

Final Report

Police Operations

Youngtown, Arizona



POLICE OPERATIONS

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I C M A C O N S U L T I N G S E R V I C E S

Submitted by and reply to:

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Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

ICMA Background

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) is the premier local government leadership and management organization. Since 1914, ICMA's mission has been to create excellence in local governance by developing and advocating professional local government management worldwide. ICMA provides an information clearinghouse, technical assistance, training, and professional development to more than 9,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals throughout the world.

ICMA Consulting Services

The ICMA Consulting Services team helps communities solve critical problems by providing management consulting support to local governments. One of ICMA Consulting Services' areas of expertise is public safety services, which encompasses the following areas and beyond: organizational development, leadership and ethics, training, assessment of calls for service workload, staffing requirements analysis, designing standards and hiring guidelines for police and fire chief recruitment, police/fire consolidation, community-oriented policing, and city/county/regional mergers.

I. Introduction

ICMA was retained to conduct a review of the Youngtown Police Department in order to: (1) Identify labor-management relations, communication and interpersonal strengths, weakness, and opportunities for improvement in the Youngtown Police Department that impact the efficiency of the operations; and (2) Identify recommendations to address any issues.

ICMA was retained prior to the separation of the Youngtown Police Department's Police Chief Kimberly Johnson (and did have some discussions with that individual), but the majority of the review involved in this report occurred after former Chief Johnson's employment separation.

ICMA reviewed whether the operations of the department met commonly accepted practices for a small town Police Department and, if not, to identify alternative policies and procedures to be implemented to improve the operations of the agency. ICMA also reviewed whether there exist reasonable alternative strategies to provide police services to the community.

The observations and recommendations contained in this report stem from an on-site review which included reviews of records and interviews with members of the Police Department, elected and appointed town officials, and legal representatives of the town and we thank them for the considerable time and effort that they expended working with us.

Observations

A. Issue: Contracting for Police Services

The Town of Youngtown Police Department is comprised of 12 sworn positions, and that number includes the Lieutenant and Chief of Police. The department provides basic police services to a population of approximately 5,000 persons in an area slightly larger than one square mile. The community is overwhelmingly residential and primarily single-family homes with minimal commercial and multifamily properties. The town is transversed by a multilane highway where a significant amount of the agency's enforcement activities are focused.

The level of criminal activity in the community is extremely low. For example, in 2008 there were a total of only 17 serious crimes against persons. (2008 is the last year that FBI statistics are available.) Of these, 3 were robberies and the remainder (14) were assaults. There were only 89 serious property crimes in the town in that time period (burglary, theft, motor vehicle thefts and arson). This level of activity is consistent with a very small, middle class, residential community such as Youngtown. However, these statistics demonstrate that the town is paying an exceptionally high financial price "per unit" of serious crime.

While we have identified commonly accepted "best practices" which should be implemented within the agency (and discussed later in this report), we find that the most significant finding of our review is that the town must determine whether it can afford to continue to operate the Police Department (as modified as described below) or whether the town should contract for law enforcement services with either the Sheriff's Office or another municipal agency. There are numerous reasons that the town should

seriously consider disbanding the Police Department and obtaining law enforcement services elsewhere.

A. Costs

The current police agency costs the town approximately \$1.3 million per year. That figure is an exceptionally expensive way to provide minimal law enforcement services to 5,000 people. (The town primarily receives basic patrol services.) The Police Department currently is assisted by the Sheriff's Office and/or other law enforcement agencies in the event of a serious crime. Accordingly, the town could receive the current level of services provided by the Youngtown Police Department through a contract that would cost significantly less than the \$1.3 million currently incurred annually to operate the Police Department.

Should the town continue to provide police services through the Youngtown Police Department, we would recommend increasing the funding to the department by either adding additional personnel or altering work schedules and incurring overtime costs. (Discussed in detail later in this report).

Certainly there is a significant economy of scale with such a contracted service. The geography, population, and call for service workload in Youngtown would warrant the existence of a single patrol zone which could easily be policed by one on duty officer backed up by officers in surrounding patrol zones. In fact, the entire Town of Youngtown is smaller, in population and land area, than a typical police patrol zone. By contracting for services, additional resources can be brought into the community on an "as needed" basis rather than staffing, and paying for a continuous presence that is unnecessary most of the time.

