
Community Policing

Department-wide Expansion of the Current Model

December 2006

The St. Petersburg Police Department is highly committed to our neighborhoods. In an effort to better serve the community, the Department will expand community policing to include all Department personnel. As a process evolving over time and circumstance, it is advantageous at this time to expand the present model and increase the level of effectiveness and service to the community.

Community Policing in St. Petersburg

This Department has always been at the forefront of community policing implementations. In the early 1990's, the St. Petersburg Police Department embarked on planning one of the most comprehensive, strategically designed community policing initiatives in the country.

During the beginning phases of this initiative, the Department's goal was essentially twofold: (1) to develop both external and internal partnerships that would enhance community relationships; and (2) to provide a mechanism for improved intra-agency communication, cooperation and coordination.

First established City-wide in 1991 as a centralized and separate entity both philosophically and operationally, it was quickly realized that some level of inclusion of the community policing model was necessary in other Department areas. As a result, the Community Policing Division was merged into the patrol districts in 1993 as a strategically planned *decentralization* technique. Over the past decade, Department leaders have continued these decentralizing efforts by methodically introducing the philosophical concept of community policing, both internally and externally. However, this agency has continued to use a decentralized model where less than ten percent of the workforce is fully engaged in community policing.

The Decentralized Model

Of all the agencies within the state and the nation that we queried and researched, none currently utilize the model presently used by our agency.

Research of local and national agencies has revealed that a model promoting a partially decentralized plan is inadequate in appropriately meeting the needs of the more involved and demanding communities as found in St. Petersburg. As a result, the trend of police agencies has been to implement structural changes aimed at flattening and decentralizing their community policing programs, coupled with a philosophical paradigm shift to accomplish the embodiment of the community policing philosophy throughout the entire organization.

In comparing the large agencies in Florida (Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, Orlando, Tampa, and Jacksonville), none are currently operating with the model presently used by our agency. This is also consistent with what was found nationally. Community Policing has been "institutionalized" and the patrol workforce does the community policing function. The majority of these agencies have operationally integrated the community policing philosophy throughout their entire organization. All officers in these agencies are actively involved in addressing community issues and are considered "community police officers."

Orlando has always operated under the philosophy that everyone is a "community police officer." They currently have five officers who are assigned to areas (corresponding to those of their city commissioners) that deal with some minor quality-of-life issues and who attend meetings.

Tampa has recently moved away from a model similar to ours in some respects. The community officers who were assigned to fire stations were reintegrated into patrol. Everyone in their department is now considered a "community police officer."

Fort Lauderdale at one time had a model similar to our agency which was disbanded. Fifty officers returned to a patrol assignment. Although they currently utilize a "Special Problems Squad," it compares more closely to our Special Investigations Unit (SIU) than a community policing component. Everyone from officers to lieutenants to Majors attends neighborhood meetings.

Jacksonville has a "COP" squad of three to eight officers assigned to six zones throughout their city. These squads, often without supervisors, mainly work narcotics, prostitution and crime patterns in plain clothes. Although they were involved in more traditional community policing activities at one time, their focus has changed over different management regimes to an emphasis on directed patrol activities.

Miami considers all their officers as community police officers but refers to them as part of a "Neighborhood Enhancement Team" (NET). Although their primary

function is to respond to 9-1-1 and non-emergency calls for service, they do work with code enforcement officers, public works employees, etc., to address quality-of-life issues. Each Commander of the twelve areas within the city has two Neighborhood Resource Officers assigned to them. These officers attend meetings, take care of minor issues, and assign and direct other resources.

National Trends

In reviewing research related to national trends, a similar approach was found to those agencies in Florida. Charlotte, North Carolina, and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) have an approach which typifies the common model. Their models have the patrol officers doing the "community policing" work. Typically, a "coordinator" or "lead officer" is assigned to an area to provide community liaison, coordinate problem responses, and assist with resource management. The number of "coordinators" could depend on the complexity or number of issues in an area. Sometimes a field supervisor is responsible for coordinating these activities. Washington D.C., for example, assigns a lieutenant to each "beat."

In acknowledging these trends, in conjunction with our Department's model which has evolved over time and circumstance, it is advantageous at this time to expand the present model, thereby increasing the level of responsiveness, service, and accountability to the community.

Expanding Our Community Policing Model

It is well understood among scholars that the philosophy of community policing is a conceptual term that is not easily understood nor readily defined. As suggested by McGuire (1997) in his study of large bureaucratic police agencies, departments that implement the programmatic components of community policing without the structural changes required by an overall shift in philosophy will lack the appropriate structure to support community policing activities, and will maintain or eventually revert to more traditional styles of policing. The philosophical components of community policing maintain that organizations must be flattened and decentralized and the philosophy embodied throughout the entire organization. In fact, a June 1998 U.S. Department of Justice study of the St. Petersburg Police Department revealed that police organizations should not expect to implement community policing with a decentralized patrol organization. Further, that a common focus on problem-solving and partnership must be adopted and realized by all officers working within a neighborhood.

