

**PUBLIC SAFETY TRANSITION TEAM TASK GROUPS'**  
**SCOPE OF WORK**

**BASE-LINE WORK ITEMS**

Throughout the course of our Task Group's deliberations we have addressed the following Work Items presented in the form of research questions. This Report summarizes the Task Group's observations about pertinent characteristics of the Function Area of **PUBLIC SAFETY**.

**I: How should the specific purpose of this Functional Area be defined?**

In a traditional sense, Public Safety is usually viewed as responsibilities of police and fire. However, we should define Public Safety in a comprehensive way that is inclusive of all aspects (i.e., economics, education, prevention, intervention, etc.) that have an impact on the fear of crime, the perception of crime and crime itself. This is usually the central understanding of its scope and reach. Without this approach, it becomes virtually impossible to design and implement a long term sustainable solution to Public Safety, i.e., the eradication of crime and disorder.

**II: Where, within the governmental structure, should this Functional Area (FA) fit? Why? What activities should it address?**

Public Safety should be the primary responsibility of Police and Fire Departments. However, all aspects of government should have a sense of responsibility in this area and a clear understanding of that responsibility and how it affects the overall comprehensive plan of public safety. For example, parks & recreations, economic development, neighborhoods, fiscal budgets, etc.

**III: What are the existing strengths of this FA in St. Petersburg? How can these strengths be reinforced?**

Within the Police Department, sworn personnel is near its authorized capacity. The Police Department is well funded and has the latest technology and equipment. The Department is nationally and state accredited. Its response time to priority one calls (i.e., serious) is below the national average.

The St. Petersburg Fire & Rescue Department (SPFR) provides the citizens of this city with an Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating of 2. A level of 1 is within our reach. The SPFR is nationally accredited.

**IV: What are the current weaknesses of this FA? How can these conditions be improved or eliminated?**

**Leadership:** One of the most important factors in public safety is “leadership,” including the strategies, tenor, and goals set by top leaders in both police and fire. Leadership also dictates policy and policing philosophy. In city government, there is no role more important than those individuals who lead the police and fire departments. Therefore, it is imperative that the city has the right people in place to properly lead these two crucial

organizations. Both police and fire need new direction and leadership. This should be a priority, for the Mayor-Elect, addressed within the first three to four months of his administration.

As a part of the selection process for a new police chief, the selection committee should, at a minimum, include a civilian from the St. Petersburg community with extensive experience in law enforcement. This individual should be reputable reputation within the community, specifically the African American community , which traditionally has experienced discord with the Police Department.

For decades, the senior staff at the police department has had concerns and questions about officer-involved shootings for aggravated assault with a motor vehicle and police-involved pursuits involving the same alleged crime. The 1996 civil disturbances involved a police shooting where an officer was the alleged victim of an aggravated assault with a motor vehicle. Shortly thereafter, the police chief at the time, understood that the organization had a responsibility to the officers and the citizens to take the necessary steps to ensure these types of police-involved shootings were minimized. The police chief implemented a policy addressing officers' responsibilities to utilize tactics and strategies that avoided officers putting themselves in harm's way. After the policy was implemented and reinforced by staff, officer involved shootings were dramatically reduced.

With police officer-involved shootings at a record high, there may be an underlying systemic problem related to strategies, tactics, training, supervision, and leadership. Which brings into question, why other local law enforcement agencies have not experienced this disproportionate number of police-involved shootings. Therefore, the new police chief will have to have the foresight, intestinal fortitude, and courage to make the tough decisions and bring about the necessary changes.

All the job-swap policy controversy within the fire department suggests that the leadership needs to be changed. This will give the Mayor-Elect an opportunity to rebuild trust with the tax payers and give the fire department new direction.

