

# Department Assessment Newberg Dundee Police Department

Final Report  
November 2015

## Overview

The City of Newberg contracted with the Strategic Policy Partnership, LLC to conduct an assessment of the Newberg-Dundee Police Department. In-person interviews were conducted with members of the Department at the Newberg City Hall September 28 – 30, 2015 and telephone interviews were conducted during the week of October 5-9.

A standard set of questions was asked of each interviewee that was provided in advance of the interviews. The consultants interviewed a total of 31 persons, 26 in person and five by phone. Both sworn and civilian personnel were interviewed and respondents represented all ranks of the department. All interviews were anonymous and no one has been identified by name. Employee participation in the assessment was completely voluntary.

This report is being submitted to the City's outside labor attorney, Todd Lyon. Thereafter, Mr. Lyon will review the report to ensure confidentiality is maintained. He then will work with the City to determine what, if anything, can be done to implement improvements in the Police Department.

Each interviewee was asked to describe briefly their career in the department including their time with the department, their assignments and whether they had previous law enforcement agency experience. No records were kept of this information, but it helped the consultants to understand some of the perspectives provided.

## The Interview Results

1. Initially each participant was asked to describe the strengths of the department.
  - Almost universally the response was that the primary strength is the people in the department. Most said they work with high quality and caring people who provide a high level of police service to the public.
  - Many spoke of their attraction to the agency based upon the organizational strength of being a family atmosphere; though some noted such atmosphere has been diminishing.

- Respondents also identified the incorporation of advanced technology within the department as a strength.
2. The second question asked them what they liked about working in the department.
- Again, the dominant response was they like the people they work alongside. Many also cited that Newberg is their home and they like working to make the city a safe place to live and bring up their family. They enjoy being part of the community.
  - Another often cited “like” was living close to where they work minimizing commuting time.
  - Also mentioned was the pace of the work. Newberg-Dundee is busy enough, they said, so they can be an active police officer. It is not so busy that they have to have to go from call to call constantly with no time to engage the community or do proactive police work.
  - Some described the ability to govern their own work day as a reason they enjoy working at NDPD.
3. Next, respondents were asked whether the department provides good equipment and tools for it employees.
- The consensus is that the department does, overall, provide good equipment and tools for its employees. Many recognized that, as a relatively small city that is mainly residential, the city’s financial resources are limited. A number identified the acquisition of patrol rifles as an example of the department providing good equipment. Many mentioned they appreciated the department allowing the personalization of issued equipment.
  - Some concern was expressed about the age of the dispatching equipment. There was mention of the on-going issue of whether this function becomes regionalized as the reason the department does not invest further in communications equipment.
  - Another issue expressed by some was the condition and size of the fleet. A few episodes were cited, when several cars were down for repair of maintenance, when an oncoming shift had to wait for cars from the previous shift causing a delay in going into

service. Some respondents thought the set-up platforms (for lights, sirens, radios, etc.) for the patrol units should be more consistent.

- Some participants thought the department incorporates new technology, such as the new e-ticketing system, without determining if there is a need in the department and without thoroughly researching the equipment.
- A number of respondents felt the department would benefit from organizationally prioritizing the equipment needs of the department to ensure limited funds are best spent.

4. The fourth question asked the interviewees whether the department provides adequate training for its employees.

- Broadly, departmental employees want more training. Frequently mentioned was a desire for more firearms training especially using scenarios and simulations.
- There was recognition that increased firearms training would be expensive because of the cost of practice ammunition and the munitions required for simulations. Additionally they recognized the expense of personnel costs for trainers and for taking officers out of duty to complete such training.
- Professional development through enhanced training was also a commonly expressed desire.
- Some respondents thought the department's self-description as "the best" at times works against the agency in not being open to new training and outside trainers.

5. The next series of questions asked employees to describe how the department treats them with regard to: discipline, promotions, special assignments and general supervision. On each dimension they were asked whether there was fair and equitable treatment.

#### 5.a. Discipline

- There was variation in interviewees' views about the extent to which discipline is considered to be fair and equitable. Most discipline consists of letters or memos placed in employee personnel files which may be removed after a period of good

conduct. Very few examples were cited of severe discipline resulting in days off or termination.

- Respondents were split in their opinion of whether discipline is fair and equitable. Some have no problem with the manner in which discipline is conducted. There were others who view discipline as inconsistent with varying standards. This viewpoint perceives that discipline is based more on who you are rather than what you did.

#### 5.b Promotions

- There have been no promotions for some time. Few interviewees were fully aware of the process and the criteria used, especially those who have joined the department since then.
- Two views were expressed about what the criteria should be for first line supervisors. One view is that since all the sergeants supervise patrol officers recent patrol experience should be a critical factor. Others felt that an investigative background is important since many patrol officers conduct the complete investigation into crimes (as is common in department's like Newberg-Dundee) and can use guidance to ensure the quality of the investigations.
- Few expressed an interest in entering into a promotional process. The view was that the sergeants' job is bureaucratic, paperwork driven and desk work. This was not enticing to many interviewees.

