

The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act: Is it a One Size
Fits All Collective Bargaining Agreement?

An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation from
the Leadership Command College

by
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July, 2001

7/1/01

ABSTRACT

Personnel issues are of the utmost importance to all persons within an organization. These issues take up a considerable amount of an administrator's time and budget and are obvious concerns of the employees themselves. Currently, state civil service and collective bargaining agreements are commonly in place in many cities across this state. State civil service has been likened to a collective bargaining process without the need to bargain. The purpose of this paper was to determine to what extent this comparison is accurate. The hope is that information gleaned from this study will assist administrators and labor leaders in choosing a system that will work best for them.

This comparison was made by studying the histories of the two labor systems and the content of the state of Texas' Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act. This was done by means of a review of the act itself and existing literature on the subject. A survey of current civil service employees was distributed and results indicate that while the overwhelming majority of respondents were satisfied with the civil service system, there were several areas where the system failed to adequately address certain issues and lacked the specificity of a collectively bargained contract.

Another shortcoming of the Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act is its inflexibility and the inability to change provisions included in the Act. Throughout the life of a collectively bargained contract, questions will arise that can be settled during subsequent contract negotiations, this does not exist in the civil service system.

The study finds that while the Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act addresses many issues contained in a collectively bargained agreement, it falls short in addressing all the needs of both management and the employee.

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Introduction

In 1947, the 50th Legislature of Texas enacted what is known as the Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act in an effort to protect the rights of the effected employees and set guidelines for their employment (Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act of 1947, as cited in Art. 1269m of Vernon's Annotated Revised Civil Statutes of Texas, 1963). This Act has been likened to a collective bargaining agreement. The purpose of this paper is to determine if this comparison is accurate; or more appropriately, to what extent it may be accurate. This topic is of great importance to law enforcement personnel as well as the city or county administrators who employ them. Personnel issues and expenses are a constant source of stress on the individuals concerned and the organization as a whole. Studies have shown that labor costs in many enterprises are more than 50 percent of total costs (Milkovich & Newman, 1999). A look at the 2001 budget for Baytown, Texas reveals personnel costs for the city account for over 66 percent of the General Fund, and 46 percent of the over \$64.3 million total city budget (City of Baytown, 2000). Given a change in employment concerns brought on by the changing face of the workforce, these issues require renewed attention.

To accomplish this task, it becomes necessary then to determine what is collective bargaining, and what may be found in a collective bargaining agreement, and what is contained in the Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act; henceforth referred to as the Civil Service Act, or the Act. This will be done through a review of the history of collective bargaining and the Civil Service Act. A cursory analysis of the items contained in a collectively bargained

contract will be conducted. This analysis will then be compared to those items that are covered in the Civil Service Act.

There will also be surveys and interviews conducted to gain insight into how those working under a collective bargaining agreement view their agreement with regards to ease of administration and overall satisfaction. The results obtained will be compared to the results received from a similar set of interviews and surveys conducted on officers and firemen working under a civil service system.

It is anticipated that the Civil Service Act will compare very well with a collectively bargained contract in several areas, but will fall short in others. The differences will most likely be regarding specificity. It is hoped this comparison will show the shortcomings of each system and offer the labor leaders and the city administrators insight into which system might work best for them.

Review of Literature

Any review of the literature concerning these topics would require a search of the historical background of collective bargaining and state civil service. Although this review will be limited to the American foundations of the two topics, like many other ideas, concepts and processes common in this country, the term *collective bargaining* originated in Britain, in their labor movement. The American labor leader Samuel Gompers is credited with developing its common use in the country (Carrell & Heavrin, 1988).

According to Collier's dictionary, collective bargaining is a negotiation between union representatives and employers for reaching an agreement on terms of employment, as wages,

hours, or working conditions (Collier's, 1986). This negotiation, by name and definition, is an ongoing process, beginning with the actual negotiation of the contract, through the duration of the contract and possibly daily administration and interpretation of its provisions

The **terms of employment** generally negotiated include the price of labor, e.g., wages and benefits; work rules, including hours of work, job classifications, effort required, and work practices; individual job rights, e.g., seniority, discipline procedures, and promotion and layoff procedures; management and union rights; and the methods of enforcement and administration of the contract including grievance resolution (Carrell & Heavrin, 1988).

