



RANCHO SIMI RECREATION AND PARK DISTRICT

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SEP 25 2007

VENTURA COUNTY
GRAND JURY

July 13, 2007

RECEIVED
VENTURA COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT

JUL 18 2007

Ventura County Grand Jury
Attn: Alyce Klussman
800 South Victoria Avenue, L#3751
Ventura, Ca 93009

OFFICE OF THE
PRESIDING JUDGE

Honorable Colleen Toy White, Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California, Ventura County
Hall of Justice, #2120
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, Ca 93009

*To file
Crew*

Re: Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District

Honorable Colleen Toy White and Ms. Klussman:

On or about April 23, 2007, Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District (the "District") received by hand delivery the attached Grand Jury report, titled, Public Safety: Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District Ranger Program (hereinafter referred to as the "Report"). The letter accompanying the Report required a response within 90 days (by July 23, 2007). Listed below, in ***bold italics***, is each finding, conclusion and recommendation, as they appeared in the Report. Underneath each is the District response, approved by the District's Board of Directors during its regular meeting on June 21, 2007, as evidenced by the attached minutes. The responses are based upon: staff discussions with each of the various agencies; District Policy Manual provisions covering operational procedures of the Ranger Program; staff analysis of the issues raised (District's General Manager, Business Supervisor and Senior Park Ranger); and, an understanding of the District's Ranger Program and its effectiveness in serving the community.

FINDINGS

F-01. District Ordinance No. 2 [Ref-O1] is an ordinance passed by the District Board of Directors. It establishes rules and conditions governing the use of District parks and facilities and participation in District programs.

The Park District concurs.

F-02. Enforcement of Ordinance No. 2 is the responsibility of the Ranger Program.

The Park District concurs.

F-03. The District Ranger Program currently has three full-time, five part-time, and three special-event rangers to patrol the properties within the District.

The Park District concurs.

F-04. Rangers are on patrol seven days a week from 10:00 a.m. to midnight.

The Park District disagrees. Ranger schedules are determined on a monthly basis. The schedule is then distributed to appropriate staff members. Hours of coverage is a result of ranger availability, ranger cost, the need for greater coverage at particular locations, the ability to reduce coverage at particular locations, special events, facility rentals, and other things. Ranger patrols change frequently to make the best use of limited resources. See for example the attached Ranger Schedule for period June 1, 2007 - June 28, 2007.

F-05. The Ranger Program compiles monthly statistics of their calls for service and ranger-initiated activities and incidents.

The Park District concurs in part. Rangers prepare a daily log describing their activities. These logs indicate the park location, time of visit, noteworthy activity, and warnings or citations issued. These logs are turned in daily and reviewed by the District's Senior Park Ranger, the Senior Buildings Maintenance Supervisor, General Manager, and Business Supervisor. The ranger logs can identify graffiti, maintenance or other repair work needed, and help staff members respond quickly to issues. Citation issues are also attached to these ranger logs, which are reviewed and discussed when appropriate. Ranger logs are maintained and, on occasion, used to generate statistics that may form the basis for scheduling adjustments, presentations, etc.

F-06. The Ranger Program does not provide periodic safety reports of any kind to the District Board of Directors.

The Park District concurs. The District's Park Ranger program is supervised by the District's Senior Park Ranger who in turn is supervised by the District's General Manager. The District's Business Supervisor provides secondary supervision of the Ranger Program, and processes citations, acts as a liaison to the Simi Valley Police Department and Ventura County Sheriff, and coordinates and communicates ranger scheduling.

F-07. The District and the Ranger Program do not provide information regarding District safety statistics to the public.

The Park District concurs in part. Most Park Ranger interactions with the public fall into the

following categories: skateboarding in the park, riding a bicycle without a helmet, visiting a park after hours, trespassing, dog off leash, lewd conduct in a parked car, alcohol possession and public intoxication. Warnings are provided and field interview cards are completed in most circumstances, citations are issued on occasion, and police or sheriff are called for back-up when appropriate. As indicated above, warning and citation information appear on Ranger logs. This information is not provided to the public at large, but is provided upon request, in conformance with the Freedom of Information Act. Statistics created by instances requiring police or sheriff involvement are reported by the respective agency in accordance with their policies.

F-08. The District Board of Directors does not require that an annual report from the Ranger Program be compiled, presented and made available to the general public.

The Park District concurs.

F-09. The current Web site of the District has limited information about the Ranger Program.

The Park District concurs, however, approximately one-year ago the District placed its Rules and Regulations onto its web site and several months ago it placed a description of the Park Ranger authority onto its web site. The District will also place an informative article on the Ranger Program within an upcoming edition of its Reporter (a class and information listing that is sent to every residence within the communities of Oak Park and Simi Valley).

F-10. Loitering by homeless persons and gang activity on District property is increasing and frequently requires assistance from either SVPD or VCSD.