#### 5.c. Special Assignments

- In the NDPD there are two types of special assignments – full time and collateral.
- Full time special assignments include detectives, canine, school resource officer and traffic (motorcycle). When openings occur, a department wide announcement is posted, applications are accepted and candidates are interviewed. Management then makes a selection. The department usually asks for an officer assigned to one of these positions to commit to staying there for a minimum of five years so that the department can recoup its training investment. Incumbents usually stay as long as they want in these positions, providing they remain productive. Some felt there should be more turnover in these jobs but few seem to apply when vacancies occur.

- Most interviewees' felt patrol time is not valued nor given adequate consideration in the selection of full-time special assignments. As noted in the case of promotions, few expressed an interest in competing for a full-time specialized assignment. A recent vacant canine position attracted only a single applicant.
- Collateral special assignments are performed on a part time basis in addition to an officer's regular duty. Examples include the domestic violence team, the firearms team and field training officers. There is more turnover in these positions. They are filled by an expression of interest and then by management decision. No formal process is used. Several interviewees expressed the view that since these positions have no established criteria for selection or retention they have been at times subject to favoritism.

#### 5.d. General Supervision

- The consensus is that, generally, supervision is inconsistent. This is due in part, it was stated, to the patrol schedule where patrol officers have different days off sequences than the sergeants. During an officer's rotation he/she will have multiple supervisors each with somewhat different standards. An officer's performance evaluation is most often completed primarily by the sergeant they worked for most frequently during the last rotation in the evaluation period. Doubt was expressed that the sergeant completing the evaluation gets much genuine input from the other supervisors although the formal process requires input by each sergeant.
  - Because the department is small and officers generally know the preferences of the sergeants interviewees expressed that a certain amount of sergeant "shopping" goes on when an officer wants a favorable decision on a particular matter.
  - Some thought the inconsistencies in supervision perceived by personnel is more of a generational difference in the values of some employees rather than differences in oversight.
6. Participants were asked whether they had raised a suggestion, concern, or issue with the Police Department management. If they had, they were next asked how the suggestion, concern, or issue was received, addressed or responded to.

- Of the line personnel interviewed somewhat less than half indicated they had raised a suggestion, concern or issue.
  - Interviewees indicated that there have been varying degrees of receptivity to such episodes. Some indicated there were no problems. Others indicated that their ideas were met with antagonism. Some indicated they feared retaliation if they raised issues counter to prevailing management thinking.
  - A minority of respondents thought “who” made the suggestion was the deciding factor in whether it was given strong consideration by the administration rather than the merit of the suggestion itself.
7. Interviewees were asked whether the department recognizes good work performed by employees. If good work is recognized, they were they asked how recognition took place.
- There was a broad consensus among those interviewed that good work is recognized. The most typical form of recognition is an internal e-mail. Some of these go to the entire department; others are directed to the individual. They then become part of the officer’s file.
  - Some thought that the e-mail recognitions have become so common that they mean little. They thought that some received praise for work that should be expected of everyone as part of their normal course of duties.
8. The next question sought to get interviewees’ perspective on how the community views the department and its service.
- Interviewees almost universally expressed the view that the department has the community’s trust and support. They feel the department has an excellent relationship with the community, due partly to the good treatment residents receive from officers. Support is also a result, they said, of the department’s willingness to respond to all citizen service requests.
  - Many respondents felt that while the department enjoys the confidence of the public, the reputation of the department has diminished a bit due to the recent events publicized in the local media.

9. Next, employees were asked whether improvements could be made in the department. This was followed up by a question that asked what improvements they thought should be made. Finally they were asked, if they were in a position to make those changes, how they would make them.

(The original set of questions also asked the interviewee to indicate which improvements might be short term, medium term and long term. This sequence of questions was discarded because the improvements recommended did not lend themselves to such time frames.)

### **Recommendations**

- The selection process for promotions and filling special assignment vacancies – both full time and collateral should be formalized and recorded in a written directive.
- Members of the department throughout the organization should be used in the selection process for new hires.
- A minimum number of years in Patrol should be required to qualify as a candidate for a supervisory position or a special assignment. (i.e. five years in Patrol to be eligible to test for sergeant and three for special assignments.)
- The Chief should examine the responsibilities of the two Captains and look to more evenly divide their workload.
- When possible, the interest and expertise of line personnel should be used in the decision making process in supervisors' ancillary administrative duties. They felt that unilateral decisions made by supervisors that have an impact on the work environment should be avoided.
- The department should look for opportunities to have personnel, especially Captains and Sergeants, work with other law enforcement agencies to expose them to different ideas and challenges facing other agencies.
- The department would benefit from reviewing the process by which performance evaluations are completed and ensure the supervisor with the most personal knowledge of the officer's performance completes the appraisal.

- The role of each rank within the department should be reviewed and clarified.
- The department should consider initiating a formal “suggestion process” that goes directly to the Chief and is time specific to complete.