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Starting Up a Police Department:
Learning Experiences in Setting Up
The Police Department of Combine Texas

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ABSTRACT

The Police Department of the City of Combine, Texas was reborn in April of 2000. The existing city phone line was going to be used also for the police department and the only other equipment available were two police vehicles. Procurement sometimes literally meant scrounging old and used equipment from various surrounding police departments. This issue of the paper is to explore the essential elements in starting up a police department and the avenues needed to continue to develop such a department further and into the future, specifically into a police department with 24-hour coverage. What is needed to continue the development and growth of the Combine Police Department? Literature suggests that funding is an essential element in starting up a police department and funding was an initial obstacle. Also, from interviews, it was clearly found that the primary need of any police department is adequate funding. . The citizens of the community should come to realize that without appropriate funding growth of the Combine Police Department will be stifled. Increasing the budget of the Combine Police Department would enable the growth to include moving from the current 18 hour police coverage of the city to a full 24 hour staffed department.

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INTRODUCTION

The Police Department of the City of Combine, Texas was reborn in April of 2000. After having been closed just over two years after having difficulties that this paper will not be addressing, the city fathers decided after conferring with the Kaufman County Sheriff's Office that it was cost prohibitive for the citizens of the city to take on a contract for police protection services. This was the basis for the decision to re-open the department they once had.

Upon taking the position as the Chief of Police, the author found himself, after being sworn in, standing in a freshly painted room with a new tile floor and nothing else located in the rear of the city building. This was to be the new location for the City of Combine Police Department office. The existing city phone line was going to be used also for the police department and the only other equipment available were two police vehicles. The vehicles had not been started in over two years and had the original equipment installed from the previous departments' existence. At the time the author was the only sworn police officer for the city.

The problem faced on the first day was realizing that this department needed to be reborn. Literally starting from scratch, the author set out to begin the process of growth for the department. Over the next two years the department grew from one sworn officer to three sworn officers and an additional four non-paid officers (NPO). In that time frame office equipment, including computers, desks, chairs, a separate phone line, and other office supplies needed to perform daily functions were procured. Procurement sometimes literally meant scrounging old and used equipment from various surrounding police departments, i.e. handheld radar unit; police report forms, flares, etc. The police

department currently has three new fully equipped patrol vehicles with radar and camera units installed. The cars not only have new overhead equipment but also LEDs, strobe lights, and departmental distinct decal markings.

This issue of the paper is to explore the essential elements in starting up a police department and the avenues needed to continue to develop such a department further and into the future, specifically into a police department with 24-hour coverage. Specifically, this research answers the questions: What are the essential elements in starting up a police department? Based from the identification of these essential elements, what is needed to continue the development and growth of the Combine Police Department? The relevance to the law enforcement community is specific to the Combine Police Department, in not only being able to provide 24 hour coverage in the near future but also to give the citizens a department they can be proud of. This would also flow into the pride the current officers and future officers can take in working in this community. Moreover, this research will hopefully contribute to other individuals or institutions that will face the same challenge of setting up a police department from scratch.

The author plans to continue this development in a positive direction through the acquisition of proper equipment, good personnel, and needed funding. This basis is also secured in the safety of the officers on duty and the citizens of the City of Combine. Keeping these basics in mind will also help to attract qualified persons when future growth opens positions within the department.

This paper will attempt to find support or means in answering the questions: What are the essential elements in starting up a police department? What is needed to continue

the development and growth of the Combine Police Department? The methods of inquiry on setting up and, at a later stage, continuing to develop the Combine Police Department actually began when the author walked into that empty freshly painted room. Numerous personal interviews with neighboring police department command officers and chiefs helped to begin the slow and deliberate gathering of equipment, other support, supplies and direction for obtaining funds through grants and other government programs.