Collective bargaining can be found in countless meeting rooms across the country, it is an accepted part of the labor-management relationship in this country. Our nation's history, as it pertains to the labor movement, will show that this has not always been true.

In 1790, the New York Printers went on strike and it is believed this is the first strike by employees in this country. The 1806 case of the Philadelphia Cordwainers declared that a "combination" of employees was illegal (Carnell & Heavrin, 1988). Over the next century and a quarter, management and labor had a rocky relationship. It was not until 1935 that Congress articulated and passed a national labor policy, The National Labor Relations Act, or Wagner Act (French, 1998).

Through this policy, Congress recognized the need for collective bargaining as a way to eliminate and mitigate industrial strife. This act gave employees the right to organize themselves into unions and required management to recognize them and meet them at a bargaining table to discuss terms and conditions of the job. The employees big bargaining "chip", the right to strike, was given government protection.

There was one group of employees not included in the Wagner Act, and as a result were not guaranteed any rights provided for in the act. Congress had excluded federal, state and local government employees. Congress apparently viewed the government not as an employer, but as a representative of the people, providing certain needed services. This would therefore mean that public workers were not employees but were public servants, and there were already systems in place to protect public servants from the arbitrary actions of private employers (Carrell & Heavrin, 1988).

While the private sector employees were fighting their battles for better wages, better conditions and job security, the public sector employees were starting to do the same. In the early 1800's, patronage and the *spoils system* were alive and well -- government employee turnover was linked to party affiliation and not ability or dedication. If one was a government employee, it was necessary to back the right candidate to remain employed. The expectation to support candidates with time and money or fear losing employment was also present. Not only did this impact the employee, but government continuity and efficiency were lost due to the high turnover and costs associated with it (Carrell & Heavrin, 1988).

Early reforms in the public sector did not occur until the late 1800's. The first Civil Service Commission was established to propose reforms in the national government in 1871, but was later disbanded because Congress failed to make an appropriation for the commission (Carrell & Heavrin, 1988). Due to the political nature of obtaining employment in the public sector, Congress passed the Pendleton Act in 1883. This Act provided for a non-partisan three-member Civil Service Commission to draw up and administer examinations to prospective federal appointees. It also protected federal employees from being fired for not making political contributions. Many states followed suit and public employees now enjoyed some job security

through this **civil service system** (Carrell & Heavrin, 1988). This act allowed for employees in the federal workforce to be appointed and progress professionally based upon their performance (French, 1998). Rules were in place to govern hiring, firing and discipline and due process hearings were granted to give a worker a forum to protest an employer's action.

The Pendleton Act also granted Congress the right to regulate wages, hours and working conditions of public employees. When an increase in wages or benefits was requested the employees lobbied the appropriate level of Congress. Presidents T. Roosevelt and Taft tried to prevent such actions through Executive Orders, but in 1912 Congress passed the Lloyd-LaFollette Act that allowed unaffiliated organizations to present their proposals to Congress without fear of retaliation (Carrell & Heavrin, 1988).

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s private unionization grew significantly under protection of the National Labor Relations Act. Both the private and public sector employees enjoyed job security, higher wages, better benefits, grievance procedures and arbitration rights, or at least an avenue for improving each of these. Unionization, therefore, held no attraction for many public employees. It was not long before the new strength of the growing unions and their collective bargaining power started to surpass the ability to lobby Congress, enjoyed by public employees, and public employees began to talk of unionizing and to collectively bargain.

