

June 8, 2010

**Report to the Mayor and the City Council
City of Austin**

Your Public Safety Commission met Monday, June 7 at 4:00 p.m. in the Boards and Commissions meeting room. We had one item on the agenda requiring a vote of the Commission and updates from Chief Al Eells on the public safety cameras and grant activity from the three Departments, Police EMS and Fire. We heard citizen concerns on our Commission efforts, the cameras and grant efforts by departments. Several citizens came and provided prepared testimony on the existence of various crimes in their neighborhoods and urged us to address needs for policing resources. We noted their concern of safety in their neighborhoods, their fear of crime and their concerns about the relative response of police.

This meeting and this one action agenda item represents the culmination of a great deal of effort on the part of the Public Safety Commission and all persons and groups involved with the Commission. I think the recommendation speaks cautiously yet directly to concerns we have about ensuring the public safety of all in Austin. Austin today is increasingly a national and an international city. We are the capital of the nation's second largest state that even in very difficult economic times sets a pace and a model for others in the United States and North America. Texas is the nation's leading exporting state and our educational and research institutions are recognized and are an important resource in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Yet we are also faced not simply with local crime but with a frightening level of civic deterioration along our border and in many parts of Mexico as well as Central America. Never in the past has Austin been as susceptible to public safety threats that originate far from the city's limits and this emerging reality was reflected in our findings and this motion.

We passed one motion unanimously to endorse measured and focused increases in resources to Police, Fire and EMS in the coming fiscal year. These recommended increases are based upon public testimony in our meetings in December, January, March, April and May by our Departments, the presidents of the three associations of public safety employees and substantial public testimony about safety matters. The testimony we received this spring included expert testimony from three major Federal and State entities (FBI, DEA and DPS) that work with our Public Safety Departments.

These are our detailed recommendations in the motion we passed:

The Austin Public Safety Commission's recommendations for public safety departments' funding in the 2010/2011 City of Austin budget.

These are our recommendations for Police, EMS and Fire.

The timing for additional funding in each of these recommendations reflects the Commission's concerted attempt to balance the public safety needs of the community with the recognized realities of funding resources in each upcoming budget.

Police

Austin police chief Art Acevedo testified before the Commission that APD is 500 officers short of what a city the size of Austin, both in terms of population and geography, must have to serve effectively the community. Austin now has approximately 1.5 officers per thousand population, while Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Fort Worth have between 2.5 and 3.5. The PSEM consolidation (airport police and park rangers) into APD impacts the officers per thousand population calculation as these additional officers also brought with them responsibilities that had to be assumed by APD. Significant annual increases in both emergency and non-emergency calls have caused unacceptably long response times with the attendant stress on the system. In calendar year 2009 APD had 41,915 emergency calls, with an average response time of 7:51, and 327,523 non-emergency calls with an average response time 22:55, for a total of 369,438 calls for service. Taking a mandatory proactive approach and looking forward, without additional resources, there obviously will be increases in response times because of increased call volume. The effect of this shortfall of officers is seen in the number of fatal and critical injury accidents (which are falling in the rest of the country), in the absolute number of residential and commercial burglaries, and of burglaries of vehicles. Vandalism and graffiti plague our neighborhoods. The best deterrent to all of this is high police visibility, which is impossible with so few officers. "Community Policing", especially in working with kids to keep them out of gangs, is also not a reality because the department is so understaffed that patrol officers only have enough time to go from call to call. The average response time to even the highest priority calls is too high. At the April meeting the Commission heard testimony from representatives of the FBI, DEA, DPS and APD regarding the increasing gang/drug cartel challenge in Austin, with an associated increase in violent and property crimes, and that Austin has been designated a High Intensity Drug Area (HIDA) by the office of National Drug Control Policy. The DEA resident agent in charge recently informed the commission chair Lauderdale that in order to obtain maximum benefit from the High Intensity Drug Area (HIDA) designation, the Austin Police Department will be called upon to support the HIDA task force with dedicated officers, thus stretching the already scarce APD personnel even further. He does not change his opinion from his testimony that drug and cartel activity is increasing significantly in Austin.

1. All of these factors have led the Commission to have as a primary recommendation increasing APD's authorized manpower strength by 50 officers effective March 1, 2011, and by 50 officers effective September 30, 2011.
2. By January 1, 2011, APD should create and complete a blueprint of data and judgments, to provide justification for the likely increases in future budget years in APD's authorized strength with on-going analysis of the following factors: (1) Reported crime; (2) Emergency calls; (3) All calls for police service; (4) Existing and projected population growth and demographic changes in

Austin and the surrounding metropolitan area, combined with the commuting patterns into Austin that increases Austin's actual population during various day-parts; and (5) Existing and projected crime patterns, most especially organized crime and gang/cartel activity, which is important if Austin is to have a mandatory proactive, anticipatory rather than reactive budgeting process for law enforcement. The data and subsequent analysis should provide an empirical foundation for a ratio of officers to citizens of greater than 2.5 officers per 1,000 people (looking at the total population which will always be greater than the number of Austin residents) as a minimum required for an effective police department.

