

The Austin Public Safety Commission's Report for February 2011

The Public Safety Commission met on Monday February 7, 2011 in the Boards and Commissions Meeting Room in the Austin City Hall. The Commission opened with the availability of time for members of the public to address the Commission on general issues and then moved to calendared items dealing with reports from the City Public Safety Departments, and monitoring efforts concerned with staffing configurations and needs in the 911 System and in EMS ambulances.

Reports from City Public Safety Departments

Chief Carter provided an overview of activity for the three Departments followed with focused commentary from Chiefs Shumard and Evans on responses to citizens' calls for service. Major business included the following:

- APD Communications Manager Marcia Brooks provided a major presentation on 911-call volume and characteristics with comparison to previous years and other cities of similar size. With a current full-time staff of 79 and no increases for several years, it was readily apparent to the Commission that increased resources are needed to bring staff up to about 100 full-time persons. The exact number of staff is not the responsibility of the Public Safety Commission but rather the effort is to judge if serious threats to public safety are appearing. The opinion of the Commission is that there are insufficient numbers of full-time staff in the Call Center to meet current demand and to appropriately direct calls for service to the correct entities in Public Safety.
- EMS service patterns were examined followed by an in-depth commentary provided by the Medical Director of EMS, Paul Hinchey.
- The Commission approved new bylaws in accordance with changes provided by the City Council.
- The Commission was advised that the authority to select the Public member of the Public Policy Advisory Committee to the ARIC Austin Regional Intelligence Center (ARIC) shall remain the responsibility of the City Council.

Conclusions

The first year of the new Public Safety Commission has included careful reviews of budgetary, staffing and equipment needs for Police, EMS and Fire. The Commission ends the first meeting of the new year, 2011, with two important conclusions:

First, the level of full-time staff seriously compromises the entry point of citizens' requests to public safety in the 911 Call System. The Commission judges from City staff reports that the system stays at the state of the art in terms of available telephone communication technology including the ability to tie calls to GPS technology and the emerging shift to cell and Internet systems. City staff is abreast of software improvements to assist in determining the severity of calls and the resulting response in terms of level of equipment and personnel from EMS, Fire and Police. The Public Safety Commission urges consideration of adding more full-time staff to the Call Center to meet the increased city population since the current staff levels were created sev-

eral years ago. The Public Safety Commission remains concerned with how well the Call Centers and the three Public Safety Departments factor the level of responses to calls. While adequate numbers of personnel and equipment are needed for every call, levels that go beyond what is needed both waste scarce assets and tie up resources that might be needed on other calls. There was a time in years past that the relative level of city resources permitted redundancy in services but that is no longer the situation. It is doubtful that a more favorable revenue situation will exist in Austin for several more years and every effort is required to carefully and prudently use current resources.

Two, the Austin Police Department remains substantially under-staffed with rising rates of property crimes, serious traffic problems and the specter of powerful criminal organizations growing as a presence in Austin. The existence of the Austin Regional Intelligence Center is an important addition to the City's ability to factor criminal threats. Citizen concerns about crime are high as well as concerns about appropriate conduct of police and the use of data gathered on citizens in the general operation of the police department and in the newly created Austin Regional Intelligence Center. The Public Safety Commission is aware of this constellation of concerns and will carefully monitor police responses, citizen concerns and crime reports.

Contextual Features for Austin in the Next Several Years

The role of the Public Safety Commission is to examine information from the City and other sources such as state and federal agencies about matters that affect the safety of Austin citizens. Austin is unique among Texas cities in that its public safety resources serve City residents and also the people including visitors and structures of the State's Capital as well as the State's largest university. The Commission operates in an open forum with its meetings broadcast on public access television and depends, among other sources, on public topics and testimony to identify areas of concern. Deliberations and conclusions then take the form of advice to the Austin City Council.