The Park District concurs in part. The frequency of homeless and gang activity has ebbed and flowed for a long time, and it has existed primarily at two of the Park District's facilities. Park Rangers and Simi Valley Police officers work together frequently at these two locations to handle problems and reduce the frequency of issues. Unfortunately, eliminating gangs and homeless problems is not possible within the confines of the law. It is not a crime to loiter in a public park, and civil and personal property rights extend to everyone, regardless of their status or affiliation. The Park District increases its ranger coverage at these problem areas when appropriate.

F-11. The SVPD is the primary law enforcement agency providing police services to District properties within city boundaries. (See Attachment 1.)

The District concurs. The Simi Valley Police Department acts as the primary law enforcement agency within Simi Valley, and the Ventura County Sheriff acts as the primary law enforcement agency for the community of Oak Park. The Park District provides parks and recreation activities to both communities.

F-12. The VCSD is the primary law enforcement agency providing police services to District properties within unincorporated areas of the County.

The District concurs. The Simi Valley Police Department acts as the primary law enforcement agency within Simi Valley, and the Ventura County Sheriff acts as the primary law enforcement agency for the community of Oak Park. The Park District provides parks and recreation activities to both communities.

F-13. No formalized agreements exist requiring the SVPD or VCSD to provide additional patrol and enforcement on properties owned by the District.

The Park District concurs. Park District facilities are within the jurisdiction of either the SVPD or VCSD. Both of these agencies regularly patrol Park District facilities, and information is frequently exchanged between Park Rangers and other officers. There is no agreement in place to provide patrols above and beyond this existing level of coverage.

F-14. No formalized agreements exist with the SVPD or VCSD setting forth operational procedures and liability issues within the Ranger Program.

The Park District concurs in part. It is true that there is no formalized agreement between the Park District and the SVPD or the VCSD. However, there is ample authority governing agency interactions and responsibilities. For example, the Park District has a Board approved policy governing Park Ranger Operational Procedures (copy attached). These procedures clearly convey the primary role of a Park Ranger: enforce Park District Rules and Regulations. Paragraph J of Section 2203 expressly states that a Park Ranger “Works with other law enforcement agencies where a situation is beyond a Park Ranger’s control and expertise (i.e., drug violations), and works with police agencies in other areas of law enforcement that occur in the parks where assistance is required”. This policy is supported by Simi Valley Police Department General Order 0831 (attached to the attached Grand Jury Report). The procedures set forth in this authority have been respected by each agency for more than two decades. Although there is apparently no comparable VCSD policy, the tradition of past practice has successfully worked to protect residents.

F-15. The District has no formalized tracking system for noting responses by the SVPD or VCSD to incidents occurring on District property.

The Park District disagrees. The Park District obtains a copy of incident reports from the respective agencies, and regularly exchanges information with officers and administrative staff members on items of significance.

F-16. The District has had difficulty convincing the Ventura County District Attorney’s Office (VCDA) to prosecute citations written by the Rangers.

The District disagrees. Very few of the District’s citations are categorized as misdemeanors subject to prosecution by the VCDA. Misdemeanor citations, together with supporting documentation are filed in accordance with established procedures. The VCDA requests and the Park District Ranger Program provides additional information when needed. The Park District does not attempt to

convince the VCDA to prosecute. The Park District understands that not every crime can or should be prosecuted, and it relies upon the judgment of the VCDA to make those determinations.

F-17. The District has plans in place to expand its property holdings and facilities.

The District concurs. Community growth requires more facilities. In addition to attempting to meet this expanding demand through the provision of additional developed park sites, the District also purchases and preserves open space to help protect habitats and view sheds and to provide less formal additional recreational opportunities (hiking, birdwatching, horseback riding, etc.).

CONCLUSIONS

C-01. The District does not adequately inform the general public of the mission, duties, and responsibilities of the Ranger Program. (F-06 through F-09)

The Report has not requested a District response to the conclusions of the Grand Jury.

C-02. A lack of awareness of the mission, duties, enforcement authority, and responsibilities of the Ranger Program has resulted in the District having difficulty obtaining criminal prosecution through the VCDA. (F-02, F-16)

The Report has not requested a District response to the conclusions of the Grand Jury.

C-03. The District Ranger Program is not staffed to carry out patrol duties on a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week basis, thus leaving the property and facilities vulnerable to criminal acts during the ten hours a day that rangers are not on patrol. Since the District has plans for expansion, additional Ranger staff may be required. (F-01 through F-04, F-13, F-17)

The Report has not requested a District response to the conclusions of the Grand Jury.

C-04. Without formalized agreements with city and county law enforcement, there is a likelihood that confusion and misunderstandings could result regarding jurisdictional responsibilities and expectations in the event of a significant incident occurring on District property. (F-02, F-11 through F-14)

The Report has not requested a District response to the conclusions of the Grand Jury.