For years governments were able to resist collective bargaining because of the **sovereignty doctrine**. Sovereignty refers to the supreme, absolute power, by which an independent state is governed; and in a democracy, that is the people. This doctrine, therefore, means the government will wield its power unrestricted by anything but the people -- all of the people (Carrell & Heavrin, 1988). Under collective bargaining, decision-making would have to be shared with employees, not with the government only; this was seen as a threat to the

sovereignty doctrine. The sovereignty doctrine is flawed and did not hold up to close scrutiny, and in January of 1962, President Kennedy signed Executive Order (EO) 10988. EO 10988 granted public employees the right to join or to refrain from joining labor organizations, and it detailed bargaining subjects. The EO specifically stated economic (pay) issues were not subject to bargaining (Schuler, Beutel & Youngblood, 1989). Currently, Title VII of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 governs only federal employees and state and local employees must look to state and local laws for their collective bargaining rights (Schuler, Beutel & Youngblood, 1989).

Arrangements for collective bargaining at the state and local level vary considerably. All but 14 states have provisions for collective bargaining (French, 1998). There is a wide range of coverage among the states: some include municipal employees, some include state employees and some include both. Some states even have special legislation for police officers and firefighters; Texas is one of these states.

There are instances where cities in Texas operate under both the state civil service system and collective bargaining agreements. It would seem that with the fear of a strike taken from the picture, the employee would have little to bargain with and the city has nothing to gain, so why bargain? Only when both sides accept an attitude that they each have something to gain and lose, does it make sense to bargain. The employer then can take the stance that they want to achieve a more efficient and productive operation. In essence, the losses experienced by the city due to increased salaries or benefits, can be offset by savings in efficiency and productivity. Productivity can take many forms and in no way is intended to be construed as quotas on tickets or arrests. In his 1979 paper for the U. S. Department of Justice, John Burpo used the example of a department experiencing increased illness and use of sick time by overweight officers. The city could unilaterally impose a policy enforcing a weight proportional to height. This could

create a definite morale issue. However, if the city put this on the table as a bargaining proposal, both sides could gain from it. New York City has been acknowledged for its use of this concept of bargaining (Burpo, 1979). The city of Corpus Christi, Texas was a state civil service city that accepted collective bargaining for issues concerning police hiring, promotions and discipline (Burpo, 1979).

Methodology

In an attempt to compare collective bargaining to the civil service act used in Texas, and determine if the Act is a "one size fits all" collective bargaining agreement, a content analysis of the Civil Service Act will be conducted. Much is widely known and accepted with regards to the content of collectively bargained agreements and therefore, an analysis of an agreement beyond that which was presented in the literature review will not be undertaken.

In addition to this analysis of the Act, questions will be asked of those persons operating under state civil service as to their familiarity with the act and their satisfaction of its coverage or protection. The measurement instrument will be a written survey as well as some oral interviews. The survey will be sent to the 250 civil service employees of the cities of Baytown and La Porte, Texas. The oral interviews will be conducted with those members of the targeted group that indicate they are very familiar with collective bargaining and civil service. Due to the structure and relationship that exists at these agencies, it is anticipated that close to 30% of the distributed surveys will be returned. Oral interviews will be conducted with the chief executives of the departments targeted in order to gain their insights on the question.

The information gleaned from this process will be analyzed with the proposed question in mind. Overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the Civil Service Act will be only the surface question. The greater question will be what parts of the Act cause the satisfaction or dissatisfaction. It is hypothesized that the Act will fair well in the comparison but will fall short with regards to specificity; it seems to be too generic a document. A further finding may be that the responders would support a combination of the two systems, allowing them to bargain for the specific items not covered in the Civil Service Act.

Findings

On 5 Sept 1947, the Fire and Police Civil Service Act became effective in Texas after being passed by the 50th Legislature. This Act, found in Vernon's Annotated Civil Statutes of 1963, Article 1269m, states its purpose in Sec. 16a.

"Sec. 16a. It is hereby declared that the purpose of the Firemen's and Policemen's Civil Service Law is to secure to the cities affected thereby efficient Police and Fire Departments, composed of capable personnel, free from political influence, and with permanent tenure of employment as public servants . . ."

This section, amended and effective 5 Oct 1949, clearly addresses the problems faced in public sector employment in the 1940's pertaining to the *spoils system*. The results of the survey distributed as part of this research clearly indicates employees see this as a major benefit to state civil service.