**More strategic deployment of personnel and proficiency:** Most cities have moved beyond the use of police-per-1,000 ratios to determine the number of officers needed to effectively police the city. This is in part due to a growing body of research that confirm the lack of correlation between the number of officers per thousand and the reduction of crime. Research suggests that factors such as efficiency in deployment, technology and strategies play a larger role in reductions in crime. This is particularly important considering the \$100,000 (approximate cost) to hire a police officer, including equipment. For the past decade, the officers have been provided with the latest and best technology and equipment for efficiency and proficiency.

It is recommended that an outside consultant be hired to conduct a work load analysis. This will help to determine the number of officers needed to police our city appropriately **prior** to increasing the authorized sworn strength from 545 to 550 as already approved in the 2014 budget. When the budget amendment is made for 2014, the five additional officers should be removed. This is supported by the decreases in the Citizen Calls for Service, Drug Arrests, Traffic Crashes and Citations as noted in the 2013 Police

Department Performance Measures Monthly Status Report. Also, according to the 2013 Citywide Uniform Crime Report, Part I Index, Crime is down 10.5% over the 5-year average. Furthermore, the Federal government has downsized its military, recognizing that with the advancement of technology and implementation of effective strategies, more can be done with fewer personnel.

**Organizational structure:** The Department has moved to streamline its senior ranks, for example, by combining job duties for job levels such as “major,” it is possible to reduce the number of senior staff needed to effectively run the department. The Mayor-Elect should give thought to additional cost effective consolidations (for example, consolidate the job responsibilities of the two vacant major rank positions, property crime and labor relations, which have been vacant for over a year).

There was much discussion about the policing models and methodologies for the agency. Some suggested that we return to the model of community policing that was eliminated years ago where 40-50 police officers were placed in neighborhoods throughout the city. There is no need to turn back the time and return to a model that was ineffective and represented a misuse of valuable resources. There are more modern methods at work in other locales which represent enlightened approaches to effective police community collaboration. However, there is a need to have a model of policing that requires all police officers, who respond to calls for service, to routinely get out of their cars, walk the neighborhoods and get to know the residents of their areas. This philosophy should be encouraged, supported, required, and measured by the Mayor-Elect and the new police chief.

There was some discussion about code enforcement being placed or considered for the police department. Although there may be opportunities for code enforcement and law enforcement to collaborate, code enforcement should not be placed under the authority of the police department. To do this, would be a waste of valuable, expensive police officer resources.

**Training to curb the rise in officer-involved shootings:** With police officer involved shootings at a record high, it is recommended that a review of personnel be conducted to determine if additional training is needed in the areas of dealing with the mentally ill, tactics involving aggravated assault with a motor vehicle on a police officer, and the role of the first line supervisor of these officers as they patrol our city. Many of the police officers are young and inexperienced and need the appropriate guidance and supervision from their first line supervisors.

Over the next 24 months, many of our experienced officers will be eligible for retirement. Therefore, succession planning is needed.

**Red light cameras** – Data on red light camera citations suggest that their public safety impact is questionable. While red light cameras are a rich source of added revenue to the City and State, data have shown that two of the top infraction types being incurred by drivers are less dangerous than generally perceived (i.e., “right on red” cause less than 1% of the crashes,” and “blink-of-an-eye” infractions cause a very small percentage of collisions).

It is recommended that the red light cameras be eliminated completely or eliminate the right on red and blink-of-an-eye violations.

**Juvenile arrests:** Advocacy Groups have called for the city to adopt a policy of issuing civil citations in lieu of arrests for a select number of misdemeanor charges. The new police chief should meet with the appropriate entities including the Pinellas County School Board to implement the best practices involving civil citations.

**Pursuit Policy:** Change from forcible felony back to violent felonies only. Also, it should be policy to utilize the current technology (GPS) to determine the driving patterns and behavior of police officers. This will enhance community relations and trust as it relates to the many complaints regarding police officers and their inappropriate driving habits in neighborhoods.

**Take home vehicles:** Take home vehicles policies need to be revisited and perhaps modified for officers living within Pinellas County only and all others reimburse the city for gas per mile.

