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PUBLIC SAFETY ST. PETERSBURG STYLE

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PUBLIC SAFETY: ST. PETERSBURG STYLE

The concept of police and fire consolidation is not new. The majority of literature on the subject appears to have been written in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Even today, however, there is little agreement as to what is meant by the term public safety.

Many people consider consolidation as representing total integration of all police and fire duties. This interpretation results in emotional responses from both fire and police because of the potential effects of such an approach on pay, pensions, and prestige. Individual and organizational arguments against total integration are basically sound, but they do not apply to all types of consolidation since public safety denotes various approaches in different cities.

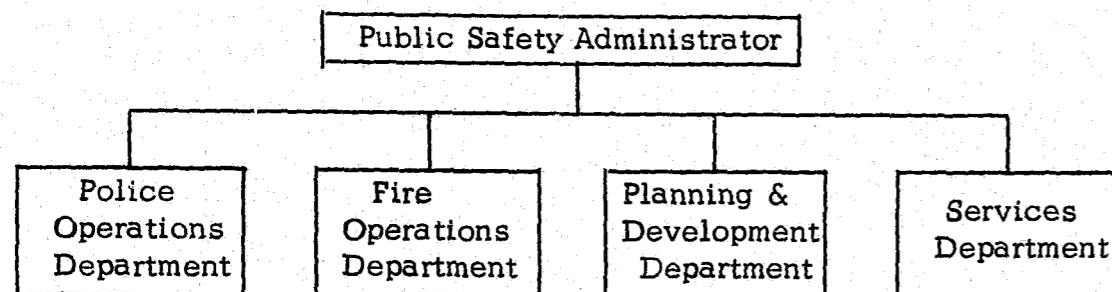
Thus, a city that has a Public Safety Agency could conceivably have either totally integrated its fire and police services, merely changed the name of its police department to the department of public safety, or more than likely adopted a "middle of the road" approach to integration. Any mention of public safety, however, normally connotes something has been done to police and fire operations.

Introduction of Public Safety Concept

In January 1971, a "Department of Public Safety" was established for the City of St. Petersburg and a Public Safety Director was appointed to transform two separate departments with over 800 employees into a single agency that could provide a more effective and efficient approach to police and fire service. Thus nominal consolidation was accomplished without disturbing the remainder of the organization and its traditional structure.

The St. Petersburg City Council approved in January of 1972 an organization structure for the entire city. It included a Public Safety Agency that was quite different from the previous organization. The Agency reflected a functional consolidation of all auxiliary functions (Planning and Development, and Services) but the line functions (Police Operations, and Fire Operations) maintained their traditional identity. The most traumatic change to the line operations was in the name change of the head of the department to Director, rather than "Chief", in order to coincide with the title of all department heads within the City. In addition, the head of the Agency was designated Administrator, once again to coincide with overall city titles.

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[The primary goals of the reorganization were to identify and group functions, and determine resource people with the potential for either performing these tasks or leading others in performing them. A secondary objective was to determine the capabilities of identified units and individuals for potential movement within the Agency.]

In order to accomplish the objectives of the reorganization, the capabilities of resource people were stretched by having them outline goals for their particular units and recommend projects that would facilitate the realization of such goals. The input of ideas and personal involvement reflected favorably on those persons who participated. As responsibilities were added to these units and their resource people gained confidence, their position in the organizational structure was re-evaluated. Those units capable of functioning more efficiently at another position in the structure were identified and consideration was given to the appropriate change.

The current structure represents both nominal and functional consolidation, with the line operations of police and fire retaining their traditional roles. The administrative and service functions of police and fire have gradually merged until the duplication of efforts within these functions has been eliminated.

[Although some cost reductions may be possible, the real value of consolidation is in improving the level of services rendered to the community.] Administrative and service functions, however, are two areas where reduction of costs, in addition to greater performance at the same costs, can be shown.

There are also facets of the line operations that can be altered to provide the community with more service at approximately the same cost. This can include extensive programs utilizing the standby time of on-duty fire personnel in such activities as fire code enforcement inspections, and conducting limited programs that teach fire safety to the highly impressionable students attending elementary schools. Having already provided such services, St. Petersburg went one more step. In August of 1972, the City Council approved the budget for the 1972-73 year. [It included the position of public safety agent, a cross-trained (police and fire) specially selected individual who receives a greater salary than a regular police officer, who in turn is compensated at a higher rate than a fire fighter. At none of the public budget hearings were any objections to the new position raised, although

it represented the first integration of line operations.

