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**LAS VEGAS METROPOLITAN
POLICE DEPARTMENT
JOHN MORAN, SHERIFF**

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**RESEARCH DOCUMENT:
MOBILE OFFICE CONCEPT**

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INTRODUCTION

Councilman Steve Miller has requested that this Department consider a mobile home-type (office) substation in troubled neighborhoods. This is similar, but yet dissimilar to the motor home concept that North Las Vegas is just implementing. Similar in that both the mobile home and the motor home would move from one neighborhood to the next. Dissimilar in that the mobile office would be more stationary since it could not simply be driven to the next location and in that it could not be located on the street. Both of these are dissimilar to the existing Gerson Park office operated by the LVMPD, which is an apartment and cannot be moved.

It is important to point out that neither one of these is a substation by LVMPD's definition. A substation has officers operating out of it 24 hours a day; has access via computer links to a majority of the Department's files; has facilities available for the officers located in it including lockers, showers, exercise room, training capabilities through a video link, and an on-line briefing system. Gerson Park officers operate out of the Northwest Substation (Area Command).

RESEARCH EFFORTS IN PATROL

Recent research efforts in viewing what is and is not effective police work have been more with mobile patrol units than with viewing the size and location of "substations." Some of the community policing efforts have called for smaller and more substations with communities swallowing the costs of these facilities. However, as a part of this effort, citizens are much more involved and actually staff these facilities themselves¹.

In viewing only robberies, *The Effect of the Police on Crime* pointed out that increasing the probability of arrests is a key ingredient to reducing crime rates.² The conclusion drawn was that the number of officers on patrol was not so important as what officers do on patrol: aggressive stopping of suspicious persons, a high rate of visibility, and stopping vehicles for warnings or traffic citations are keys to success. This followed on the Kansas City study. During this same time period, the Wilmington split force patrol research indicated that considerable success could be obtained by directed patrol activities as opposed to simply answering calls for service.³ This research in turn has been followed up by "problem-oriented" patrol which has shown that substantial concentrations of all police calls occur in relatively few "hot spots."⁴ Police efforts devoted toward these relatively few hot spots will reduce over all calls for service.

¹Christopher Walker, "Community Leadership in Proactive Policing," Paper presented at the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Washington, D. C. March 29, 1989.

²James Wilson and Barbara Boland, *The Effect of Police on Crime* (Washington, D.C.: LEAA, NIJ, 1979).

³James M. Tien et al., *An Evaluation Report of an Alternative in Police Patrol: The Wilmington Split-Force Patrol Experiment*, (Cambridge, Mass: Public Systems Evaluation, Inc., 1977).

⁴Lawrence Sherman, Patrick Gartin, and Michael Buerger, "Hot Spots of Predatory Crime: Routine Activities and the Criminology of Place," *Criminology*, Vol. 27 (February, 1989).

A Houston study indicated that "storefront" offices reduced fear of personal victimization and lowered perceptions of the amount of personal crime in the area. These storefront offices were operated in conjunction with directed patrol activities through a community organizing response team. It appeared the latter was more effective in reducing crime than the former, i.e. such offices may reduce the "perception" of crime, but do not appear to actually reduce crime.¹

The Field Services Division of LVMPD has certainly kept abreast of this research and had made efforts toward directed patrol activities. Indeed, all of the area commands have directed patrol activities as objectives for the current and upcoming budget years. Part of the problem has been that the rapidly growing population and increasing gang activities has created an understaffing problem which has taken some time to resolve. The Gerson Park project was the first effort to take one of these "hot spots" and attempt to resolve the problems.² In addition, all of the area commands have assigned one squad of officers to work as a problem oriented patrol team for the upcoming fiscal year. This can be done thanks to the large volume of area specific information provided by the computer assisted dispatch system.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECTS

The following is a review of existing "office" compared to the proposed "mobile office" and the North Las Vegas concept.

GERSON PARK

The success of the Gerson Park office has kindled requests from other areas for such similar offices or "storefronts." The term "office" as opposed to substation is used since officers continue to work out of the Northwest Area Command (substation) and bring all of their equipment with them. In addition, the office is not computer linked to any of the files of the department with respect to wanted persons, suspicious vehicles, etc. The patrol car which is used by the officers at the project actually has more capability in this area because of the mobile in-car terminal.

