The distance between the Main Jail and the Simi Valley City Hall is approximately 40 miles.
- F-26.** The distance between the Main Jail and the Thousand Oaks City Hall is approximately 24 miles.
- F-27.** The time to drive from the east end of the county to the Main Jail, book a suspect, return to the east end and resume patrol duties is estimated to take two to two and a half hours.
- F-28.** Deputies in the field have some discretion with respect to either booking a suspect or citing and releasing.
- F-29.** There is no Sheriff's Department policy to encourage citing and releasing suspects rather than booking to avoid the delay in transporting suspects to the Main Jail.
- F-30.** Although they are the exception, there are instances when officers in the east end of the county cite and release, so as to avoid being off the street during the time necessary to book at the Main Jail.
- F-31.** On April 5, 2005, the Board of Supervisors voted to settle lawsuits involving the Board, the Sheriff and the District Attorney. The lawsuit dealt with the provisions of Proposition 172 and Ordinance 4088.
- F-32.** The settlement described above enables the sheriff to reopen the East County Jail.
- F-33.** The Sheriff's Department's current plan is to reopen the jail during the peak 12 hours starting in September of this year and will make the facility fully operational early in 2006.

Conclusions

- C-01.** The Sheriff's Department's process in establishing priorities, in an environment of declining financial resources, was reasonable and prudent, and consistent with the department's mandatory and statutory responsibilities. (F-04, F-05, F-15 thru F-18)
- C-02.** The Sheriff's Department's decisions as to which staff members and programs were to be eliminated were consistent with the department's priorities. (F-04, F-05, F-12, F-13, F-14, F-19, F-20, F-21, F-33)
- C-03.** "Citing and releasing" of suspects so as to avoid booking in the Main Jail was being done by some deputies in the east county. (F-24 thru F-30)
- C-04.** Keeping the East County Jail fully operational should continue to be a high priority. (F-01, F-02, F-03, F-06 thru F-11, F-30, F-22, F-31, F-32, F-33)

Recommendations

In light of the recent lawsuit settlement between the Board of Supervisors, the Sheriff and the District Attorney, which allows for the reopening of the East County Jail and the Sheriff's decision to reopen it, the Grand Jury has no recommendation.

Responses

None required.

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