



Community Policing

and the Department through the Lens of Our City

Recommendations on Expanding Community-Based Policing in the City of Fresno

A Report from the members of the Citizens Public Safety Advisory Board
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Community Oriented Policing is a somewhat nebulous and flexible term. In many ways, it is in the eye of the beholder and can be unique in each city/community. To some, it is walking the beat like a police officer of 50 years ago. To others it is knowing and being known in a certain neighborhood. Still others see it as integrating into a part of a city and becoming part of its fabric. For many, it is all of the above, as officers engage with local residents, neighborhood groups/organizations, and instead of responding after the fact to an incident, they prevent crime from happening in the first place.

Still, the term can be ill defined, leaving it open to individual interpretation. The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services put out a book titled "Community Policing Defined." It is 16 pages long.

In its most basic definition, Community Oriented Policing is a strategy that establishes a partnership between residents and law enforcement. There must be a commitment to community empowerment, decentralized and personalized policing, proactive problem solving, grassroots support and, possibly most important, internal change.

We see Community Oriented Policing as a way to reduce crime and address the disconnect between officers and residents. Expanding Community Oriented Policing can make Fresno a safer City. But it can do so much more than that. It can reestablish trust between officers and the public. It can build relationships based on civility and mutual respect. In short, it can make Fresno a greater city and a better place to live for everyone.

Fresno's Current Situation

In many ways, Community Oriented Policing as a strategy has always been practiced in Fresno. Community policing as a strategy has been around for several decades, and despite what some people think, it includes Fresno. Many residents throughout the city remember times when their local police officer would drive through the neighborhood, attend local events, and have rapport with the families that live in their areas.

In 2019, those community policing strategies continue to grow and evolve with the times. In Fresno these include:

- Each of the Fresno's five policing district offices have a designated Safe Exchange Zone. Safe Exchange Zones make buying from other people, custody exchanges, and other activities safer. These Safe Exchange Zones provide that space.
- Fresno Police Officer's recently hosted a Hmong residents' academy. The idea of the academy is to develop a better understanding between police and the City's Hmong-speaking population on how the department works and what services are available to the public. Previously, the department conducted similar outreach to the City's Latino residents, in addition to hosting a Teen Academy.

- For several decades, the Fresno Police Department has had a Citizen's Police Academy, in addition to this newly formed Citizen's Public Safety Advisory Board (CPSAB).

The goal of these programs is to enhance the relationship between citizens and the department, whether they live, or work in the City. The Citizen's Academy classes include patrol procedures, SWAT, Internal Affairs, officer involved shootings, homicide investigations, traffic enforcement and gangs. During the 12-week program – in which citizens attend weekly three-hour classes – participants tour the department's dispatch center, Crime Scene Bureau, as well as testing their skills on the Use of Force and Driving simulators. At the end of the course, volunteers have the option to continue for another eight classes to train to become a Citizen on Patrol volunteer.

- The Fresno Police Department and each of its five policing districts have Facebook pages. The department also has Twitter and active Nextdoor accounts. In today's digital age, social media is a vital communication tool. For instance, the Nextdoor app was used in March by Detective Haywood Irving in the Northwest Policing District to locate the owners of a photo album that was stolen during a mail theft. The app was also used to promote a Neighborhood Watch start-up meeting for the Greater Holmes Playground Area.
- In the Southwest Policing District, there is a Downtown Police Unit, which is made up of five officers and a sergeant who patrol by bicycle and squad car. The unit is supplemented by two private security companies hired by the Downtown Fresno Partnership, which do nightly patrols.
- In addition to downtown, the Tower District has a Tower Bike Patrol, and the Northeast Policing District has a two two-person Bike Unit at El Dorado Park near Fresno State. This unit is also used for other northeast areas. Fresno police are currently exploring the addition of bicycle officers to the Southeast Policing District along the Kings Canyon Corridor.
- Officers are being trained to think with the community they patrol in mind. One example of this is Fresno Police Officer David Ponek, who started a GoFundMe account for a single mother of three to buy a new truck after she had \$3,000 stolen from her purse. She had been saving the money to buy the truck for work. This is not so much a strategy as a state of mind that is likely already part of the thinking of many officers. Such outside-the-box thinking among officers should be encouraged, as it is the very essence of community oriented policing. Officers in Southwest Fresno also engage in recreational activities, such as basketball and soccer with community youth, it provides a simple way for officers to meaningfully connect with the people they work to protect in our neighborhoods.

Looking Ahead

While admirable, and a step in the right direction, these steps are not the final solution when it comes to community policing in Fresno. With community-based policing, the City and its police department should always be willing to adapt, be responsive and expand their approach to keeping Fresno safe. Innovative departments across the nation are exploring new ways to define community-based policing. Our Police Chief, Jerry Dyer, has done well in working with the available/limited resources to implement some community policing strategies. But as Chief Dyer

prepares to retire and hand over the department's leadership to a new chief, we feel it is perfect time to look at growing the City's community policing efforts.