Need for Additional Manpower

Police operations within St. Petersburg are somewhat hampered due to a lack of manpower partially caused by budgetary limitations. Studies were conducted to determine more productive methods of manpower utilization. Through a series of maneuvers, available manpower was increased approximately 25 percent and response time was cut in half. Increases in calls for service, however, offset this improved efficiency by decreasing time for preventive patrol, which, in turn, resulted in an increase in the crime rate. Prevention programs can help to alleviate this undesirable situation but there were not enough men available to combat the crimes occurring, let alone work on extensive prevention programs.

Many recognized experts in police work and various commissions, including the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, have stated that effective crime prevention programs are needed to reduce certain types of criminal activity. Personnel must be available before a meaningful crime prevention program can be implemented. Police operations in St. Petersburg, however, like many other large cities, can ill afford to supply these people.

With the knowledge that police operations is coping with a workload that is taxing its capability daily, and fire operations has many

hours of productivity that are not being utilized to their fullest potential, there is the realization that some measure of balance is desirable. This balance, however, must not be achieved at the expense of either service since both are critical to the community in time of emergency.

The Public Safety Agent

A public safety agent program was instituted at the same time that the actual strength of fire fighters and police officers was increased, thus offsetting any allegations of "robbing Peter to pay Paul". Rising costs for police and fire personnel, coupled with the pressures from labor organizations for a shorter work week for fire fighters, and the possible inclusion of public safety employees under the jurisdiction of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1947, mandates that better utilization of fire personnel be actively pursued.

These factors made it desirable to consider the implementation of a program that would help to alleviate the workload pressures of police operations and at the same time assure the public adequate fire protection at a reasonable cost. St. Petersburg's answer was the public safety agent. The position calls for an individual who could function effectively with a minimum degree of supervision: most major and all minor decisions are entrusted to his discretion. An Agent Coordinator has administrative responsibility for each team of approximately ten agents but exercises an absolute minimum amount of supervisory

control over their activities. Because of this, the agent program requires people who have exceptional qualifications. The desired requirements are graduation from a four year college and some practical experience in public safety or allied fields. In the event the individual does not meet this requirement, he may be accepted with two years of college and two years experience in police, fire, or closely associated occupations, including helicopter training. There is ample evidence that an adequate number of qualified individuals are interested in serving in this capacity. Agents must also meet the minimum state training standards for both police officer and fire fighter.

The generic goals of the Public Safety Agent program, in order of their priority, are:

- Supplement fire suppression manpower.
- Establish and maintain effective crime and fire prevention programs.
- Enforce the laws of the community.

Some insight into the role of fire suppression is necessary in order to understand how the cross-trained agent can effectively wear two hats.

Fire Suppression Philosophy

The objective of fire suppression is to amass a large enough force composed of men and apparatus to affect the prompt and efficient extinguishment of fires once they have started. There is a point where the fire defenses are such that no fire can become large enough to cause serious damage. This is a commendable goal although it may not be entirely compatible with the overall needs of a city.

A critical point in fire suppression is the coordination of men and apparatus in relation to time. The initial arrival at the fire ground is when the most men are needed to affect rescue and attack the fire. There is no substitute for manpower when it is necessary to place hose lines at the most strategic points for attacking the fire. This could be at the corner of the structure that is the furthest away from the street or on the eighth floor of some condominium. This type of work is more related to the engine company. It is for this reason that its manpower must always be available and not left to chance that all personnel will be at the fire ground when the apparatus arrives.