The Commission has begun its second year of existence and came into being at an important junction in civic life in Austin. Today Austin, unlike ten or twenty to thirty years ago, is no longer a small college town where the state capital is also located. Now, it is a major urban area that numbers about 1 and 1/4 million people and is part of a large triangle from Houston to San Antonio to Austin to Dallas-Ft. Worth that represents more than 3/4's of the state's population. Austin is an urban center and Texas is now an urban state. Increasingly public safety is addressed in the context of ever more density in housing and businesses and crowded roadways.

The economy of Austin during most of the 20th Century was based upon the earnings of state employees and activities around the state capital and the University of Texas at Austin. Agriculture and trade center activities were always evident but small compared to these two features. In the later 30 years or so of the 20th Century, Austin broadened its economic base in high technology drawing on the talents and intellectual resources of the University and attracting such manufacturing companies as IBM, Motorola, 3M, AMD, Dell, National Instruments and smaller entities that were part of the "biosystem" of high tech creativity and manufacturing. These companies paid very good wages with extensive benefits and through both the plant and equipment and the wages significantly enhanced the tax base of the City. High tech growth and visibility reached a peak with the consortium to create increased computer board and chip densities in mi-

croelectronics and the explosion of software companies into 2000. That growth ended in the early years of the 21st Century with the "dot com bust" and then the ensuing deflation of the housing boom then bust, occurring across the country and affecting Austin to a lesser extent and some suburban areas of Austin to a greater extent.

Now to a significant degree Austin is concerned about mending its economy. Tax revenues are down and property values are dropping and that will, in time, decrease tax revenues from property unless rates are raised. Austin has, relative to many other areas of the country, a low unemployment rate but it is, nevertheless, significantly higher than it has been since the oil and real estate bust of the 1980's. There are some efforts to create other areas of economic activity such as expanding tourism and promoting music but both sectors are plagued with low incomes and few benefits for most employed in those sectors.

The most significant immediate factor that will have a consequence for the Austin community is the shape of the state budget. The Texas State Auditor estimates about 40,000 state employees live in Austin and near Austin, and how these employees will fare with the new state budget is an important part of the City of Austin's economic outlook. This is early in the session but it appears likely that there may be fewer State employees and less average income per employee perhaps through requiring employees to pay a larger share of insurance premiums. The state budget will also likely reduce the amount of money passed down to local governments and public schools resulting in tighter budgets for government and local providers to government. A smaller state budget will also affect state-supported and/or affiliated institutions of higher education particularly the University of Texas at Austin, Texas State University and Texas A&M University all of which have some sort of footprint in the Austin area including traffic at the airport but also in tourism and entertainment as well as direct higher education functions.

Perhaps the most attractive economic horizon that beckons for Austin is greater participation in regional and global economic activities. From the earliest, the high tech companies were part of that perspective and that is often a double-edged sword as for illustration one original Austin company, Dell, has moved much of its manufacturing out of Austin and out of the United States seeking areas with lower labor costs. The most promising opportunity in building a world rather than local level economic footprint lies immediately south of Texas. Mexico is nearby less than 230 air miles and about 240 auto miles via IH 35. Trade between Mexico and Texas is sizeable and Austin with its locus of state government and scientific resources can represent great potential for economic growth for Austin with all of Latin America.

The two largest public safety challenges for Austin in this year and probably for this decade are related to the ways Austin has changed and the world economy. Today job growth in Austin is slow but significant; however the slowest area is for individuals with limited education and skills (high school and below). However that low level of growth of entry-level jobs does not stem the flow of people moving to Austin to seek employment. Even persons recently released from the state prisons are far more likely to come to Austin than were originally sent from the city. The reality is that the availability of jobs in Austin as compared to many other cities is relatively stronger as are assisted housing, health and social services. Both highly educated and skilled persons and those with few skills are all attracted to Austin.

