

Fresno Police Department Chief's Advisory Board Minutes

October 25th, 2007

Present: Kamal Abu-Shamsieh, Anthony Alaniz, Ed Bailey, Judy Gordado (for Roz Clark), Gordon Donoho, Harry Gill, Jesse McDonald Jr., Jim Poptanich, Rebeca Rangel, Tom Gentile, Paulina Miranda (for Enrique Reade), Vicki Bethel (for Michael Roth), Jan Sangster, Paula Farris, Debra Odom, David Tittle.

Absent: Roz Clark, Cary Catalano, Morgan Doizaki, Floyd Harris, Lorena Marinez, Deep Sethi, H. Spees, Frank Franco, Luke Raughley,

Guests: Lt. Dennis Montejano, D.C. Pat Farmer, Lissa Parker, Pat Barr and Vicki Bethel.

Call to Order: The meeting was held in the City Hall Annex Training Room and called to order at 5:42 pm.

Minutes:

Minutes from August 30, 2007 were approved with no corrections.

Agenda Items:

Opening Remarks

Chief Dyer Announced forward movement on the holistic approach and code enforcement efforts discussed at last meeting. Resources are being intensified and directed toward problematic areas.

Crimes Committed by Street People

Chief Dyer posed the question: What should be the role of the Police Department in dealing with the individuals living on the streets?

Discussed the distinction between persons who are legitimately homeless and living on the streets because they feel they have no options and persons who spend time on the streets voluntarily, getting high, selling drugs and committing crimes. Much of the crime perpetrated by those living on the streets is perpetrated by the latter—many of whom are predatory and committing crimes against the more helpless disenfranchised individuals.

The general consensus of the group was three-fold: 1) The role of the Police Department should be one of enforcing the law, 2) the encampments “built” by the homeless create considerable sanitation and health issues, as well as contributing to drug and crime problems, and 3) there is a gap between the needs and the service availability for much of Fresno’s homeless population in terms of temporary housing, mental health services, etc.

Further exacerbating the problem: Fresno’s Police Officers generally feel as though their hands are tied when it comes to enforcing the laws pertaining to the homeless population. The perception that the “police can’t touch” the street people in Fresno is impacting officers’ ability to do their jobs as well as spreading throughout the

communities, creating a subtle invitation to street criminals: They are untouchable in Fresno. This is leading to an increase in numbers of predators on the streets.

The police need to be able to enforce the law without violating anyone's Constitutional rights. Finding a way to do this in this situation is presenting a challenge, as is the problem of what to do with the personal property of those in the encampments, how to store and manage it.

Pat Barr stated that the P.D. must build a case and educate the public, distinguishing clearly between the "homeless" and the "street people." A well put-together case coupled with public education about the problem will increase public pressure to enforce the laws. Increased support of the P.D. will result from that pressure.

Harry Gill suggested finding a way to keep track of those people who live on the streets (the legitimate homeless) and those who turn up on the streets less consistently (possibly those committing the majority of the crimes). This may give the police individuals to target.

Rebeca Rangel suggested consulting with other counties to determine what they are doing and also to develop and enforce a zero tolerance policy for public drug use and alcohol consumption.

Chief Dyer pointed out that, similar to one component of the targeted gang suppression efforts, if the City makes being on the streets in Fresno a lot less comfortable than taking advantage of the missions and services that are available, many of the homeless may choose the "service" option.

Jim Poptanich pointed out an additional concern with the situation with regard to safety: that perhaps the angle from which to approach the situation should be one of concern for the safety of the homeless living in the encampments as well as the safety of other citizens and police officers in Fresno. Regular checks performed on the encampments to ensure the safety of its inhabitants could be helpful. Communication is the key to any successful operation.

Other agenda items postponed in the interest of time

Announcements:

None

Closing Remarks:

Chief Dyer stated that the homeless situation presents one of the biggest issues faced by the P.D. and the variety of Board Members' ideas and feedback is valuable and appreciated.

A quick note on cameras in the community: The cameras work very well when you have a direct link to fiber optic. Unfortunately, the fiber optic is not located where the cameras are most needed. Further discussion will occur at a later time.

Adjourn:

Meeting adjourned at 6:35 pm.

Next Meeting:

November 29th, 2007