The ladder trucks are major apparatus that are not critically affected by the need for immediate manpower and time factors. This is not to say that time is unimportant but rather to give it proper perspective. There are usually fewer ladder trucks in a city than engines and this

number is correlated on actual rather than potential need. The fact that there are fewer ladders in St. Petersburg (three ladder trucks as opposed to nine engines) requires their territories to be proportionately larger. Naturally, this entails a longer response time to the various sectors of their territory. The ladder truck by itself is an instrument for rescue or advancing hose lines and personnel to the upper levels of a structure. But to use it as a tool for fighting fires requires the incorporation of a coordinating factor. It is necessary that one or more engines be spotted at locations where sufficient quantities of water are available to meet the nozzle requirements of master stream devices on the ladder and again this requires more time. During these periods of response time and set-up time, manpower needs of the ladder trucks are minimal. Usually the driver and the officer can spot the apparatus and begin to set it up. Presently in St. Petersburg one of the ladder trucks used by fire suppression has hydraulic jacks and the master stream devices are mounted when they are to be used. Fire fighters can ready this apparatus for service very quickly, at least within three or four minutes. The other two ladder trucks, however, take longer to make ready for service, but this can still be accomplished within four to six minutes. The engine companies need five to nine minutes before they are ready to pump water through the ladder depending upon the location of the hydrant. This time differential makes it possible that the setting up of the ladder for fire fighting could be accomplished

with two men and still be ready before the engine could begin to pump.

These factors make the ladder truck the ideal apparatus for the utilization of back-up fire fighting manpower such as public safety agents. A minimum of ten agents, working two shifts, will be assigned to each ladder company.

Since a St. Petersburg fire fighter spends at the least two percent and at the most five percent of his time actually fighting fires, the development of a cadre of qualified back-up fire fighters means there is the potential for theoretically utilizing 95 percent of his non-fire fighting time. As previously mentioned, some of this time is spent on familiarization and safety inspections, lectures and training. There still remains a large percentage of non-productive time, however, that has been accepted as the traditional role of the fireman.

Utilization of "Down Time"

The other two goals of the public safety agent program, the establishment of crime and fire prevention programs and enforcement of the laws of the community, consume 95 percent of the agents' time. These agents, having graduated from the Fire Academy as well as the Police Academy, and having received special training and experience in both fire and crime prevention, will gradually assume the responsibilities for fire inspections within their ladder company's geographic area. However, while performing such inspections, the agents will

also conduct crime prevention inspections. This type of inspection is being instituted under the guidance of two members of the Public Safety Agency who have attended the Crime Prevention Institute at the Southern Police Institute. Other selected agents will be scheduled for attendance at the Institute on a regular basis.

A security ordinance is being drafted similar to those enacted in Seattle, Washington and Oakland, California. It will mandate certain mechanical preventive efforts on the part of the citizen.

Agents have also instituted Operation Identification (marking of personal items) and a public education program aimed at attacking the most preventable crimes: burglary, robbery, and auto theft.

The agents' role in enforcing the laws of the community is accomplished through preventive patrol in the area that is the geographic responsibility of their ladder company. Since they will not be assigned any routine calls for police service, they will be the only sworn officers utilized "full time" for preventive patrol during certain hours of the day.

It is anticipated that approximately 50 percent of the agents' time will be spent on preventive patrol since all of their non-fire fighting night time activity should be devoted to this function. Since the agents' inspections will be preventive in nature, it is estimated that approximately 95 percent of their time will be spent on preventive activities.

Although the agents meet all of the qualifications of the Fire Fighters Standards Council and the Police Standards Council, the Attorney

General for the State of Florida has decreed that a factual determination of the employee's primary responsibilities, and thus the Council under which this jurisdiction and responsibility lies, must be made by the employing agency. Realizing that 95 percent of the agents' time will be expended in non-fire fighting duties, we have designated the primary responsibility of the public safety agent as that of preventive police patrol and other related law enforcement matters and, thus, they have been designated as coming under the jurisdiction of the Police Standards Council. This in no way indicates that their expertise in the area of fire suppression will, in any manner, be slighted while serving in the capacity of a public safety agent. For manning purposes the agent shall be considered a fire fighter assigned to a ladder company.

The Agent in Action

Whenever an agent-assigned ladder company is dispatched to a fire, the agent responds to the scene of that fire. He must always be geographically located so that his response will ensure arrival at the fire scene before or simultaneous to his ladder company. (The former has been the case in well over 90 percent of the time during the first ninety days of the program.) While responding to a fire and at the fire scene the agent is under the command of the officer in charge of his assigned fire company. The regular fire ground chain of command is observed by the agent when responding to a fire with his assigned fire company.