Police administrators responsible for implementing the initial and subsequent community policing model within the St. Petersburg Police Department understood that philosophical change could not occur by simply adding another box to the organizational chart. This, in and of itself, does not constitute community policing. For the past two decades, the Department has methodically introduced this philosophical concept within the Department by actively exposing and assigning certain officers to the community policing task. Most recently, in an effort to fully integrate the community policing model, it has become increasingly apparent that full decentralization is necessary. A major shift in our current paradigm simply cannot occur when less than 10% of our officers are practicing this philosophical concept, allowing the remainder to believe it is not within their job description. In addition, there have been persistent concerns from the neighborhoods about community police officers not returning phone calls and not attending meetings. To effect change, this concept must be re-introduced, refined, and practiced at every level within the organization.

After analysis of our community policing model, four main issues have currently been identified that need to be addressed:

1. A response needs to be developed to address neighborhood concerns cited above.
2. Community policing needs to be implemented Department wide.
3. Performance commitments to our community need to be established.
4. Service enhancements need to be made to better address community issues related to narcotics, prostitution and cyber-crimes.

To augment our current community policing approach, we must consider sound, yet bold, initiatives that will further St. Petersburg's community policing experience. With this in mind, the time has come to expand into a fully integrated, decentralized Department-wide community policing model. This restructuring effort will require a departure from our current community policing model, and will include the reintegration of all community policing officers into uniform patrol. No longer will the Department operate as functionally divided units, but as one unified Department with a common philosophical approach to community-based policing.

The City is divided into three police districts, each commanded by a district major. The district major manages and directs all resources within the district. Under this expansion, there will be four Community Service Officers (CSO) and

one Community Service Sergeant (CSS) assigned to each of the City's three districts, whose sole responsibilities will be to act as the community interface and liaison, and become facilitators of the problem solving/community policing process using Department-wide resources.

Each district will have a central telephone contact number for citizens to call and report quality-of-life issues, with a return phone call within 24 hours by a CSO. Calls received will be assigned, extensively tracked via a computer-based reporting system, and resolved to their most logically and statutorily conducive conclusion.

The Department's response to these calls will be measured and reported in the Department's Performance Measures. Community meetings will be regularly attended by appropriate personnel. This approach will address neighborhood concerns of unreturned phone calls and unattended meetings.

While staffing levels are currently sufficient to handle the current calls for service, the redeployment of personnel to the districts will allow additional time for all officers to address community policing activities and problem solving. All shift sergeants and lieutenants (middle managers) will now play an active role in community policing. Additional community policing/problem solving training will be provided to all sworn employees in order to finalize this decentralizing expansion process, giving them the knowledge base necessary to ensure effective community partnering. This expansion will focus all employees on their community policing role.

Community Patrol Officers

Currently, patrol officers are undervalued and underutilized in community policing activities. Many officers have worked in areas for long periods of time and are very knowledgeable about their assigned areas. By having officers engage more directly in community policing activities, it will allow them to better utilize their knowledge and experience of their respective area. The redeployment of personnel to the districts will allow additional time for all officers, who will be known as "Community Patrol Officers," to address community policing activities and problem solving.

Community Service Officers (CSO)

Under this expansion, every area of the City and every resident will have Community Service Officers (CSOs) who will be responsible for being a community interface or liaison. There will be four Community Service Officers in

each district who, in essence, will act as facilitators of the problem solving process. Each district will have a central telephone contact number for citizens to call to report issues. Each officer will be available to attend community meetings and other resident contacts in their assigned districts, although these responsibilities may be disseminated to other personnel throughout the Department. The CSO will also be responsible for ensuring citizen calls are returned within 24 hours, thus eliminating a primary complaint currently reported by residents of unreturned phone calls.

Community Service Sergeant (CSS)

Each district will also have a Community Service Sergeant (CSS) who will be responsible for managing and coordinating the activities of the Community Service Officers. Reporting directly to the District Major, the Community Service Sergeant will monitor issues brought to them by the Community Service Officers. They will assign tasks to address issues and problems, make referrals, liaison with middle managers and supervisors, coordinate with other resources, and handle other activities as needed. The Community Service Sergeant will be administratively responsible for tracking the completion of tasks and ensuring the appropriate resources are utilized to ensure optimum service.

