

HOMETOWN SECURITY STUDY COMMITTEE

March 26, 2003, 1145 hours

Members Present: Carol Brown, Oscar Rios Pohirieth, Jim Geist, Don Marti, Major Guy Moon, Doug Ahlberg, Jeff Fortenberry, Craig Madsen, Ken Svoboda, Julie Righter, Tom Casady, Rich Furasek (for Mike Spadt), Bruce Dart

Not in Attendance: General Stanley Heng, Larry Hudkins, Annette McRoy, Mike Spadt

City Staff & Other Public Present: Jeff Cole (Staff), Corrie Kielty (Staff), Darrell Podany (Council Office), Mike Miriovsky (EMS Inc), Steve Hubka (Finance)

Jeff Cole served as Chair in the absence of General Heng.

Approval of Minutes

Jeff Cole called for approval of the minutes of the March 12th meeting. **Jim Geist moved approval of the minutes, seconded by Craig Madsen. Motion carried by unanimous vote.**

Public Comments

There were no public comments. Jeff Cole noted that copies of the minutes and agendas are being given to the City Clerk and are available to the public. In addition, the minutes, agendas, committee membership and background information will be available on line on the city's web page, with links to Police, 911, Fire, EMS.

City Budget

Steve Hubka from the Finance Department provided information in response to a request made at the last meeting about the city's budget process. Steve said that public safety is the number one function of government. Each year, Department heads are asked to prepare a budget that is a percentage less than their prior year's budget. Over the past 13 years, the city has grown in population by 19% and in area by 25.2%. Statistical information provided by Steve shows that public safety has been the city's number one growth priority. Overall city staff has grown 8.6%, however there has only been a 1.9% increase in the number of public employees other than public safety employees. Total public safety employees have increased 22.1%, barely keeping up with the growth of the city, and Police employees have increased 28.1%, which shows that has been a top priority for elected officials.

Sources of funding for public safety is almost exclusively general revenue funds. 911 gets a 911 surcharge which is about \$800,000 a year. The city is currently looking at the feasibility of increasing that rate from 50 cents a month per phone line to \$1.00, the maximum allowed by the state government, so that could be an additional source of revenue. About 70% of the tax budget is related to personnel and the other 30% goes to all other expenditures. Of all city employees that are paid out of tax dollars, public safety employees account for 45% of all tax supported

public employees.

Steve noted that there has not been an increase in the property tax rate in nine years. This coming year there will be a substantial re-evaluation of the tax base, which could be anywhere from 10-20%, so if the tax rate is kept the same and the tax base goes up, revenues from property taxes would also go up and would provide extra dollars.

Homeland Security Update

The events of the past week underscore how the international environment influences things here. Doug Ahlberg attended a national conference of emergency responders and he reported that Lincoln and Lancaster County are well ahead of the national curve in preparing for a response to a weapons of mass destruction incident. He bases that on the fact that we have cooperative working relationships between our first responding agencies elements who are not driven by their own personal agendas.

On the state level, Major Moon said the Governor's Office has directed the National Guard to plan for protection of resources in the state that have been identified as having a potential risk. The State is well prepared, compared to other states, and can respond to any type of threat that could occur in the state. Major Moon feels that the National Guard and local agencies are as best prepared as they can be.

Jeff Cole asked Chief Casady if an increase in the alert level affects the Police Department and Chief Casady responded that there has been no change since 9-11. The Police Department's ongoing "Operation Boy Scout" project meets at least weekly to remain current on affairs. Members of his Command Staff have been assigned specific areas of responsibility, as an example the water system's facilities and vulnerabilities, and what needs to be done to reduce risk to the water system. In addition, the Department has been awarded a \$131,000 grant from the \$3.2 million grant that the state as a whole received which will fund devices to improve the ability to operate the radio system at a remote location, and to purchase respirators for police officers.