The agent remains under the command of his designated company officer, or other officer acting in the proper chain of command, until such time that he is relieved of fire suppression duties by his company officer. The agent then returns to service. Exceptions are made only if the fire was so severe and the work performed by the agent so strenuous that he requires a rest break before returning to service. This is left to the company officer's discretion.

When the company officer relieves the agent of fire suppression responsibilities, he resumes his other duties. The company officer may decide initially that he does not require agents at a fire scene. If so, he may relieve all or some of them of their suppression responsibilities.

A situation may also arise where the agent discovers a fire. In such a case he notifies the dispatcher of the fire's location and the type of occupancy. He then evacuates any occupants that are in potential danger and attempts to extinguish the fire, if possible. Depending on the outcome of his attempt to extinguish the fire, the agent can either turn back some, or all, of the responding apparatus or direct it to the scene. If the agent's fire company does not respond, he is free to resume his normal patrol activities. If it does respond, the procedure previously outlined is instituted.

Crime in Progress

Should an agent come upon a crime in progress, he calls for a regular police cruiser and takes only those steps which would prevent loss of life or damage to property.

The agent makes arrests only in cases when waiting for a regular patrol car would be impractical. When an agent makes such an arrest he normally transports the person arrested to the Public Safety Building for booking. If he is the only agent in service at the time, however, he requests that a zone cruiser be dispatched to transport the arrested person.

At the scene of a police emergency, the agent is under the command of the police supervisor in charge of the emergency scene. When agents are needed to enhance back-up capabilities, the communications dispatcher determines their service status for assignment. Should a fire be reported to which the agent must respond, he notifies the police supervisor so that he may leave as soon as practical.

In the case of a misdemeanor, the agent makes the arrest, since the law requires that a misdemeanor arrest be made by the officer witnessing the act. In the case of a felony in progress, the agent reports the crime, requests assistance from police units, and aids these units with the arrest. Wherever possible, regular police officers make the arrest.

Agents' Equipment

The personal equipment for the public safety agent's consists of a blazer uniform sufficient in number to provide the agents with uniforms for every duty day, a "jump suit", hard hat, and fire fighting (bunker) gear. Blazers and other civilian attire can be worn while the agents are conducting ordinary public safety inspections, as well as public safety prevention and community relations programs. The jump suits are necessary since the agents conduct some inspections in areas where the blazers might be damaged or badly soiled. The hard hat, of course, is a simple protection device which is worn in any inspection situation where a head injury might be incurred. The bunker gear is essential in any fire fighting situation, as is breathing apparatus which is also provided the agents.

Since every agent is a sworn law enforcement officer, a pistol and related pertinent gear is issued to each of them; however, they are only required to wear their weapon when they feel it is necessary to protect themselves or other citizens. At no time is their weapon conspicuously displayed without an adequate reason.

Each agent cruiser, a regular police sedan, is equipped with a fire extinguisher, type 4A30. This equipment is necessary since the agents might well be the first arriving public safety personnel at a fire emergency and can extinguish the fire, thus saving large fire apparatus from making a run. Cruisers are also equipped with first aid kits

and all other equipment assigned to regular police vehicles. Battery chargers are installed in every agent's car to allow them continual use of their portable radios.

Conclusion

The public safety concept has as much potential as is envisioned by its advocates. Clear and precise facts, time and experience can overcome the emotionalism generated against the concept by its adversaries.

The successes and failures of variations of the concept over the years provide a sufficient foundation upon which can be built an effective and efficient organization dedicated to better serve the community. When more effective protection can be achieved through a less rigid separation of police and fire functions then it should be attempted.

Even multi-use facilities should be considered if they can further enhance the realization of public safety goals. The next two "fire stations" planned for St. Petersburg will in fact be public safety stations. These two buildings will have fire suppression personnel and their apparatus, public safety agents, and police officers assigned to Baker and Charlie teams, two of the five team policing units serving the city.

The public safety agent is symbolic of the entire consolidation concept and, as such, he presents the united front of public safety oriented attitudes. This position can be the common thread to enhance the feeling of security and safety from the ravages of crime and fire.

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