C-05. The District and the general public does not have an accurate overall picture of crimes and incidents occurring on its properties. (F-07 through F-10, F-15)

The Report has not requested a District response to the conclusions of the Grand Jury.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R-01. The District should consider providing 24-hour, seven-day-a-week patrol coverage of its properties and facilities so that it can better address security needs. This could be accomplished by increasing the number of rangers or contracting with the SVPD and VCSD to provide additional patrol of District properties. (C-03)

The Park District will not implement this recommendation. The primary mission of Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District is to provide recreation activities and park facilities. The primary law enforcement authorities are the SVPD and VCSD. The Park Rangers supplement coverage and focus on compliance with adopted park rules and regulations. Contracting with the SVPD or the VCSD would require additional payment from the Park District to either or both of those agencies. Each agency already has primary law enforcement authority within their areas of responsibility, and each agency already patrols Park District facilities as a part of that responsibility.

The costs associated with either increasing ranger patrols, or contracting for more coverage would require a shifting of resources away from the provision of well maintained parks and recreational activities. The District believes that the cost of providing additional protection would far outweigh the cost of repairing the occasional damage done to the parks, after hours.

Residents of the District take great pride in their parks and do their best to make sure they are protected. The District frequently receives calls from park patrons and nearby residents alerting the District to problems to which the Rangers can then respond. The District welcomes these reports from individuals and normally responds in a timely and professional manner while protecting the identity of the informant. The fact that District residents care about their parks and want to protect them provides a level of supervision of the parks far greater than the results which would be obtained by hiring more Rangers.

R-02. The District should execute formal Memoranda of Understanding/Agreement with SVPD and VCSD defining the operational and jurisdictional interface between the Ranger Program and the two agencies. (C-04)

The Park District will not implement this recommendation. The District believes that there is ample authority governing agency interactions and responsibilities. For example, the Park District has a Board approved policy governing Park Ranger Operational Procedures (copy attached). These procedures clearly convey the primary role of a Park Ranger: enforce Park District Rules and Regulations. Paragraph J of Section 2203 expressly states that a Park Ranger “Works with other law enforcement agencies where a situation is beyond a Park Ranger’s control and expertise (i.e., drug violations), and works with police agencies in other areas of law enforcement that occur in the parks where assistance is required”. This policy is supported by Simi Valley Police Department General Order 0831 (attached to the attached Grand Jury Report). The procedures set forth in this authority have been respected by each agency for more than two decades. Although there is apparently no

comparable VCSD policy, the tradition of past practice has successfully worked to protect residents. In short, Park Rangers call for back-up when necessary.

R-03. The District should establish a mechanism by which SVPD and VCSD report to the Ranger Program all crimes and incidents occurring on District property. (C-05)

The Park District has implemented this recommendation.

R-04. The District should update its official Web site to provide details about the mission and enforcement responsibilities of its Ranger Program. The site should also provide a statistical breakdown of crimes and incidents occurring on District property. (C-01, C-05)

The Park District has implemented this recommendation in part. Information about the mission and powers of Park Rangers has been posted onto the District's web site. The District will not provide a breakdown of crimes and incidents, except upon request. Significant violations of the law are reported in the records of the police and sheriff departments. Since most of the work of the Rangers consists of encouraging park patrons to follow the rules through the use of discussion and citations, providing "statistics" would not give a meaningful picture of the Rangers' work and contribution to the community. Further, publication of information on Ranger interactions with residents could be detrimental to the reputations of those residents and the organizations to which they belong. Park Rangers are directed to solve problems in a public relations oriented manner. When serious problems arise, they can call in the Police or Sheriff. This gives a progressive response to discipline.

R-05. An annual report about the Ranger Program should be prepared for the District Board of Directors. This report, as well as a brochure, should also be available to the public both on the Web site and in print. (C-01, C-05)

The Park District concurs in part. The District placed its Rules and Regulations together with a description of Park Ranger authority onto its web site. The District will also place an informative article on the Ranger Program within an upcoming edition of its Reporter (a class and information listing that is sent to every residence within the communities of Oak Park and Simi Valley). This will be performed during the 2007 calendar year, and will: provide a description of Park Ranger qualifications including their extensive experience in law enforcement; emphasize the fact that the District has carefully selected the Rangers to ensure that they have skills in dealing with the public in a non-confrontational way; emphasize that the Ranger program is designed to establish relationships between the District and persons using park facilities which will encourage protection of park patrons and park property; state that the primary purpose of the Ranger program is to protect park patrons. Park Ranger reports are given to the Board of Directors on an as-needed basis, and this has been adequate.

R-06. The District should meet regularly with the VCDA to exchange information and better educate VCDA personnel about activities of the Ranger Program. (C-02).