Other common issues brought up during collective bargaining negotiations were addressed in this piece of legislation. Benefits addressed by this Act include sick leave accruals, vacation accruals, and in a related Article, 1583-2 V.A.P.C., even the salary of police officers (Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act, 1963). The areas of hiring and firing, promoting and demoting, disciplinary actions and grievance procedures are also addressed. All manner of commonly collectively negotiated employment issues are addressed by the Act (Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act, 1963).

On the surface the Act seems to be an effective "collective bargaining" agreement for all police officers and fire fighters across the state of Texas. Closer scrutiny reveals some problems with this "one size fits all" agreement. A common thread in a private sector collective bargaining agreement is that only and all **represented** employees will be affected by the outcome of the agreement. United Auto Workers bargaining for a new contract at a plant in Michigan will work under the terms of that contract when finally voted on. This new contract will not affect how another U.A.W. shop is currently working under their contract. Section 1 of the Fireman's and Policemen's Civil Service Act of 1947 states:

"Section 1. There is hereby established in all cities in this state having a population of ten thousand (10,000) or more inhabitants, according to the last Federal Census, and having a paid Fire Department and Police Department, a Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service."

Section 27 does state that the cities have to adopt this Civil Service Act, it is not mandatory for all cities over 10,000; but for all cities that adopted it, it was the law. Should the cities of Houston, Dallas and San Antonio adopt the Act, they would have to administer it the same as the cities of La Porte, Baytown, and Waco. It is obvious that the situations that exist in Houston are

far different from those in Baytown. What of those cities that do not reach the magical number of 10,000? The strength in collective bargaining is a unified mass of organized workers. In a small city there would be a very small police or fire department whose workers might very well be subject to poor, unfair or even illegal treatment. While there are some very good benefits and protections that are provided for in the Civil Service Act, the inflexible way it is to be administered appears to be a drawback.

This situation has brought about some changes. The 73rd Legislature of Texas codified the laws in 1993; Vernon's Civil Statutes 1269m became Chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. With a full time lobbyist in Austin, the city of Houston was able to make some changes to the Civil Service Act. Now, throughout the Act are subchapters and subsections with notices stating whether cities with more than a 1.5 million population may disregard the contents of the subchapter or subsection (Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act, 1993). One of these sections deals with the issue of salaries. Under the original 1269m, all firemen or policemen in the same classification had to be paid the same base pay. Later revisions allowed assignment pay for Field Training Officers or other special assignments as long as the pay was offered to all persons in that assignment. Now subchapter G is titled "Provisions Applicable to Municipality with Population of 1.5 million or more and certain other Municipalities". One of the sections in this subchapter authorized assignment pay for those members assigned to the helicopter division, the dive team and several others (Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act, 1993). It is obvious that the larger cities have different needs and the new sections are a step in the right direction. Results from the survey show pay issues to be a concern of civil service employees. While there was support for the equality of pay for those in the same job description, there was

concern that civil service stifled the ability to increase pay. Statistically, 48% of survey respondents feel the system does not adequately address compensation issues.

Another area where the "one size fits all" theory does not hold up is in the area of discipline. The Act lists the 12 grounds for which a fireman or policeman can be removed or suspended, the procedure for removal of an offender and the procedure for appealing his/her suspension. There are also provisions for the election of a hearing examiner instead of an appeal to the Civil Service Commission and further appeal to a District Court. There is now a special provision for the large cities disciplinary system and it too is specific in what can be done and in what sequence. The changes to reflect the needs of the larger cities are again steps in the right direction. However, protection for the employees of smaller agencies is still non-existent.