The office is maintained on two shifts from 0745 hours to 0200 hours. There are a total of four officers and one sergeant assigned to the project in total. Overtime is used to cover three of the seven days. At any one time during the hours of operation, there are usually two officers on foot or in their vehicle. The rule is that the patrol car will not leave the premises of the complex even if there are calls in proximity. The office is not always manned. When it is, it serves as a community gathering place with children and adults involved in numerous activities. The sergeant assigned to the office has advised that the office is almost too small and does not have sufficient meeting area. This facility is approximately 900 sq. ft. While crime has declined in the area, it is probable

¹Lee Brown and Mary Ann Wycoff, "Policing Houston: Reducing Fear and Improving Service," *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 33 (January, 1987), p. 77, 81,84,87.

²The small reporting area in which Gerson Park is located had 76 calls in April 1988 and 75 calls in April 1989. But, in May 1988, there were 110 calls vs. 73 calls in May 1989. The office was opened in mid-February 1989.

that it has simply been "displaced" to North Las Vegas and to other complexes in the area. Calls appear to have decreased in the area; however, no analysis of calls in the surrounding areas has been done.

The costs for the project were minimal. The Las Vegas Housing Authority provided the apartment, all furnishings, the telephone, and three portable radios free of charge as well as painting of the unit. In addition, the Authority pays for all utilities (including the phone bills) and maintains the unit (including repairing the unit after various acts of vandalism).

North Las Vegas Motor Home

The 38 ft. motor home which North Las Vegas is putting into service was borrowed from Emergency Management. If a situation occurs which requires the motor home, it will be returned to Emergency Management. The unit is fully self-contained. Some work had to be done to improve the air-conditioning and add radio equipment.

The motor home will be manned by a five officer unit--a sergeant and four police officers. The sergeant will stay in the unit, and the officers will patrol on foot or in cars. The motor home will be moved from one location to the next, possibly in the same day. The unit will be operational four days a week, but only on the swing shift. The officers will not be assigned to calls for service, but will only be checking around the neighborhood. Seven neighborhoods have been targeted. The unit has to be manned at all times because of vandalism. (NOTE: Gerson Park has had one incident of broken windows and three incidents in which a hose was stuffed through the mail slot and the apartment flooded.) If someone comes to the motor home with a report, it will be taken, but that is not the purpose of the motor home.

Mobile Office

It is this Department's understanding that the proposal by Councilman Miller is for "the placing of a 40-foot or 60-foot mobile home-type substation in troubled neighborhoods." "This unit can be uprooted at will and moved a few blocks or across town to interfere or disrupt gang activity."¹

For purposes of this analysis, a single wide mobile home has been used in the size of 12 x 60 ft for a total of 720 sq. ft.² Conversations with the City of Las Vegas Community Planning Office and the Building Inspection office indicate that the mobile office would be too large to sit on a street. It would have to be situated on a piece of property and a use permit would have to be obtained if this was residential zoning (which would probably be the case). Use Permit applications would have to be obtained any time that the office was moved to another site. This process would take anywhere from one to two months. Indeed, the use of these offices are suppose to be only temporary. LVMPD could probably get an exemption from that condition, however, if necessary.

¹City Councilman Steve Miller, Letter to Sheriff John Moran, June 8, 1989

²Conversations with mobile office experts indicate that while offering more space, double wide mobile homes are not suited for being moved from one place to another on a periodic basis. Costs would be extremely high.

The costs for a used mobile office with two offices, one at each end, a large open area of 324 sq. ft. and a bathroom would be approximately \$12,000 or \$299 a month to rent. This would house anywhere from four to eight people. Community Planning would require paving and hook ups to water and sewer and electricity. Depending on the site and the location of water and sewer, this could be fairly expensive. An estimate of \$5,000 for paving, water, sewer, and electrical hookups has been used. Some construction trailers have port-a-johns. It is doubtful that this would be acceptable to the Planning Office, the community in which the office is located, or the police officers staffing the building. Building Inspection would require skirting, as cheap as \$100 or as much as \$1,088; handicap ramps, \$1,500 which might have to be changed depending on each site elevation; emergency lights, no costs assigned; tie downs, \$225.

There would also be transportation costs associated with moving the mobile office. The first time according to one rental place would be approximately \$170 with set up costs at \$98. Each time the mobile office was moved, tear down charges would have to be considered at approximately \$80, as well as another set up charge, and transportation costs of at least \$143.¹ While each company charges insurances, that cost is unknown. It is important to recognize that these costs and the costs of obtaining a use permit would be required each time the mobile home is moved.

In addition, furniture and equipment would be required. A figure of \$5,100 will be used to cover cellular telephones, radios, and furnishings with much of it donated. Officers would continue to work from a substation and would bring all of their equipment with them. No communications link is proposed.

