

July 27, 2012

To: Public Safety, Civil Rights & Technology Committee  
From: Peter Harris, Central Staff  
Re: Response to SLI on Update to Neighborhood Policing Plan

## **Introduction**

On August 1 the Committee will be briefed on the Executive's response to the Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) calling for an update to the Neighborhood Policing Plan. The SLI is attached. The response will be in your Committee notebooks and is available in Clerk File 312467.

Here I will describe the original objectives of the Plan and why they changed, and summarize the SLI. Then I will describe some specific information the response lacks, and discuss why the Plan should encompass more than the size and deployment of patrol.

Bottom line: The SLI response hints at hard choices in policing that await the City but does not describe them in detail or suggest how they might be resolved. These include balancing time-honored goals for 911 response time and highly popular bicycle and foot patrols against forms of proactive policing that evidence suggests are more effective in preventing serious crime, and balancing these together against the many other Police Department responsibilities, such as criminal investigations, traffic enforcement and disaster preparedness.

## **What was the Plan and why did it change?**

The impetus for the SLI was the recognition by all that the original objectives of the Plan would not be met. This was due largely to the City's budget situation, but also to what the Police Department learned in the first few years of Plan implementation.

The original objectives of the Plan included hiring a net additional 105 officers between 2008 and 2012, assigning 605 officers to 911 response duties in the precincts, changing the boundaries of patrol beats to equalize 911 demand across them, and changing patrol shifts to improve the fit between deployment and workload by time. The Department changed the beat boundaries, and was able to add nearly 80 sworn officers in 2008 and 2009 combined (see the table on page 3 of the response), but will lose nearly 60 officers between 2010 and 2012, and as a result has not been able to change patrol shifts.

The goals underlying the original objectives were to be able to respond to high priority 911 calls in seven minutes or less throughout the city, have adequate patrol backup, and give the officers assigned to 911 response the time for more proactive policing when and where it would be useful. The last of these arguably was the main innovation and point of the Plan. Officers assigned to 911 response on average spend a little more than a third of their time responding to 911 calls, a little less than a third in a variety of administrative and training tasks, and about a third in random patrol. It

has long been known that random patrol has little effect on crime; as a consultant to the Department once said, random patrol gives random results. More recently we have learned that concentrated police attention to specific crime problems, represented by high risk places, persons or combinations of these, can have a large effect on crime. If a large share of the time that officers assigned to 911 response spend in random patrol could instead be devoted to proactive efforts to solve crime problems in their individual beats, the Department would achieve a dramatic increase in the resources available for one of the most effective crime prevention techniques known.

This, at any rate, was the idea. A combination of factors changed the idea. First was the budget, which prevented the Department from assigning 605 officers to 911 response. For technical reasons related to the minimum number of officers needed at even the least busy times, this meant no change in the shifts, which in turn meant no ability to move much of the time that officers are not busy responding to calls from the early hours of the morning, when it is less useful, to other times of the day.

Partly for this reason and partly due to rethinking how best to assign officers to dedicated proactive work, the Department began emphasizing the response time objectives for the officers assigned to 911 response and emphasizing the proactive roles of other officers assigned to the precincts, including bicycle and foot patrols, anti-crime teams and community police teams, and of officers who work from headquarters, such as the gang unit and SWAT.

This rendered the specific objectives of the Plan largely obsolete, or at least delayed indefinitely. This was the context for the SLI.

### **What did the SLI request?**

The SLI asked for an updated Plan that would be fiscally realistic and provide the most public safety for the resources available. It reiterated the Council's support for the core principles of the Plan. It asked that Plan implementation be measured in part by whether patrol officers in every beat in the city have enough proactive time to address neighborhood crime problems at the most effective times.

Reflecting work the Department already had been doing, the SLI also asked the Department to consider new options for patrol shifts that would be more efficient than either the existing 9-hour shifts or the all 10-hour shifts called for in the original Plan and also make it possible to meet the objectives with fewer than 605 officers.

More generally, the SLI asked that the Plan begin to address the roles of officers outside patrol, in part because of the likelihood that the budget would require transferring some of these officers into patrol. It asked that the Plan take advantage of recent progress in the science on policing. And, in response to the up-and-down experience of the last decade, it asked that the Department minimize fluctuations in year-to-year hiring because of the inefficiencies and threats to the quality of training they create.

### **How did the SLI response respond?**

The response paper is not long, so it does not need summary here. I will focus on a few main points.

As noted in the first paragraph of the response, the Department, the Budget Director and the Central Staff Director agreed that it would not be feasible to develop a fully articulated new multi-year Plan. The reason was that continued uncertainty in the City's fiscal situation made it difficult to predict the Department's budget with any certainty. Nonetheless, we might have expected a few more specifics. For example:

The graph on page 2 tells us what we knew from the first quarter 2012 staffing update, which is that as of last March the number of officers assigned to 911 response had declined to 524. Page 4 says the Department has temporarily moved 18 officers into 911 response to maintain response times in the expectation that workload will increase as usual in the summer, but does not say whether these transfers will yield a stable net increase of 18 for a while or be counterbalanced by the continued overall attrition in filled sworn positions that the staffing update showed us would continue until the middle of next year.