**New police building:** Although a new building is mainly needed due to hurricane hardening, the building itself does not play a pivotal role in the effectiveness of police services to the community. It is recommended that the Mayor-Elect proceed with a new structure that will be inclusive of a plan of completion in one phase. The question becomes can the new building size be reduced in order to decrease cost and work within the framework of the allocated available funding. With the rising cost of construction, a decision must be made as soon as possible that is in the best interest of the tax payers and that balances necessity versus budget.

**The weakness in the SPFR are:**

EMS issue: “Fire Transport”; decide what the city wants the level service to look like within the next four years. What are we willing/prepared to do? Should the governance of this service be provided by the County Commissioners or City Council?

Re-examine Brown- outs: the practice of placing units out of service due to personnel/budget restraints; all fire and EMS units must remain fully funded and in service. This will ensure the units are available to protect lives and property.

**V: What is the City doing currently in this FA? What Programs are being operated by the City or by any partnerships/collaborations?**

The SPFR participated in the States, Journeyman Apprenticeship program. This provides 7000+ hours of training. The SPFR is among a very few and may have the longest record of participation. The programs are Penny for Pinellas, Staffing for Adequate Fire, and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program, EMS/ and other fire departments in the County.

**VI: What should be added, or eliminated, to the City's efforts in this Functional Area.**

An overall comprehensive strategy to address public safety (see definition above - question #1) should be added with an oversight component. This should include the Mayor-Elect and his top administration that will set the goals and define the comprehensive strategy. Quarterly meetings should be held to review the impact of each entity and modifications should be made based on input and data.

**OTHER SPFR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Explore the possibility of diesel exhaust system: Insure that each station has a diesel exhaust system to evacuate the exhaust of the fire trucks outside of the station.

Increase administrative capacity (cost saving possibility): add more civilian chief/administrators to handle the work in fire headquarters. This can be accomplished through attrition of current chiefs; send firefighters (earning high risk pay/high risk pensions) back out to the fire stations.

Fire prevention / public education: explore the possibility of adding additional personnel and plans review.

Vehicle maintenance; explore the possibility of more mechanics trained in the specialized area of repairing "Emergency Response Vehicles", more in the line of the Bigger Fire Department trucks.

Eliminate:

Non-essential core fire services: Review all non-essential core fire services and explore the possibility of eliminating any that take away from the core services of the fire dept.

Take home cars (cost savings): review the program to ensure the cars are issued to essential personnel only and that the vehicles remained within the city limits for the fire department.

**VII: OTHER: What else is important to understanding and improving PUBLIC SAFETY in St. Petersburg?**

**Public relations:** For more than a decade, citizen advocacy groups have cited the need for more information and better communication among police and citizens. Some believe that a large degree of the trust between the community and police department has diminished. There were several concerns regarding the police department's ability to fairly and objectively police itself, i.e. investigate and appropriately discipline personnel. Some also suggested that there be a citizen review and oversight board with the authority to recommend disciplinary actions. After reviewing the number of police officer grievances for discipline over the last four years, it was apparent that the numbers were at record lows which could be an indication that officers are not being properly disciplined. Therefore, they have nothing to grieve or complain about. This could give credence to the distrust.

It is recommended that the citizen complaints process be better communicated to the public by utilizing the resources the department currently has available, i.e. crime watch, neighborhood associations, churches, recreation centers, radio show, school system, and social media, etc. While there may not be a need, at this time, for a review board with oversight of police personnel, it is imperative that the new police chief and the Mayor-Elect set the tone and renew that trust.

There are other underlying issues within the police department that involve leadership and the work environment that must be repaired immediately. This can only be done with the right person as the police chief.

It is highly recommended that both the police and fire chief positions continue to report directly to the Mayor.

For the SPFR, review the “Strategic Plan”, St. Petersburg Fire Rescue 2011- 2016, and the Accreditation Report.

The importance of having a good relationship with employees and an understanding of labor laws and relations should be reinforced..

Ensure race and gender diversity within both departments, specifically the senior staff of the SPFR.