Here are some recommendations –

- Creating a new position that would oversee the department's community policing efforts. The Albuquerque, New Mexico Police Department made this person a "deputy chief of staff." Whatever the job title, the position should be within the department's upper echelons and report directly to the Chief or to one of the deputy police chiefs. This would ensure that any community policing efforts remain on the front burner aren't shuttled to the side in favor of other policing priorities. This position also allows for the officer to be the "eyes and ears" of what's happening as far as community engagement out in the different parts of the City.
- Expand bicycle patrols. Bicycle patrols are a proactive and personal approach to patrolling in many of the city's most densely populated areas (downtown, Fresno State, the Kings Canyon/Ventura corridor). On bicycles, officers can be a presence over a greater part of their assigned community. Bicycle patrols can be very effective in more compact neighborhoods and in areas near our city's major educational institutions, areas around Fresno's high schools such as Roosevelt, McLane and Hoover, and around Fresno City College/Fresno State.
- Encourage officers and the department to continue working with churches, nonprofits and social service agencies to create a database of services they provide to the community, and make that database available to officers. This may include drug abuse counseling, meals for the homeless or other services. When an officer comes in contact with a resident that could benefit from such services, he or she can access the database and relay the social services information to the resident. This will further help with the issue of "doubling up" on efforts and not using our limited resources effectively.
- Work to expand and strengthen neighborhood associations (block captains, neighborhood watch, PTA's, etc.), then develop partnerships with these associations, which include giving association leaders access to the cellphone number of their community policing officer. This could give neighborhood associations another option if the need arises for an officer. This would not replace 911, but could instead be a sort of two-way communication tool that would allow community policing officers to keep a better handle on happenings within their assigned beat.
- Establish counter service at each of the five district police stations. It would benefit residents from each part of the City – Northwest, Southwest, Southeast, Central and Northeast – if they were able to walk in to their district station and get a report, file a report, ask questions, provide information on issues ongoing in the area, as well as any other topic they may want to discuss. This position does not have to be a sworn officer, it can certainly be filled with a cadet/explorer, or an officer on modified duty.
- Create individual Citizens' Public Safety Advisory boards in each of the City's five policing districts. These advisory boards would operate somewhat like Mayor Lee Brand's CPSAB, only with more of a focus on issues important to each part of the City they serve. These boards could in turn provide advisory input to the respective captains in charge of each policing district.

Southwest currently has a version of this, and it works well with the residents that current district leaders have place.

- Expand the residents' academies to other minority communities, and partner with community organizations in order to identify and recruit individuals. The Teen Academy should also continue, possibly with an organized curriculum as practiced in both Houston and El Paso, Texas. The 11-week curriculum used in both these cities, which was developed by a University of Houston professor, brings youths and police officers together to problem-solve on child and youth safety topics such as violence, physical and sexual abuse, domestic trafficking, sexual exploitation, and bullying.
- All officers should be knowledgeable about the customs, culture and traditions of the communities where they are assigned. This would help officers and the community members they deal with not only to build a mutual trust, but also to communicate with each other.
 - Assign additional resources, with intent of staffing each district's lobby.
 - Encourage Council Members to further collaborate with residents, community groups and law-enforcement, on the issue of community-based policing.

In addition, here are some additional strategies to consider –

- Implement Gang School Safety Teams, which are a targeted intervention strategy centered on gang enforcement officers working with Child Protective Services personnel to intervene in youth conflicts, which can be determined via strategies such as social media monitoring or school-based intelligence, to prevent conflicts from escalating into acts of violence.

More Resources Needed

We recognize that as it currently exists, the Fresno Police Department's financial resources and staffing levels make it difficult to expand community policing and implement creative community policing strategies.

To truly implement community oriented policing, the Fresno Police Department must essentially expand its mandate, adding a proactive component to the traditional reactive role. Police must continue to respond immediately to both crises and crime incidents, but then broaden that vision to bring the community into the policing process to stop crime before it happens.

Currently groups and organizations in the City often express concern in two areas – The amount of time on hold when calling 911 and officer response times. These issues have led in a deterioration of the public's expectations of their department, and to morale issues for officers responding to many-times angry citizens who have waited hours for an officer to come by.

Though the City has made moves to hire more 911 dispatchers, the system itself is still antiquated and badly in need of an upgrade. On response times, the department has still not recovered from cutbacks during the Great Recession. In 2009, there were 849 officers and 471 civilian personnel. Today, there are 813 officers and 279 civilian employees. During that time, the City's population

increased from around 481,000 to close to 549,000, with a projected population of nearly 750,000 in coming years.

In short, the department needs more personnel, both officers and civilians, to meet the needs of California's fifth-largest city. In addition to the antiquated communications systems that regularly fail and leave our public safety personnel unable to communicate with each other.

Any community policing efforts would likely need additional staffing, infrastructure and money to implement. It is clear that the department has already addressed what would be called "low-hanging fruit," which are the easy and inexpensive community policing strategies it has implemented.

We would encourage the next police chief to think creatively to try and implement as many community oriented policing strategies as possible, and also to seek additional funds, which are needed, to make these new strategies a reality. By building on those strategies already implemented, Fresno can truly embrace community-based policing.