Poor and unemployed or underemployed persons may not necessarily mean more property crime but some comparative data suggest that it will. Austin has a young and mobile population and thus may have a population more likely to use "recreational drugs" and that may mean more illegal drugs coming into Austin. Testimony last year from the Austin Police, the FBI, DEA and Texas State Police suggest that is a developing situation and the recent arrests of persons that are members of one of the state's more dangerous gangs, the Texas Syndicate, and their apparent connection with Mexico's Gulf Cartel as the source of cocaine, methamphetamines, marijuana and heroin provide a fair warning of a growing public safety threat. It is important, though, to understand this most recent arrest in early February of 2011 is not the first indication of Mexican cartel involvements in Austin in drug trafficking. There have been several instances in the last two years and the attached table from the 2008 Justice Department's reports indicates clear tracks of growing organized crime involvement a good four years ago.

Mexican Economy, Elections and the Drug Challenge

How these threats of high and persistent un- and underemployment and organized crime are expressed will weigh heavily on what recommendations the Public Safety Commission will make this year. Even as the economy of the United States struggles, a more difficult challenge is faced by Mexico. While it is the 13th largest economy in the world and has vast natural resources, it also has vast problems. The problems include a youthful, urban population lacking in sufficient higher and technical education. It was not always so young and urban but became that way during the last years of the 20th Century as it as a nation sought to change and build a more prosperous society. In essence Mexico sought to make the transition from a nation of rural, self-sufficient farming families to an urban population in about a generation, a transition that took the United States three generations and probably four for England or Germany. It did this while sustaining high population growth; so high that the country's ability to provide education and high earnings jobs was overwhelmed.

During the 1980's Mexico thought it had found three solutions to this transition and the population's needs. One was to use the export earnings from a growing petroleum exporting sector to create and fund a middle class of engineers, teachers, nurses, physicians, police officers and civil servants. Two was to encourage excess labor to move temporarily to the United States, work in construction, agriculture, meat processing and tourism and send earnings back to Mexico. Three was to change a century old restriction on letting foreign companies own factories in Mexico and hire Mexican workers. Mexico did this to create jobs and also to increase the technical education of Mexicans that would work in such factories.

There were some successes in this strategy. Mexico now clearly has a middle class. Funds repatriated to Mexico were a godsend to millions of Mexicans and some of the maquilas both generated jobs and begin to create an entrepreneurial class to build Mexican factories. There were also shortcomings though this is not the place to detail many of them. But the most significant shortcoming was that Mexico may have started with this 3 point strategy too little and too late.

One of the things that overtook the strategy was the worldwide economic decline of the past decade that ended the real estate boom in the United States and saw many jobs for Mexicans laboring in the States dry up. That economic decline also affected jobs in maquilas with the employment rates still off in most Mexican cities. The last item is the now apparent state of decline of

Mexico's oil fields. Mexico will likely not have oil to export in three years and most of that goes to the United States. All these things with a young and urban population, now substantially unemployed and having few means of support, provide a ready recruiting ground for the cartels along with the reality of Americans, as a voracious customer of illegal drugs. That is the volatile mix that we face with cartels appearing in Austin.

If the world economy revives only slowly, if the Mexican government loses its nerve to fight the drug cartels, if high Mexican unemployment does not lessen, if American illegal drug use continues then we have truly sown the wind and will inherit the hurricane. That is the most significant exogenous threat that Austin faces in public safety. Signs are that the hurricane draws near.

A dangerous portend of that hurricane can be seen in an editorial of the Austin American Statesman in January commenting on a number of very wealthy Mexicans attending events at Governor Perry's inauguration. The editorial suggested that part of their presence was the fact that some were looking to move both capital and family members to Texas to escape the growing violence in Mexico. Other sources including the print media speak of "little Monterreys" in the Valley, Houston and San Antonio as Mexican citizens with some wealth have begun to relocate outside of Mexico. While this migration will increase real estate values in these locales and perhaps bring and generate new businesses, it has a far different consequence for Mexico. This is flight capital. It is both money and talented people giving up on a country and looking for a safer home. But what are left behind are much greater poverty and lessened resources to build a vigorous economy, strong families, safe communities and a desirable future. Such events happening in Africa or Asia are an intellectual consideration for Texans, but in Mexico this is a stern warning of what next heads this way.