B. Professional Capabilities

Even more critical than cost-containment is the level of operational capacity of the Police Department. We note that the Department, as currently configured, can provide only basic patrol services and relies on outside agencies for assistance for work beyond that level. The Sheriff's Office has been a willing and able partner to the Department. Therefore, the Sheriff's Office (or another larger agency) could begin to provide law enforcement services to the town through a seamless interaction.

While Youngtown is indeed a relatively safe community with few episodes of major incidents, the reality is that it is located in a large urban area and serious crimes can well occur within the community. It is essential that the officers responding to a major incident, particularly the first responders, possess the highest quality professional capabilities. Attracting and retaining high-quality police candidates is not just a function of salary and benefits. A review of benefits provided by police agencies within the relevant region indicates that the Youngtown Police Department compensation package is competitive. However, generally higher-quality law enforcement candidates gravitate towards larger police agencies whereas individuals incapable of working within larger agencies tend to work for small agencies. The Youngtown Police Department is a small agency. As described more fully below, maintaining a small agency results in lower service quality and less qualified candidates.

B. Career Opportunities

By contracting with a larger agency, the town could be policed by individuals who have far greater career opportunities than those that exist for the members of the Youngtown Police Department. While there is a certain

quaintness about having the same police officer working the same beat, performing the same tasks, for years on end (as is the case in Youngtown and other very small departments) we have observed that this kind of lacking of upward mobility opportunities and sameness of daily activities often results in disgruntled, unmotivated employees. The best law enforcement officers are those who are routinely sharpening their professional skills and seeking greater challenges -- conditions that our review did not find within the Youngtown Police Department. (The Youngtown Police Department is not unique in this regard, as most small agencies are unable to provide such opportunities.)

For these reasons, we recommend that the town explore the possibility of obtaining law enforcement services from another agency. For example, the town currently enjoys high quality fire rescue capabilities provided by a regional agency (the Sun City Fire Department). This relationship provides an example that the town's residents can obtain high-quality police services without the need to operate an independent agency.

II. Best Practices Recommendations

Should Youngtown decide to continue to provide law enforcement services through its own policing department, we recommend the town adopt a series of “best practices.” These “best practices” fall largely within the area of personnel practices, policies and procedures and human resource issues. The Town spends considerable funds on facilities and equipment for the Police Department. For example, with the exception of the lack of a locker room for personnel, the police building is a more than satisfactory facility to house the small agency. And, police vehicles are in good condition and properly maintained.

We observed that the primary Human Resources issue revolves around recruitment and retention of police officers. As previously discussed, an agency as small as the town’s generally is unable to retain top caliber entry-level police personnel and finds that its pool of candidates are either individuals having been unsuitable for larger agencies or individuals who intend to start at Youngtown and move to a larger department when the opportunity arises. Accordingly, the town largely is a “training ground” for inexperienced police officers, and therefore we recommend that the town adjust its pay and benefit plan. Since the primary motive for these entry level police officers is to obtain employment elsewhere after being trained by the town, entry level and early career pay and benefits need not be comparable to other agencies since pay is not the attractor for these candidates. Then, should an experienced officer (one that could easily obtain employment at another larger, higher paying agency) remain with Youngtown, the town could implement and follow a pay scale that significantly increases pay levels.

Entry level police officers need appropriate supervision and training by experienced, well-trained and educated first line supervisors. These individuals could be persons who have served in supervisor capacities in larger agencies and now have retired honorably from those department's service. There are large numbers of retired and soon to be retired police officers throughout the country who would be interested in extending their careers in a low workload environment like Youngtown. Since many of these individuals will be drawing retirement pay from their original agency, this potentially lowers necessary salary levels for these positions. However, more importantly, such individuals would bring to the town years of experience and training and a maturity level so important for a small agency. We note that the current Lieutenant and the current Interim Chief have both successfully completed careers in larger, well-managed agencies and these individuals should serve as an example of the caliber of personnel the department could attract if the employment requirements for supervisory positions included lengthy police service combined with educational and training standards.

A. Probationary period

The Police Department should utilize a rigorous probationary period when individuals are hired and / or promoted within the Department. This period must include very detailed standards and documentation, and unlike other town employees the probationary period should last for up to two years for entry level personnel and one year for promotional status. A meaningful Field Training Officer (FTO) program should be implemented with detailed descriptions of each type of activity the officer must successfully master before completing the probationary assignment. Given the very low incidence of serious crimes in the town, it is likely that an officer will not experience all of the basic types of police calls within a more traditional probationary period, or one consistent with the rest of the town's employees.

