

June 15, 2011

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**SUBJECT: POLICE DEPARTMENT REORGANIZATION STUDY CITY OF COSTA MESA  
AND FY 2011-12 CITY BUDGET BY \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING OF JUNE 21, 2011**

Honorable Mayor and City Council Members:

As a Costa Mesa resident I am concerned, as I am sure you are, that our Police Department maintains sufficient capital and personnel resources to continue providing the excellent quality of protection and service to which we have become accustomed. I understand the need to make hard decisions to balance the City's budget, but I encourage you to be mindful of the effect those decisions will have on the level of service provided by the Police, and other departments.

I have read the study provided by Management Partners, as well as the report from Interim Police Chief Stavely and the report from CEO Hatch. While many of the recommendations in these documents can best be addressed by those with substantial experience in provision of municipal police services (such as Chief Stavely), there are some areas upon which I feel compelled to comment.

First, and perhaps foremost, is the emphatic recommendation of Chief Stavely that, "staffing levels below 140 [sworn officers] will result in degradation in service levels." The chief reiterates this several times in his report. Of course, the possible combinations of sworn and reserve officers, non-sworn employees and volunteers are numerous and offer alternative ways of providing various services. But, even accounting for these options, your hired consultant recommends at least 136 sworn officers and Chief Stavely recommends no less than 140. To ensure optimum protection of the City and its citizens, I feel the professional recommendation of the Chief, or at least that of the consultant, should be the overriding consideration.

At the June 14 Council Study Session, Mayor pro tem Righeimer stated that the Council "made it very clear we won't cut back on patrol." I can't imagine that reducing the current level of sworn officers from 149 (budgeted) or 139 (filled positions) to 131 will result in anything other than a cutback on patrol.

Both the hired consultant and the Interim Police Chief have stated that the appropriate level of staffing cannot be determined by reliance on standard ratios of Police Officers to population. The 125 base level recommended by CEO Hatch appears to be derived from application of the average (of the five other cities surveyed) of 1.07 officers per 1,000 population to the City's population of 117,000. (If this is not the source of the 125 number, there is no apparent basis for it – at least nothing contained in any of the documentation.) Again, as stated in the Management Partners report (page 6), "Benchmarking should not be used to create formulas or ratios for determining budget or staffing allocations."

Moving on from the issue of overall staffing levels, there are several other recommendations that I feel require additional attention.

The recommendations regarding K-9 deployment, Traffic Bureau staffing, School Resource Officer positions and transition to a regional SWAT program all call for further study. Yet, proposed staffing decisions appear to assume certain changes. I would only encourage you to wait for the results of these further studies before making irreversible staffing changes.

Along the same lines, at previous meetings, the Council voted to withdraw from the ABLE program and proceed with sale of the assets (helicopters, etc.) and the Council expressed interest in pursuing a regional helicopter program. Although it has been stated that there are "already too many helicopters," and sale of the ABLE assets would not hinder formation of a regional program, this ignores the question of whether any of the ABLE helicopters may be in better condition or otherwise better suited to a regional program than helicopters owned by other cities. It would seem wise to retain the option of contributing (or selling) ABLE helicopters to the regional program until further study has been completed. Once they are sold, Costa Mesa would have nothing but money to contribute to the program and, as we know, that is in short supply.

In conclusion, I urge you to heed the recommendations of the Interim Police Chief and retain sworn staffing levels that will allow continuance of the Community Policing and Problem Oriented Policing Programs, continuance of adequate patrols to act as a deterrent to criminal activity, and maintenance of sufficient, qualified Police Officers to respond to the crimes that do occur. Once these capabilities are lost and criminal activity begins to increase, it will be extremely difficult to get the "horse back in the barn."

If funding is an issue, I would again remind you that many of the 28 currently-vacant but budgeted positions in the City are unlikely to be filled within the next three to six months, resulting in available funds of between \$1 million and \$2 million. And, additional salary savings will accrue from employees who leave the City in the next year. Seldom are employees replaced in less than two-to-three months following their departure.

Sincerely,



PERRY VALANTINE  
Costa Mesa Resident since 1972

Cc: CEO Tom Hatch  
Police Chief Steve Stavely  
Budget and Research Officer Bobby Young