The limitation of the Act to those municipalities within a specific population is not the only short fall of the Act when comparing it to a collective bargaining agreement. For all the detailed specificity, the Act is also vague in some areas. Many of these are in the area of discipline. As previously mentioned, a commission rule prescribing cause for removal or suspension of a civil service employee is not valid unless it is made based on one or more of the following areas:

- (1) conviction of a felony or other crime involving moral turpitude,
- (2) violations of a municipal charter provision,
- (3) acts of incompetency,
- (4) neglect of duty,
- (5) discourtesy to the public or to a fellow employee while the fire fighter or police officer is in the line of duty,
- (6) acts showing lack of good moral character,

- (7) drinking intoxicants while on duty or intoxication while off duty,
- (8) conduct prejudicial to good order,
- (9) refusal or neglect to pay just debts,
- (10) absence without leave,
- (11) shirking duty or cowardice at fires, if applicable:
- (12) violation of a applicable fire or police department rule or special order (Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act, 1993).

In many of the twelve violations there is room for interpretation. Moral turpitude and intoxication have legal definitions in this state, but the Act fails to state which definition is to be followed. Who is to judge what are acts showing lack of good moral character? It would appear that while nothing career ending happened to President Clinton for his actions while he was President of the United States, he would have been suspended, possibly indefinitely, if he were a police officer or a fire fighter at a civil service agency in Texas. Does discourtesy to a fellow employee include sexual harassment? Sexual harassment may not have been a front line topic in 1947, but in 1993 it was, and could have been included in the section. Without strict guidelines as to definitions in these areas, employees may be subjected to punishments based on personal biases of local administrators.

The sequence for punishment in most agencies does not begin with suspension for all violations. Most agencies do follow a progression in their discipline. A minor infraction may warrant verbal counseling, with any repeated offenses of the same violation receiving a written performance notice of negative impact being placed in the employee's file. Should the infraction be subsequently repeated, suspension may result. Usually for minor infractions only one or two day suspensions are issued. Suspensions of 15 days or indefinite suspensions are not very

common. The Act clearly limits the type of punishment an employee can receive. For some of the 12 listed violations, suspension seems ludicrous. If you cannot pay your bills, we will suspend you without pay so you have an even more difficult time paying your bills. Should you choose to not come to work, we will punish you by sending you home! Only after 1269m became Chapter 143 was an alternative added. There is now the option for the department head to assign an employee to work additional duty without compensation (Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act, 1993). This seems to be somewhat progressive, and does offer an option to the two aforementioned issues, but there is an obvious problem. The Fair Labor Standards Act prevents someone working more than 40 hours a week without being compensated at the rate of time and a half, therefore the employee must agree to this type of punishment.

Should the employee not agree with the department head's punishment, whatever it is, he/she may appeal the punishment to the local civil service commission. Appeal to the District Court is available should the employee not accept the decision of the commission (Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act, 1993). This structure or avenue for grievance is essential for any comparison of civil service to a collective bargaining agreement; and yet it goes farther. The overwhelming majority of collective bargaining agreements in the private sector have as an option for discipline review or appeal, the right to go before an Arbitrator or Hearing Examiner. The Act has such a provision. An employee may opt for a third party Hearing Examiner to rule instead of the commission. Should the employee choose this route, appeal to the District Court is limited (Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act, 1993).

Discipline issues were consistently brought up in comments on the survey returns. Respondents overwhelmingly approved of the protection they were afforded by the civil service

system, but were just as critical of the system for its inability to rid the department of less than desirable employees.

In the collective bargaining system the employer and employee representatives are clearly defined and obviously seeking the best interests in their respective constituents. This may not always be the case in a civil service system. The position of Civil Service Director was originally seen as the champion of rights for the civil service employee. Indications now reveal that this position is sometimes distrusted and viewed as pro-management (Unsinger, Moore, 1989). This is a result of how the director and the members of the Civil Service Commission are selected/appointed. For the City of Baytown, the members of the Commission are appointed by the city manager and confirmed by the city council, the Civil Service Director is also the Human Resources Director for the city. The director and the three-member commission are to fairly address the issues concerning the application of civil service policy and procedures as they apply to both the city and the employee, yet there are no employee selected representatives on the commission (City of Baytown, 1994). This could obviously be seen as a pro-management stance. Survey results show that this is a local entity issue and that the cities of Baytown and La Porte do not suffer from this problem.