Accordingly, the actual length of the probationary period should be determined not by the calendar but rather by the successful completion of specific training experiences.

The town should critically evaluate probationary employees, and should be willing to separate individuals quickly who are unable to meet minimum standards. We have found that agencies often find that poor performing, entry-level, probationary employees who are permitted to complete probation and gain permanent status are supervisory problems and poor performers, and end up terminating such employees after making the investment to train the employees.

B. Standardization

Well managed police agencies standardize all aspects of police functions to insure equal quality of service levels throughout the department. This standardization occurs through the promulgation of written directives, policies and procedures which are followed closely by officers and enforced by supervisors. However, policies and procedures are not stagnant and require regular updates and revisions to meet ever changing community conditions. While there are significant procedures that remain in place for long periods of time, there are also temporary procedures and orders designed to meet the needs of short term issues. These orders should always be in writing, properly disseminated and read and acknowledged by personnel with definitive effective dates.

Standardization should occur throughout the organization in uniforms, weapons, vehicles and equipment. For example all officers should be assigned standardized, town issued weapons and the use of privately owned weapons should be prohibited. Additionally, such weapons issued by the

town should be appropriate for use in a small town with limited incidents. For example, the types of crimes committed within the town does not warrant the routine use of SWAT type weapons. Such weapons are rarely, if ever, justified and require costly training.

C. Specialization

Our experience is that the smaller the agency the less appropriate specialized units are. Not only does such specialization bring additional, unnecessary costs, but rarely do persons working in such small agencies have the opportunity to hone specialized skills by continuous repetition experience occurring in larger departments. Given that Youngtown is adjacent to several other larger departments there simply is no need for the agency to have any specialized units (such as K-9).

D. Supervision

First line supervision is the critical component in any police agency. In virtually every police department that has experienced a break down in public confidence due to corruption, excessive force or other anomalies, the first line supervisors failed to identify the problem in advance or failed to act appropriately to stop in inappropriate behavior. Again in a small department, first line supervisors should have impeccable backgrounds and years of successful police experience. Since there typically is not a senior command level supervisor on duty, first line supervisors in small agencies actually have greater responsibilities than their counterparts in larger departments. They should be given the responsibility to actively manage their subordinates as well as the authority to do so. The chain of command should be clear and not overlapping so that each officer knows who he or she reports to. This

means, in a small department like Youngtown, that the two sergeants should not be concurrently on duty – each should have a specific, non-overlapping schedule. And again given the size of the department, they should have not only shift but also either geographical or time supervision responsibilities. For example, a sergeant in addition to being responsible for his shift tour supervision, should also be accountable for supervision of all activities within either a geographical portion of the town (one-half for example) or a portion of the entire patrol time (nights). This provides continuity of supervision even when there is not a sergeant actually on duty.

E. Shift Schedule

We note that the existing schedule at the time of our visit meets none of the above mentioned criteria. Shifts overlap at times in situations that do not require additional personnel. The two sergeants often work at the same time. Often there is no first line supervision in place and the schedule provides for one officer on duty, each day, for several hours in the early morning, which is generally inappropriate for policing agencies.

As a basic premise, we recommend that any police agency staff at least 2 officers on duty 24/7. In fact, states such as Florida have recognized this and have mandated that level of minimum staffing. This is not just a matter of officer safety but also of citizen safety. Any serious call for service, where a citizen's life is in jeopardy, requires at least two officers to respond. Any department that cannot financially afford to fund the staffing of two officers 24/7 should be disbanded. The current staffing level of the Police Department (12 officers, including Chief and Lieutenant) is not enough to meet the 2x24x7 requirement.

We recommend that the Police Department move to twelve hour shifts (42 hours average) which would provide not only the two officer minimum staffing but also better continuity of supervision. The schedule we have recommended meets the Fair Labor and Standards Act (FLSA) exemption for police departments. However, we understand that Arizona law is more stringent than the FLSA and that schedule would result in required overtime compensation of approximately \$70,000 per year. If the town cannot pay that cost, then there exists another reason to contract police services to ensure there is 2x24x7 coverage. If the town can absorb that cost, in our opinion, then the schedule will provide the appropriate staffing level as well as allow the Police Department to setup clear lines of supervision as described above.