Work Group Reports

Two work groups were set up at the last meeting, Police/911 and Fire/EMS. The Police/911 work group meets weekly on Tuesdays, 1145 at the Police Department, the Fire/EMS work group meets on Thursdays, 1600 at Fire Station #1.

Police/911: Carol Brown, co-chair of the Police/911 work group said the group has met twice. At the first meeting, Chief Casady provided an overview of the Police Department's budget. The group then discussed trying to formulate a focus group or survey to solicit community input and each member was requested to submit questions about what the survey should address. At the second meeting, Julie Righter provided information on the 911 Center's budget. At the next meeting, a facilitator who does surveys or focus groups will be present to see if the questions are on target and are questions that can be asked of the community. Corrie Kielty is currently checking on finding someone to do that. Jeff Cole distributed highlights of the two meetings.

There was lengthy discussion about the focus group or survey concept. Some committee members indicated that although it is valuable to have input from citizenry, these are complex issues and a quick scan of somebody's opinion could lead to a conclusion that may not be reflective of what the community needs. The results of a survey could be biased by the wording of the questions, by the people that are asked the questions, and by the way the questions are phrased. It would be necessary to have someone trained in preparing and facilitating a focus group or survey to avoid false conclusions. Corrie Kielty indicated she made contact with a representative at the University to see if they could be available to assist in conducting a survey. They did not feel the University would be available to do this in the time frame being looked at, it would be more costly than could be afforded, and they suggested a focus group. Corrie attempted to make contact with Gallup and Heartland Leadership but she has not heard back from either one. Major Moon said he did not feel he was qualified to critique the services that the police provide to the city, that is what the Chief is paid to do, and he did not believe that was what the Mayor was asking the committee to do. When Corrie Kielty spoke to the Mayor about a focus group/survey, he wondered why the Hometown Security Committee wasn't comfortable being the representative for the community and why there needed to be more input. It was the opinion of several members that the Mayor's Hometown Security Committee is a focus group, a cross section of the community. Several members, however, indicated that they feel the committee did not reflect the broader community.

Chief Casady said the list of things people call the 911 Center about each day express what the citizens of Lincoln expect and want their public safety agencies to do. When someone calls for something that may seem very bizarre, it is wrong to ignore that call and not recognize that there may be some kind of serious problem that underlies that call and someone could be put at risk. Chief Casady said that he can pinpoint things the Police Department is doing that they don't have to do, for example not investigating traffic accidents unless there is a reasonable probability that someone is going to die would save the equivalent of five full time officers that could be used for other duties, pulling five officers out of elementary schools would return five officers for other assignments, no longer directing traffic for UNL football games would return the equivalent of two full time officers, and the same applies to Saltdogs, Basketball, Shrine Parade, Star City Parade, Lincoln Marathon, 4th of July Celebration at Holmes Lake. All of these would be a way to change the workload. It might be of value to know how the public wants the Police Department to be involved in these kinds of activities.

Discussion of the Police/911 work group ended with the comment that the reality may be that recommendations made by the Committee may involve realignment of resources, a reallocation of funds and/or raising property taxes to fund additional services.

Fire/EMS: Doug Ahlberg, co-chair of the Fire/EMS work group said the group had its first meeting last Thursday. Chief Spadt provided each member with information regarding the obligations of the Fire Department, budgetary constraints and issues. The first meeting was more of an informational meeting, and future meetings will focus on issues related to mission versus resources.

Carol Brown said Julie Righter had indicated that taking over ambulance calls put a burden on

the 911 Center and she asked if the 911 Center could tap into the ambulance enterprise fund to pay for additional staff. Julie Righter said 911 has always taken the medical emergency calls but the non emergency transport side of the ambulance business is new. The Committee felt this is something that could be looked into.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 9th at 1145 hours at the Police Department, Classroom A and will include a presentation by the Planning Department on the future growth projections of the city.

Meeting adjourned at 1306 hours.

Submitted by:

Virginia Fischer