Total costs for the mobile office would be around \$19,325, less than the \$23,570 cost of a police car fully equipped. However, when adding in the costs associated with relocating the office over a year's time, the costs would increase considerably in direct correlation with the number of moves. For four moves in one year, some \$21,311 would be added to the costs.²

Obviously, the costs of a mobile home would be prorated over more than one year just as are the costs of any other capital equipment such as police vehicles. Some costs analysis has been completed in Appendix I.

However, concerns regarding the use of the mobile home must be evaluated in other terms. The Department recognizes the problems associated with displacing crime. There is an indication that such a proposal would only displace crime back and forth from one area to the next.³ There would be no permanent displacement. The North Las Vegas proposal may allow the opportunity to test that proposal.

Another area of concern is the impermanence of the structure. LVMPD has already had one experience with removing a facility from the community--the storefront at Nucleus Plaza. The community dissatisfaction was loud and clear. The Department, as have other departments, found that it is much easier to open an office, than close an office. Once located, the office might become politically difficult to move.

¹These are costs obtained from only one rental company.

²Includes \$5,000 each time for plumbing, electrical hook-up, paving; \$80 for tear down, \$143-170 for transportation, and \$98 set up for each location

³Conversation with Sheldon Greenberg, Police Executive Research Forum, June 15, 1989.

The community concept of the Gerson Park office which has affected the perception of the people there might be more difficult in a mobile office. Based on size constraints at Gerson, 200 fewer sq. ft. may make the mobile office almost too small. And, the black and white coloring at Gerson makes a definite statement. It is questionable whether a mobile office would make the same statement--even in black and white. It might become more of an eyesore to the community instead of an asset. Obtaining parcels of land on which to locate the office would have to be another consideration. It would seem that much time would have to be spent administratively in obtaining the necessary permits in relocating the structure. Costs could become considerable.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department has a limited budget, it must maximize benefits from each dollar of that budget. The mobile office proposal does not appear to be the most cost efficient. And, in terms of goals, LVMPD would obviously both like to impact citizens' perceptions of crime and reduce crime. However, given one over the other, controlling or reducing crime should be the primary goal. If this happens, then citizen perception may follow. A mobile office would be a "symbol" just as the Gerson Park office is a symbol. But police officers actively and aggressively out attempting to deal with hot spots are "substance." Given LVMPD's existing budget, if one has to choose--one must choose substance over symbol.

With that said, it must also be said that Sheriff John Moran is committed to neighborhood policing or community policing concepts. Those concepts are being carefully reviewed as a part of beginning efforts devoted to the strategic planning of future substations in the metropolitan area.

In addition, the LVMPD--in conjunction with UNLV--will conduct a citizen attitude survey in the upcoming fiscal year. The type of substations that the citizen would like to see is certainly a question which must be asked.

However, for the present, the patrol car appears to be the most efficient mobile unit available for officers. It can be moved at any time anywhere with minimal effort. The key is to stop the officer from running from call to call and allow that officer time to stop and become acquainted with the community.

APPENDIX I - COSTS PRORATED ON A YEARLY BASIS

	Mobile Office Alternative		Patrol Car Alternative	
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Yearly Basis</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Yearly Basis</u>
CAPITAL:	\$12,000	\$1,400 (3,588 rental) ¹	\$14,700	\$6,100 ²
EQUIPMENT:³				
Red lights/siren	N/A	N/A	945	135
MCT	N/A	N/A	4,900	700
Portable radio	1,850 (2)	264	925	132
Mobile radio	N/A	N/A	2,100	300
Cellular telephone	1,750 (2)	250	N/A	N/A
Handicap ramp	1,500	300	N/A	N/A
Skirting	500	100	N/A	N/A
Furnishings	1,500	300	N/A	N/A
Tie downs	225	225	N/A	N/A
OPERATING COSTS:				
Gas/oil/maintenance	N/A	N/A	N/A	6,600
Paving/water/sewer/electrical connections for four moves	5,000 (per site)	20,000	N/A	N/A
Water/electric/sewer		679	N/A	N/A
Set up/tear down/transportation for four moves		1,311	N/A	N/A
-Insurance for moving (unknown)				
Total Yearly Costs		\$24,829 (Land costs not included)		\$13,967

¹ Excludes salvage value of \$5,000 for office. \$1,400 is based on purchasing.

² Excludes salvage value of \$2,500 for patrol vehicle.

³ No salvage value - all electronic equipment given a life expectancy of seven years.