(NOTE: This requirement to maintain at least two officers on duty at all times may well seem incongruous with our recommendation that the town contract for services and generally operate as one patrol zone in a bigger agency. However, in such an arrangement there would always be ample backup capabilities from the neighboring zone of the contracted department, consistent with how larger agencies operate successfully and more cost efficiently.)

Additionally we believe that the department should consider a different schedule for the Lieutenant. While there certainly needs to be a second in command of any agency, another drawback of operating a police department as small as Youngtown's is that it simply cannot afford to have two command staff members (chief and lieutenant) working the same hours. We recommend that they be placed on significantly differing schedules – with at least full 7 day per week coverage and ideally differing hours of assignment, including nights. Further, the lieutenant position should be scheduled to fill in as first line supervisor in the absence of the sergeants for vacation, sick leave, etc.

F. Agency Mission

Any successful police department or for that matter any successful organization has a clearly defined mission. The Youngtown Police Department needs such a mission statement which is clearly defined and adopted by the Town Council. The police department should operate to achieve this clearly defined mission. Those values must be articulated by the elected officials of the community – the citizen representatives. The Town Council's mission statement cannot be platitudes such as "stopping crime" or "arresting bad guys" but rather they must be a clearly defined mission statement explaining exactly what the department's focus is and how it will be evaluated on its success or failure.

We believe that the Youngtown Police Department, given its size and lack of serious crime, should be very service oriented. However, our review revealed that service orientation is not the primary goal of the officers. Rather, in our discussions with members of the Police Department, we found that their focus was in "crime fighting" even outside the jurisdictional boundaries of the agency. We believe that this focus is misplaced and counterproductive. Certainly the goal of the Police Department should be to reduce crime in the community – although given the very low crime rates existing, it appears that is not a major issue. But the Police Department should be a service oriented agency with a focus on meeting the community's lower, non-criminal needs. For example, although the town is serviced by an excellent fire / EMS system police officers should be trained to provide medical first responder assistance and equipped with Automatic External Defibrillators and dispatched to all cardiac emergency calls.

E. The Role of the Elected Body

In the Council – Manager form of government the Town Manager has supervisory authority over all department heads, including the Chief of Police. That, however, does not relieve the elected body of its role as the policy setters for the police department and all other municipal operations. The Town Council should routinely set policy direction for the Police Department and insist upon routine reporting by the department (through the Town Manager) as to its success in meeting those policy goals. Policy goals for the Council to consider include level of community policing (does the Council want school and neighborhood interaction), response time goals, community education, crime prevention programs, citizen involvement, etc.) We recommend that the Town Council establish such policy goals, clearly enunciate them, and hold the Police Department, thru the Town Manager, accountable for meeting them.

IV. Summary

The Town of Youngtown has an opportunity to enhance the law enforcement service to its citizens and, at the same time reduce the costs in providing those services. ICMA is currently working with numerous communities, large and small, on ways to “share services.” While the initial impetus of such efforts are typically cost reduction or avoidance, we are consistently finding that in those communities where such progressive actions are taken the end result is that not only can cost be reduced but services also improved – the ultimate “win – win” for the tax payer citizen. Again we note that the Town of Youngtown has already experienced such a situation with its regional fire / EMS service. The successful model is already in place in the community.

Hundreds of communities contract out police services but in our experience it is often a politically challenging option because communities have pride in their own men and women in uniform. Given the size of the town and the citizens’ needs, the town should examine whether its citizens are best served with a small, extremely limited police agency costing \$1.3 million annually or whether contracting services is more financially sound. The United States has approximately 18,000 police agencies – far more per capita than any other country in the world.

Contracting for police services requires the same attention to detail that any municipal contract requires – perhaps more. An integral part of such agreements involve constant monitoring and liaison with the contracted agency as well as clearly defined performance measures. Some municipalities that have contracted for such services have retained a police chief to serve as the liaison between the community and the contacting agency. This is certainly an option that the Town of Youngtown should consider. Alternatively, contracted agencies have identified a senior ranking

member of their department to serve in that capacity, often selected by or approved by, the contracting municipality.

ICMA has extensive experience in working with municipal governments and regional law enforcement agencies to achieve outstanding working relationships which generate significant cost savings as well as improved services and is prepared to assist the Town of Youngtown in pursuing such an option.

Youngtown now is faced with continuing an existing independent agency, with limited capabilities, at ever increasingly greater costs or seeking an alternative that can, with the correct contract provisions, provide high levels of service at lower cost.