Page 3 of the paper says the Department intends to maintain "an aggregate of at least 30% of patrol time for proactive work." The aggregate is less important than how this time is distributed across beats and across hours and days of the week. Proactive time in the West Precinct when the bars close on Saturday night is highly useful. Proactive time in the far reaches of the North Precinct at 4 AM on Tuesdays is likely to be much less useful.

Page 4 of the paper notes that 911 call volumes have increased in both 2011 and 2012 to date. This suggests there may be a longer term trend underlying the expected summertime increase in calls, but the paper does not say how the Department would respond to such a trend, beyond saying on page 8 that the Department will "continue to place a primary emphasis on maintaining . . . response time".

Page 6 of the paper says the Department is implementing violence prevention emphasis patrols in every precinct, but does not say how much staffing these patrols require, or whether they are staffed by officers who would otherwise be doing something else or are supported by overtime. Nor does the paper say whether the Department expects the need for these patrols will end soon or instead will be a continuing demand on resources.

### **Looking forward**

Pages 8 and 9, on looking forward, are general in the extreme. "The Department will continue to place a primary emphasis on [patrol and] maintaining . . . response time . . . Any additional loss of officers may translate into changes in service levels. . . Any significant staffing changes would be discussed with the Council and Executive."

The original Plan focused exclusively on patrol, but the more that resources are constrained, and the more demand there is for policing – whether in the form of 911 calls, outbreaks of violence, or demands for quality of life improvements on downtown streets – the more the Plan must comprehend all of the major functions of the Department. This is evidenced by the difficulty the Department has had in transferring even as few as 18 officers into patrol. Eleven precinct desk clerks – less than 1% of the sworn force – are an issue in themselves. The most likely future scenario may be one in which the Department and the City are forced to make significantly larger tradeoffs among at least several high priority police functions.

The Department’s performance measurement framework provides one way to describe these potential tradeoffs at the highest level. Here is the framework:

Police Department Performance Measures Per Resolution 30996, Adopted September 2007	
Major Dimensions	Measures
Reducing crime	Rates of violent crime and property crime
Reducing fear of crime and increasing the sense of security	Residents’ perceptions of crime and safety
Increasing traffic safety	Injuries and fatalities from crashes
Increasing safety in public places	Violent crimes and drug offenses in major parks
Providing good customer service by responding to calls and attending to community needs	Response time to 911 calls; resident satisfaction with police services
Holding offenders accountable	Clearance rates for violent crimes and property crimes
Using authority and force fairly and only as reasonably necessary	Sustained complaints of officer misconduct; speed of OPA investigations; shootings by officers
Strengthening emergency prevention and response	Preparedness exercises and training
Using public resources efficiently and effectively	Per capita cost of Police Department; percentage of time Patrol staffing goals are met

For example, note first that responding to 911 calls is primarily an aspect of customer service, not crime reduction. This reflects the evidence that fast responses to 911 calls have little effect on crime. The SLI response acknowledges this – “one fact is clear: a prompt response is important to police customers” – yet suggests this should remain the Department’s top priority. If so, and maintaining response time either requires transferring more officers into 911 response from specialized proactive units in the precincts, or from traffic, or from criminal investigations, or, because of reduced overall resources, requires taking reductions in the latter three areas rather than in 911 response, then the Department is giving higher marginal priority to customer service than to reducing crime, increasing traffic safety or holding offenders accountable. This seems like an important policy choice for the City.

Note also that the SLI response section on preventing violence describes foot and bicycle patrols as proactive resources. Bicycle patrols may be effective in reducing crime, especially misdemeanors and drug offenses in public places, but the effectiveness of foot patrols in this is questionable. Until recently the evidence was that foot patrols had little or no effect on crime. A 2009 experiment in Philadelphia showed that foot patrols did reduce violent crime, but this effect was limited to the city blocks with the very highest rates of violence, and was highly correlated with arrests, suggesting that the effect may have had less to do with how the officers traveled than with their frequent presence at high crime locations. It may make more sense to regard foot patrols as another form of customer service or perhaps a means of reducing fear in a few locations. The point is that understanding the

tradeoffs involved in allocating resources in different ways first requires understanding what the different allocations produce.

Note finally the goal of using authority and force fairly and only as reasonably necessary. Ordinarily we do not think of this as a resource intensive area, but it may become so if a settlement with the Department of Justice ends up requiring a smaller span of control by patrol sergeants, which in turn would require either more sergeants or fewer officers. This may be less a City choice than a negotiated conclusion, but the additional pressure it would create for more tradeoffs among other goals is one more factor a policing plan should consider.

These three examples are not comprehensive. They are intended only to be illustrative of the kinds of issues an updated Neighborhood Policing Plan might address, in addition to the basic elements of patrol deployment.

### **Conclusion**

I hope these thoughts are useful. The Council will learn more about the Executive's direction for the Police Department soon, when the Mayor proposes a 2013 budget and we see new projections for sworn staffing through the end of next year.