In attempting to research the process of developing a police department from scratch, it was found that there is a minute amount of written materials available on this subject. Most of the gathered information will be from personal experience during the preceding growth stage of the police department of Combine, Texas. The intended outcome of this paper is to set forth a foundation for growth in the Combine Police Department and how to better benefit the citizens of the community. By presenting its brief history and looking to the future, the law enforcement community in and of Combine, will benefit from this foundation of information and present a positive outlook for the continued support of the growth through the citizens and community of Combine.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As mentioned earlier, there was a minute amount of written literature that could be found regarding the subject of starting a police department from scratch. Literature suggests that funding is an essential element in starting up a police department. Taylor (1995) noted that the start up budget for the Roanoke Police Department was \$78,000.00. Domash (2003) states that one of the largest obstacles or barriers to overcome is funding. Moreover, Domash (2003) also identifies another essential

element in setting up a police department: equipment. Similar to Domash's findings, Wagner (1994) identifies that, in setting up a police department in Austin, Texas, funding was an initial obstacle. One of the ways the obstacle of funding was minimized was through specialized funding from private industry through establishing a foundation. Moreover, Wagner (1994) also identifies organizing as another initial obstacle in setting up a police department. "Canadian Manager" (1998) identifies funding as being vital as regards the budgeting of monies for recruiting and hiring trained and qualified personnel. Investment in a workforce is a critical determinant in the success or failure of a business. Thus, other related yet separate essential elements in starting up a police department are personnel and organizing.

METHODOLOGY

The questions that this paper is attempting to answer are simple, yet complicated: What are the essential elements in starting up a police department? What is needed to continue the development and growth of the Combine Police Department? Aside from the scant literature available on this issue, this author generated his own data through personal communications with several police agency chiefs and command officers from department located in the general area of Combine. The literature and these personal communications will be the bases of further discussion and recommendations.

FINDINGS

Certain distinctions arise between the circumstances involved in the setting up of a police department as identified by the literature and this author. First, Taylor (1995) identifies that the Roanoke Police Department had an initial budget of \$78,000 whereas this author set up the Combine Police Department with a budget of \$10,850.

Comparatively, the Combine Police Department's initial budget may be considered as severely handicapped. Second, Wagner (1994) notes that a local public police service in Austin, Texas generated specialized funding from private industry through the establishment of a foundation whereas the City of Combine Police Department, not in a position to generate such a source of funding, took advantage of available federal and state grants. Third, whereas "Canadian Manager" (1998) identifies franchise taxes as vital in the budgeting of monies for recruitment and hiring of trained and qualified personnel, the City of Combine Police Department faced a greater challenge due to the lack of existing funds generated from franchise taxes; the city does not have an *ad valorem* tax. In the real world, the elected officials who allocate the funding do not understand the operational needs for a department to operate efficiently. They cannot, or will not, see the need to allocate to the police agencies, the funding they need. Therefore, this leaves the chiefs or sheriffs to provide for their departments by finding the funds through other means, such as grants. This also stifles finding funding for equipment, personnel training, and in making sound financial decisions that benefit the department or agency. Nonetheless, the literature that identifies the essential elements of funding, personnel, and equipment indeed affirms the experiences of this author in setting up the City of Combine Police Department.

Among these three essential elements in setting up a police department, funding arises as the central element since the essential elements of personnel and equipment cannot be realized without funding. With proper funding nearly every goal could be met without much resistance. Funding not only covers the cost of personnel salaries but also equipment, facility needs, and any other needs to assist a department in presenting

themselves as professional and well-equipped. After the process of acquiring funding, the need to procure the personnel and equipment would be further steps. This falls in line with the fact that the City of Combine had limited funds, no suitable equipment, along with no other personnel besides this author.

The findings of this project began to accumulate the very first day of the Combine Police Department new (empty) office. This continues to be a daily ongoing process. The first interview was with Chief Larry Davis of Crandall Police Department (personal communication, April, 2001). What was found through this interview was an understanding of this author's plight, and information which provided several basic tools needed to start the department. This included not only a used hand held radar unit, but police report forms, narcotic testing packets and assurance that necessary manpower for backup would be made available from the Crandall Police Department. During this interview, several grant options were discussed, for the possibility of obtaining needed funding. Chief Davis also provided information about the government's 10-33 programs which are the government's surplus program.

Several meetings with Chief Steve Sparks of Palmer Police Department were conducted as regards gathering information for the operational development needs of Combine Police Department (personal communication, April, 2001). Several areas of interest were discussed which also included more detailed information on the aforementioned 10-33 program. