



Office of Mayor Tom Potter  
City of Portland

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** Aug. 28, 2008

**TO:** Commissioner Sam Adams

**cc:** Commissioner Randy Leonard

**FROM:** Mayor Tom Potter

**SUBJECT:** Public Safety Assessment

Since you have requested the Public Safety Assessment (PSA), I wanted to extend the courtesy of responding directly to you about my observations and concerns about the results.

I heartily agree with the PSA's conclusion that the Portland Police Bureau's "men and women are among the most professional, creative, and progressive police officers employed by any city in the United States." I also appreciate how difficult the task can be of accurately assessing a large, complex organization with multiple challenges.

There are eight key areas identified in the PSA: Staffing; Enhanced Community Problem Solving; Internal Communication; Media Relations and Public Outreach; Minority Community Engagement; Racial Profiling; Budgeting, and Coordination with Multnomah County.

I would like to comment on each area specifically. Overall, I am concerned with the tone and depth of any report that makes such sweeping statements about a number of important issues, including such difficult-to-quantify issues as morale.

I also note that some recommendations are at odds with the recommendations of the sub-committees that assisted preparing in the report, and that committee notes seem to indicate that certain findings were requested or assumed before any research began.

And I believe it would be helpful to know if the problems cited have been quantified in some way beyond the report's continued reliance on vague words like "most," "some," "often," etc. to define the scale of an issue.

## **Staffing**

Two years ago, in the midst of a nationwide slowdown in recruit hiring, the Police Bureau undertook a comprehensive examination and overhaul of its hiring process and training curriculum.

Overall efforts already initiated by Chief Sizer include:

- Hiring a civilian manager of the Personnel Division to provide greater human resource management expertise and greater consistency around our recruitment and selection practices
- Assigning a sergeant to DPSST in Salem to make sure we do not duplicate training, and that our curriculum supplements the state's training
- Widening the pool of potentially qualified people while acknowledging community concerns over lowering the education requirements
- Restructuring the hiring process to lessen the time it takes to hire, toward a goal of six months.
- Bringing PPB drug guidelines for recruits into line with other police agencies
- Reducing the length of the Advanced Academy by two weeks by placing stronger emphasis on communication and scenario-based training
- Conducting an in-depth review of the Bureau's entire training program based around the core community policing competencies we want every police officer to possess. Results are due in November.

The PSA identifies 4 areas as deficient and contributing to staffing difficulties:

- *Overly stringent background checks*

The PSA recommends "reasonable allowances for what are often problems with a young person's credit history or other low level offense." A recommendation describes these as "youthful acts of indiscretion" including driving offenses, drug abuse and credit history problems.

The Bureau's background investigator does not make pass/fail decisions on a recruit during background investigations. Each background check is instead reviewed by a sergeant for completeness, and then a lieutenant and Human Resource Manager in Personnel and the Assistant Chief of Services make the decision. The goal is to find candidates who will embrace the more demanding roles of community policing.

As noted in the sub-committee report by PPB Commander Mike Reese and PPA President Robert King "recruitment, hiring and retention have all been problems for departments in many cities." However, their report cautions against lowering the

standards used to hire recruits, noting “we believe the quality of the Bureau’s current officers is an indication that the hiring process (and training process) is producing individuals with a strong commitment to community policing ...”

- *Lack of aggressive and coordinated local recruitment*

Here, again, the PSA appears to be at odds with the sub-committee report as well as current Bureau practices. As Commander Reese and Sgt. King note: “...the Bureau has taken numerous steps to hire more police officers. Among those steps have been:

- “A reduction in the educational requirement for the position of police officer.
- “Streamlined or significantly altered the hiring process to devote resources to candidates likely to pass the background check.
- “Conducted out-of-state testing and recruiting.
- “Developed a web page devoted to recruiting.
- “Held special recruiting events such as setting up booths at county fairs.
- “Visited local and out of state colleges.
- “Increased use of radio and bus advertisements.
- “Conducted aggressive military recruiting.
- “Improved efforts to recruit lateral transfers, including Multnomah County deputies as well as experienced law enforcement officers from other agencies.”

The Bureau has assigned an officer to coordinate a re-vamped recruitment program. The officer holds a Master’s degree in Human Resource Management. The program re-design will place the coordinator in the Personnel Division.

- *Unreasonably long periods of time between acceptance and academy*

Once an individual passes all phases of the hiring process, the Bureau hires them. Ideally, these hires coincide well with open slots at the state’s police training academy (DPSST) in Salem. (Newly hired officers receive training at the basic academy before they ever work the street.)

When slots are not available, recruits have been “warehoused” – usually for a period of weeks. “Warehoused” recruits are usually assigned to units like precinct Neighborhood Response Teams to assist officers in community problem solving; the Property Evidence Division to assist in the receipt and disposition of property and evidence, and the Records Division to assist in the process of police reports. The Bureau is studying temporary placement with some of their most important partners (with these agencies’ concurrence) like BOEC, the sobering center at Hooper Detox and Project Respond. (Due to union concerns, the Bureau now hires these recruits as temporary public safety aides with no enforcement powers.)

I believe it is a mistake to characterize, as the PSA does, warehouse training as not relevant.

- *Redundant academy training*

As mentioned above, the Bureau has assigned a sergeant to DPSST in Salem to make sure we do not duplicate training and that our curriculum supplements the state's training; it has reduced Advanced Academy by two weeks and is conducting an in-depth review of its entire training program, with results due in November.

Finally, the PSA proposes authorizing staffing levels of 1,080. The Bureau already has the authority to do so (through 2005 directive from the Commissioner-in-Charge to "doublefill"); it simply remains for the City Council to authorize the funds for those positions. Obviously, the next Council can meet those budget requests if it desires.

### **Enhanced Community Problem Solving**

While the PSA rightfully applauds the success of Central Precinct's Service Coordination and Housing Interdiction Teams, it leaves the impression that other precincts do not engage in successful community problem solving.

However:

- Each precinct has a Neighborhood Response Team that develops partnerships to solve community problems specific to the precinct. The core partnerships include Crime Prevention, City Attorney's Office, Bureau of Buildings, the District Attorney's Office, and Parks, with an emphasis of resolving complaints about chronic nuisance properties. Precincts also rely on partnerships with OLCC, juvenile justice, the Reception Center and gang outreach.
- A few current examples of community problem solving include:
  - North precinct has been active in working with landlords and owners of properties generating high police service needs (Enhanced Safety Properties);
  - North and Northeast precincts worked with the District Attorney's office and parents to address curfew issues;
  - East and Southeast Precinct are working to address prostitution activities on 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, using both traditional and non-traditional techniques.
  - Northeast NRT/detectives and East Precinct's Special Property Investigations unit are particularly aggressive in working the metal theft problem and developing systems to prevent and interdict the resale of stolen property.

### **Internal Communications**

It is true that the Police Bureau is a hierarchical police organization. I would be hard pressed to think of a police department of any size – or fire department, for that matter - that isn't. The urgent nature of policing often requires immediate responses to threats against life and property. To respond appropriately requires a hierarchy of command that issues orders requiring police offices to react appropriately to those threats. Without that

hierarchy of command, there would be no accountability or the proper supervision and management of crisis situations.

That being said, Chief Sizer has routinely included line officers and union representatives in discussions about new policies and directives. She has added a civilian director to her executive management team to help it meet high standards of integrity and performance, correct deficiencies and identify promising new practices and facilitate overall bureau performance.

Additionally:

- Operations Branch Assistant Chief Lynnae Berg created an Operations Branch advisory committee made up of street officers and sergeants to provide feedback and inform decision making
- The Chief meets regularly with the PPA President and by invitation with the PPA Executive Board.
- Officers assigned to the Training Division and union representatives were invited to participate on Use of Force Task Force, and comment on the various drafts of the new Use of Force policy. Their suggestions were incorporated into the final policy
- Officers and union representatives have been members of Employee Information System (EIS) Advisory Committee
- There are peer representatives on the Performance Review Board (hearing discipline cases) and the Use of Force Board (hearing officer involved shooting and in-custody death cases)
- The Chief's Hour at annual In-Service Training fielding questions, providing information, and soliciting ideas from the field
- The Chief's Office produces *The Bulletin*, a newsletter that accompanies paychecks every two weeks
- The Police Bureau has a Labor Management Committee involving police management and all of the labor associations. The Chief is making improvements in its functioning, including developing separate formats for the sworn and non-sworn associations.

Finally, I cannot imagine any police bureau operating effectively by committee – the PSA's recommendation of a Chief's Office where all decisions are made by a committee that includes three unions, and apparently the City Council as well, sounds like a recipe for chaos. To have input that affects the rank and file is important to unions. But to have veto power over the assignment of personnel, organizational structure and the disciplinary process would greatly undermine the organization's capacity to be managed effectively, efficiency and safely.

### **Media Relations & Public Outreach**

I will support in the Fall BuMP a proposal from the Bureau to hire a non-sworn communications professional to help with media and public outreach.

## **Minority Community Engagement**

As the PSA's sub-committee points out, "Soon after her appointment, Chief Sizer's style of leadership and genuine accessibility began to influence the possibility of change within the Portland Police Bureau. ... Having been appointed in the aftermath of several highly controversial police shootings, Chief Sizer guided the Bureau in implementing a more organic and intentional approach to building relationships."

There are a number of engagement programs that are working well, and new ideas that are a work in progress:

- Disabilities Advisory Council
- Sexual Minorities Roundtable
- Arab and Muslim Police Advisory Council
- Living Room Conversations
- Breaking Bread
- Youth Forums
- Gang Prevention Education
- Camp Rosebaum

Some notable forums have stopped meeting under the Chief's direction – most notably the Chief's Forum which, as the sub-committee points out, "was frequently dominated by complaint sessions referencing issues better handled by an Independent Police Review Board. ... Chief Sizer worked with the Forum for six months to identify ways to make it more active, and to help it reach out to the greater community for input and problem-solving. Forum members resisted change ... " Chief Sizer discussed her concerns about the Chief's Forum with me and I supported her decision to end it.

## **Racial Profiling**

The Chief and the Bureau are already actively engaged in the dialogue about how to transition the Racial Profiling Committee under the mantle of the Office of Human Relations and in a more positive direction.

## **Budget**

The Bureau's traditional budget process consists of a Bureau Budget Advisory Committee made up of civilian volunteers, command and supervisory staff in at least one public budget forum.

Regrettably, last year many of the same staff that were responsible for budget were pivotal in the development and execution of the TOPOFF exercise. Along with the compressed budget timeline caused by the abortive SAP conversion, the Bureau shorted the process in the FY 2008/2009 budget.

The Bureau is in the process of re-classifying the manager of the Fiscal Services Division to the higher classification with broader responsibilities to revamp budgeting.. It has

completed the recruitment for the position and are awaiting a short list from the Bureau of Human Resources for interview and selection.

I also do not view the Bureau as being five “fiefdoms.” Precincts cooperate and coordinate operations in a variety of ways. Commonly, officers are detailed across precinct lines to assist in handling fluctuations in emergency calls for service and provide cover to officers in other precincts on a daily basis. Additionally, precincts pool resources on proactive enforcement missions such as the ones that are occurring now along 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue directed at prostitution activities. East, Southeast, and Northeast precinct are sharing resources in that common effort. When Central precinct experienced a considerable spike in drug dealing in Old Town last fall, officers from Northeast, East, and Southeast precincts were detailed to assist Central in conducting undercover drug missions and proactive uniform enforcement. Officers from East, Northeast, and Southeast Precinct are currently involved in a high profile uniform hotspot interdiction effort centered around gangs. The team goes by the name HEAT (Hotspot Enforcement Action Team).

### **Coordination with Multnomah County**

The PSA’s recommendations appear to endorse several ideas already in use.

There already is a forum of public safety and elected leaders meeting to discuss budget and policy issues related to the overall public safety system – it is called LPSCC (Local Public Safety Coordinating Council) and meets every two weeks.

CJAC – the Community Justice Advisory Committee – gives public safety officials and local judges an opportunity to work together on crime prevention strategies. As Joanne Fuller noted in a 2006 newsletter, “collaboration with CJAC has saved money, focused resources and created innovative solutions ... .”

And as you know, Sam, your office has been working on city-county budgeting issues since coming into office, and we sponsored a joint resolution to that effect in September, 2005. The City/County Public Safety Coordination team received \$200,000 in the FY 2005-06 budget to help eliminate duplication, and \$150,000 in FY 06-07 do its work. I believe the Council vote to fund this committee was unanimous.

Your office guided the work of the multi-jurisdiction river safety task force while ours prepared City Code amendments related to the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design project of the Inter-Bureau Task Force. You and I requested that the estimated \$45K in unspent funds be carried over to FY 2008-09 to complete this work and any new projects.

### **Conclusion**

While any PSA that promises to both improve the efficiency our public safety system and enhance the livability of Portland is always welcome, I am disheartened by the

confrontational and accusatory tone toward the Sizer Administration found in the PSA's concluding section.