3. We anticipate this blueprint will support the need for the higher ratio than currently exists and the Commission recommends a Council resolution to make similar increases in APD's authorized strength in the 2011/2012, 2012/2013, 2013/2014, and 2014/2015 budgets, or more quickly as need indicates and funding resources are available. We urge APD to investigate all technologies to improve performance, build public trust and control costs. (One opportunity to control costs would be partnering with Travis County's Starflight program for pilots, mechanics and hangering facilities for APD's helicopter operation.)

EMS

1. The 2010/2011 budget must fund staff and equipment for 24 hour coverage Medic units for the Harris Ridge station (Medic 29) and for the Harris Branch station (Medic 32). Units had been in these stations, but funded by Travis County until facilities could be built to accommodate these units. The County stations have been built, and are now occupied by the units that had been placed on a temporary basis in the Harris Ridge and Harris Branch stations. In order to continue to provide EMS coverage for the neighborhoods in the first response territories of the Harris Ridge and Harris Branch stations, EMS has continued to staff these stations with overtime personnel. It is important to emphasize that both the Harris Ridge and the Harris Branch stations must be Medic units, and not "Demand" units, to insure protection on a 24 hour basis for their surrounding neighborhoods. Construction is scheduled to be completed in July 2010 for joint use EMS/Fire station to serve the annexed Avery Ranch area, and a Medic unit for this station should be funded in the 2010/2011 budget.
2. A "Demand" unit must be funded to go into operation on April 1, 2011, to assist in the department's efforts to reduce response times for emergency medical calls, and reduce the need for moving Medic units out of their first response territories during expected high call volume time frames. This is an economical way to manage both call volume loads throughout a 24 hour period and the critical issue of paramedic fatigue. Reducing the need to move units around the system's coverage area during high call volume periods will also reduce fuel costs and vehicle maintenance and replacement costs.
3. Because of the system's increasing call volume, along with issues relating to paramedic safety issues and to be able to provide instructions to callers on how to manage patients until an EMS

unit arrives (initiating CPR, controlling bleeding, delivering babies, opening obstructed airways, etc.), three additional communication medics should be added for the EMS dispatch center.

The Commission noted that EMS paramedics voted to decline a contracted pay increase, providing the City \$2,300,000 over a three year period, on the assumption that the money would be used to provide necessary improvement in the EMS system. Also, EMS fees were increased which was expected to add over \$4,000,000 in additional revenue to the City's general fund on an annual basis. Yet a unit was not placed in the 2009/2010 budget despite increasing call volume. Thus no unit has been added since the 2006/2007 budget.

Fire

Many buildings in the City, such as apartment buildings and homes, were built under construction and fire codes that have proven to be inadequate, as seen in the number of working fires. With a large percentage of these fires, battalion chiefs require only additional manpower and not additional apparatus, but the only way to get this additional manpower is by pulling units out of their first response territories and also moving other units out of their first response territories to provide backup coverage, resulting in increased response times for fire and medical calls that occur in the neighborhoods covered by the stations whose units have been moved. In addition, fires that occur in the new high rise residential buildings would require significant manpower resources. Because of the potential need for significant manpower at any working fire, a large number of engine and ladder companies are sent on all alarms. To reduce the increased response times in the first alarm territories in all of these situations due to dispatching so many units only because of the need for manpower and not apparatus, the Commission recommends the following:

1. For the five fire units that currently do not have four firefighter staffing, until the goal of having four firefighters on each unit is reached there be funding for one of these units to have an additional firefighter effective March 1 and September 30 of each budget period. Four person staffing is critical in situations involving civilians and/or firefighters entrapped in burning structures, as it allows for a significantly greater opportunity for a successful outcomes in such situations.
2. There are three special operations/rescue/hazmat units with two firefighter staffing. Placing two additional firefighters on each of these units would allow the units to assume if necessary the manpower responsibility of a ladder company, thus reducing the need for a ladder company, with its manpower and technical expertise, to be dispatched on first and additional alarm fires. Therefore funding for increasing from two to four fighters on the three rescue units should occur for one of these units on September 30 of each of the next three budget years.

911 Center

Response times for APD, EMS and AFD are impacted by inadequate staffing in the 911 communications center because of delays in a caller being able to reach a 911 call taker who has the responsibility of transferring requests for EMS and APD to those dispatch centers, as well as taking information for APD responses. This deficit must be addressed as soon as possible.

These are difficult times and our City is faced with increased rates of crime, high call volume for Fire and EMS services, stubborn traffic congestion and potential future problems coming from the growth of Austin and its visibility across the nation. We are a city visited by hundreds of thousands of people every year and with a growing host of business, cultural and recreational activities that have an international component. This success that the City enjoys derives from having neighborhoods, business and governmental settings that are safe. To continue this desired balance of tradition and innovation requires us to address fundamental shortfalls that are developing in public safety resources. We have therefore concluded even in this difficult financial time that we must address these shortfalls as the increased expenditures represent investments in our future.

We expect public safety issues including assessing adequate preparation of the City's resources and the conduct of members of these City Public Safety resources will continue to be important public concerns.

Michael Lauderdale
Chair Public Safety Commission