Community Policing Action Form (CPAF)

An issue which requires a community policing response will be documented on a Community Policing Action Form (CPAF). The CPAF is part of a tracking system which defines the issue, assigns a response strategy, and documents the result or completion of the task. The use of this tracking form will ensure accountability, both to document the task has been completed, as well as to document the activity of all involved personnel. The issue can come from a variety of sources, such as a resident contact, district service line call, tip line call, identified crime pattern, community need or any other issue as determined by the CSS.

CPAF Example

As an example, a CSO may identify an issue brought up by a citizen, related to a juvenile problem at a convenience store, during late evening hours. After researching the issue, the CSO would prepare a CPAF for review by the CSS. The CPAF would identify the problem and assign a task to one Community Patrol Officer to conduct three consecutive-day directed patrols. After approval, the CSS would assign the CPAF to an evening shift Watch Commander. The task would be assigned to a Community Patrol Officer working that area during those

hours. The CPAF would be closed out by documenting all actions taken (reports, FIRs, other contacts, etc.). The completed CPAF would be reviewed by the CSS, who would determine if any further action is needed or further contacts made. The citizen would be recontacted with the results.

Investigative Services Bureau and Administrative Services Bureau personnel will be assigned to complete CPAF items by the major or manager of the appropriate division. These issues will typically be in addition to normal bureau activities where a specific community issue has been identified and requires action.

Weekly Community Strategy Meeting

A structured weekly meeting will be held to identify these issues and assign tasks. The meeting will be attended by designated supervisors from all bureaus. The meeting will cover issues such as current crime patterns, community issues, and the results of completed CPAFs.

Uniform Services Bureau Expansion

This expansion will ensure that all officers, sergeants, and lieutenants will actively engage in the community policing philosophy. This redistribution will provide more personnel than the current staffing model requires; it will allow officers to be "unplugged" for periods of time to work on community issues without impacting the staffing requirements of the shifts. Directed Patrols (DP) will continue to be a "bottom up" opportunity for officers to engage issues they identify, while the CPAF items will be assigned activities, i.e., "top down," directed to them to accomplish.

Updated Community Policing Training

All employees will receive additional training on the expansion of community policing. Additionally, sworn employees will receive more intensive training defining their specific policing roles and responsibilities. The classes will also provide training related to the new tracking system to be implemented to ensure tasks are completed and documented appropriately.

Staffing Expansion of Street Crimes Unit

The success of the Project Respect Unit, the Gun Abatement Program (GAP) and, most recently, the Street Crimes Unit, has identified a valuable enforcement resource within the Department. This resource is a critical component in resolving drug and crime related issues in the community.

The Street Crimes Unit is presently staffed by a lieutenant, two sergeants and twelve officers. The current work schedule, although flexible, is typically planned for a four-day work week with ten-hour shifts.

The already successful Street Crimes Unit will be expanded by one sergeant and eight officers, with an even greater emphasis placed on the enforcement of narcotic and prostitution related crimes.

The planned operation of the unit will be expanded to cover seven days a week. They will be responsible for working where a team approach is best utilized, such as street level drug sales and prostitution. Also building on the success of Operation Safe Summer, the expanded unit will also be able to interact with the community by making referrals for social services and other available support programs as needed.

Creation of a Cyber-Detective in the Economic Crimes Unit

Some criminal activity cannot be addressed directly by traditional community policing efforts. One significant area of concern is Internet-based criminal activity, such as identity theft and child pornography. Due to this increased activity of computer-based crime and the technical complexity of building successful cases, a new position will be created in the Investigative Services Bureau to address this. The Cyber-Detective position will focus on computer-based criminal activity and establish liaison with internal and external resources which specialize in these knowledge areas. The Cyber-Detective will also provide expert assistance to other investigators within the Department. The Cyber-Detective will be assigned to the Economic Crimes Unit.

Performance commitments to our community will be established as follows:

- *Community policing will be practiced "24 hours a day/7 days a week" by all Department personnel.*
- *Citizen calls to the District Community Service Lines will be returned within 24 hours.*
- *A Department representative will attend scheduled neighborhood meetings.*
- *There will be dedicated Community Service Officers whose sole responsibility is to liaison with the community.*
- *Community Patrol Officers will be available and given time to address community issues around the clock.*

Department Community Retreat

In March of 2007, a Department Community Retreat will be held. The community has always played a role in shaping the Police Department and this agency is committed to involve community members as it moves forward. At the Retreat, community and Department representatives will be asked to:

- *Identify specific measurements to determine the success of community policing.*
- *Review and recommend revisions to performance evaluations of employees to gauge individual success relating to employees' community policing efforts.*
- *Review and recommend revisions to the Department's Performance Measures to gauge Department success relating to community policing initiatives and all other Department operations.*
- *Review and recommend changes to new employee training and field training programs to ensure community policing is a core component.*