For all of its problems and shortcomings, 93% of respondents stated they were satisfied with the existing civil service system. While this number is impressive, 52% advised they felt the individual employee could be better served by a combination of both civil service and collective bargaining with 48% having that sentiment for civil service alone. Survey results indicate that 73% of employees felt the city is better served by the civil service system.

Conclusion

It becomes obvious that the Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act has many features, and undoubtedly by design, resembles a collective bargaining agreement. With sections covering compensation, benefits, promotions, demotions and grievance procedures, it would be ridiculous to say otherwise. There are, however, some important differences, or shortcomings. A collective bargaining agreement would address not only the rules of compensation but the amount of compensation as well. The Legislature obviously realized that each city was unique in its financial situation and left the amount to be decided by the city itself; fascinating when you consider they implied that this Act will fit any city over 10,000 inhabitants. Each plant, each shop, each industry, is unique, this is why they bargain with their management to affect change in their particular situation.

The drafters of this Act, and the 50th Legislature that passed it, are to be commended for their efforts in protecting the firefighters and police officers of this state, but times and situations are changing. It is only recently that steps have been made to address this change. A collective bargaining agreement is an on going process. The agreed upon contracts may last only a year, then a new one is negotiated reflecting new ideas and better options revealed from working under the previous contract. The Fireman's and Policeman's Civil Service Act falls short of this criteria of a collective bargaining agreement. For this and the other mentioned reasons, the Act fails to compare well with a comprehensive collective bargaining agreement.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Copy of survey instrument distributed to police officers and firefighters.

Appendix 2 – Charts of survey data.

Fellow officer or firefighter,

My name is Charles Edge, a Lieutenant with the Baytown Police Department, and I am currently enrolled in The Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas' Leadership Command College. Part of the course curriculum is to complete an administrative research project, and this survey is an integral part of my research.

The research topic concerns state civil service and collective bargaining; more directly, is state civil service a one size fits all collective bargaining agreement. The acknowledgement is made that this issue can be sensitive with regards to "worker" – management relationships. This paper is for my use and does not represent the position of the City of Baytown, the Baytown Police Department, the Baytown Fire Department, nor the La Porte Police Department. If you have received this survey, it is only because your department head has authorized its distribution throughout your agency.

The results of the survey will be made available to those who request them.

I am a _____ police officer _____ fireman.

Years in the profession _____

**PLEASE CIRCLE THE MOST APPROPRIATE RESPONSE
1 BEING THE LOWEST, 7 BEING THE HIGHEST**

1. How familiar are you with the state civil service system?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
unfamiliar familiar

2. How familiar are you with collective bargaining or the collective bargaining process?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
unfamiliar familiar

3. Overall satisfaction with working under the civil service system.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not satisfied satisfied

4. I feel the level of protection the civil service system provides the worker is.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
poor adequate good

5. The civil service system adequately addresses the needs of the big cities and the small cities.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
disagree agree

6. The civil service system adequately addresses the compensation of employees.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
disagree agree

MARK THE APPROPRIATE BLANK

With regards to the promotional system, I support the following method.

_____ written test only

_____ alternative promotion system (test, seniority, certificate, assessment center)

_____ other - _____

The individual employee is better served by:

_____ civil service system

_____ collective bargaining

_____ combination of both

The agency is better served by:

_____ civil service system

_____ collective bargaining

_____ combination of both

The city is better served by:

_____ civil service system

_____ collective bargaining

_____ combination of both

LIST YOUR 3 LEAST FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT STATE CIVIL SERVICE

LIST YOUR 3 MOST FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT STATE CIVIL SERVICE

**LIST YOUR 3 LEAST FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT COLLECTIVE
BARGAINING**

LIST YOUR 3 FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

I thank you for your time and input. Please forward your responses to the following persons by Wed, 11 July.

Baytown PD – Lt. Edge
Baytown FD – Lt. Gudgell
La Porte PD – Chief Reff

For questions or comments, or to request results, contact:

Charles Edge
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Baytown, TX 77521

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Appendix 2

