

# Changes for police force coming?

## Several budget reducing recommendations given after study of Rochelle department

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ROCHELLE There could be some big changes ahead for the Rochelle Police Department, following a recent RPD staffing study by an independent consulting firm, which, among other recommendations, is suggesting work shift changes, increasing minority recruitment and possibly reducing staff.

Members of Rochelle city council recently heard the results of a police study conducted by Alexander Weiss Consulting, LLC. The report provided a staffing and organizational analysis of the Rochelle Police Department from last year.

The report indicated that the fiscal year budget for 2014-15 for the agency was \$3,211,607, with 89 percent going to salary and benefits.

According to Weiss, the study focused on the city's public safety priorities by answering questions such as what the department does, wants to accomplish, finding better ways to do what is done now, and how many people are needed to accomplish the department's mission.

### Numbers

The police department reported approximately 6,000 calls for service, equating to about 16 calls per day. The peak demand for service occurred in late afternoon hours, also noting that

after midnight until morning there were the fewest calls.

Weiss mentioned that there were 642 of the 9-1-1 hang-ups /non-emergency calls, which were nearly 10 percent of the total. There were 645 request ambulance calls of which normally an officer is not dispatched, along with 100 fire alarm and fire /smoke calls. Weiss also noted there were 215 animal complaints.

In his report, Weiss noted that law enforcement agencies seek ways to provide high quality services at lower costs due to rising costs and shrinking revenues.

"In this challenging environment it is difficult to consider the options for an agency that is, by almost all measures, over-resourced," said Weiss in his report on the Rochelle Police Department. Weiss proceeds to suggest two approaches, as written in the report.

"One approach is for policy-makers to say that they are committed to maintain a large visible uniformed presence and if possible to reduce costs in other areas," noted Weiss. "The challenge to this approach is that because sworn personnel costs represent such a large portion of the budget, it is very difficult to obtain significant savings without substantial reductions of personnel."

Weiss reported a second approach, being more data-driven and a "leaner" organization that would focus on outcomes.

"Such an approach is likely to encounter stiff resistance from many stakeholders, but it is one that will arguably be more sustainable," Weiss wrote.

## Recommendations

Weiss offered a series of recommendations, seven in all, beginning with a careful consideration by the city to look at the role of the police department in service delivery.

- Weiss suggested that calls, such as animal complaints, ambulance calls and fingerprinting, as examples, could be done "more efficiently by persons other than sworn officers ." Weiss referred to communities that have non-sworn community

service officers or volunteers are being utilized to increase efficiency.

- Another recommendation by Weiss is for the police department to become "data-driven" in its service delivery. Weiss believes that in the Rochelle Police Department, there is limited capability for crime analysis or research and planning, suggesting there would be a benefit from the use of a management analyst, or management intern.

- Weiss also believes the department should shift to a 12 hour work schedule, assigning six officers and two sergeants to each shift to maintain the minimum staffing levels.

- Weiss offered alternatives to the investigation unit, including the elimination of the unit and reassigning the members to patrol, leaving the primary responsibility with the officer assigned to the case.

"This would enhance uniformed staffing capacity and allow the department to adopt a more efficient approach to investigations," reported Weiss. "Given the relatively low number of serious offenses this seems like a solid approach.

- Another recommendation by Weiss is to look at the way the department uses the canine units, due to most of the services provided outside of the community. Presently there are two officers assigned to the canine program. The activities of the department's K-9 unit noted in the report include open-air sniffs, drugs or drug paraphernalia inside a vehicle, evidence recovery, demonstrations, article searches, foot searches, building searches, and school searches.

"Dogs are used in school searches but typically the high school in Rochelle is searched only once a year, thus the majority of these searches are done in other communities," reported Weiss.

- Weiss also recommended the department make an effort to recruit more minority police officers and acquire the necessary technology to allow officers to complete reports in the field.

"The practice of returning to the station to do this work is inefficient and reduces visibility," added Weiss.

- Weiss also believes that having a master police officer

(MPO) might add great value to the department. Weiss said that typically an MPO is an individual who has at least eight to ten years experience on the job.

- Weiss concluded that he believes, "in general, the department should increase the use of non-sworn personnel to perform tasks currently done by sworn officers, including greater use of community service officers."

## Comparisons

Citing information on the Mesa Arizona Police Department, Weiss said that they now use civilians for everything from crime scene processing to fraud investigations. Nine civilian investigators form a team who make 30 to 40 percent less money than an officer. Reportedly, in 2010 the unit handled about 50 percent of all burglary calls.

Weiss also provided information on the Albuquerque Police Department that uses Police Service Aides to assist officers on patrol. They assist with traffic accidents, misdemeanor offenses, delivery of paperwork, parking enforcement along with other duties and responsibilities. Weiss noted that his research indicated potential cadets are allowed to learn about the department and procedures, while serving the community, earning \$10.32 per hour.

## *Response*

Rochelle Police Chief Eric Higby said that overall, the report gives points to talk about and work from, but he realizes that the department will not adopt all of the recommendations. Topics such as changing shifts from 10 to 12 hours will also be looked into further. The department has had twelve-hour shifts in the past, as well as eight-hour shifts.

"I am open to looking at them again; however, when we ran the (12-hour shifts), we had 21 people here," said Higby.

There are currently 19 officers on staff at the Rochelle Police Department.

Higby agrees with the recommendation to acquire more administrative help, but disagrees that it should be in the form of a management analyst or intern.

"He did give a recommendation that we need administrative help, I concur with that. We definitely do. We've had an open deputy chief spot here for six years," said Higby. "I guess where we differ is, historically it has always been a sworn officer. Interns come and go. Management analyst" I don't know what you get out of that. What I need is a sworn officer that is outside the union to help support the department."

Higby intends to formally respond to the report, communicating with the city council, probably within the next couple of weeks.

Higby also said he is not completely opposed to some repurposing or realigning of the detective unit. "I think using them to fill on patrol more to eliminate some coverage issues is a possibility," said Higby. "We can look at the actual duties as well."

Higby said there would be further discussions on the recommendations, but does not believe eliminating the detective division, as an alternative suggested in the report, would be an option.

"He (Weiss) gave us different ideas, for example for the detective division. Take a look at what their duties are, maybe tweak those, or get rid of the entire division," said Higby. In my opinion, getting rid of the entire division isn't an option for us."