Now Mexico is facing the final two years of its six-year Presidential term. President Calderon has committed the country to removing the cartels, the violence, the corruption of police and courts; yet victory is not in sight. Indeed, if the driving forces we have sketched are correct there are many more years of indeterminate struggle ahead and some of that struggle will find its way to the streets of Austin. In most cases this will be people eager for work and an opportunity to improve their lot in life. But there will be some persons in this stream of displaced persons that will come with an agenda from one or more of the several cartels now operating throughout Mexico.

Such strategic and tactical considerations across all demand areas of public safety are continuing topics of the Public Safety Commission and its efforts to provide recommendations to the City Council. These considerations are especially important in a time of declining or uncertain city revenues as well as forces such as rising unemployment and violence coming into the City from other regions that may increase threats to public safety as well as compromise the City's ability to pay for these services.

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National Drug Intelligence Center

Attorney General's Report to Congress on the Growth of Violent Street Gangs in Suburban Areas

April 2008

Appendix C. Suspected Connections Between Gangs and Drug Trafficking Organizations

Table 1. Suspected Connections Between Gangs and Drug Trafficking Organizations

Type of Gang	Gang Name	Level of Gang	Suspected DTO Connection(s)	Number of States Where Gang is Active
Street	18th Street	National	Arellano-Félix DTO Guzmán-Loera DTO	28
	Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation	National	Italian Organized Crime	21
	Asian Boyz	National	Vietnamese DTOs	14
	Black Peace Stones	National	Nigerian DTOs	22
	Bloods	National	Mexican DTOs/Cartel	37
	Crips	National	Valencia-Cornelio DTO Carrillo-Fuentes DTO Guzmán-Loera DTO	41
	Florencia 13	Regional	Arellano-Félix DTO	5

Prison	Gangster Disciples	National	Zambada-García DTO	33
	Latin Kings	National	Zambada-García DTO Carrillo-Fuentes DTO	34
	Mara Salvatrucha	National	Carrillo-Fuentes DTO Gulf Cartel	38
	Tiny Rascal Gangsters	National	Vietnamese DTOs Wo Hop To Triad	16
	United Blood Nation	Regional	Italian Organized Crime	7
	Vice Lord Nation	National	Nigerian DTOs	28
	Barrio Azteca	National	Carrillo-Fuentes DTO Guzmán-Loera DTO	2
	Black Guerrilla Family	Regional	Arellano-Félix DTO Carrillo-Fuentes DTO	4
	Hermanos de Pistoleros Latinos	Local	Gulf Cartel	1
	Mexican Mafia	National	Carrillo-Fuentes DTO Arellano-Félix DTO Guzmán-Loera DTO	13
	Mexikanemi	National	Carrillo-Fuentes DTO Gulf Cartel	3
	Ñeta	National	Italian Organized Crime	9
	Norteños	National	Mexican DTOs/Cartels	10
	Sureños	National	Arellano-Félix DTO Carrillo-Fuentes DTO Guzmán-Loera DTO	31

Outlaw Motorcycle	Tango Blast	Local	Mexican DTOs/Cartel	1
	Texas Syndicate	Local	Mexican DTOs/Cartel	1
	Bandidos	National	Carrillo-Fuentes DTO	16
	Hells Angels	National	Zambada-García DTO Caro-Quintero DTO Arellano-Félix DTO Italian Organized Crime	28
	Mongols	Regional	Arellano-Félix DTO	8
	Outlaws	National	Italian Organized Crime	21
	Pagan's	Regional	Italian Organized Crime	11
	Vagos	National	Arellano-Félix DTO	4

Source: Federal, state, and local law enforcement.

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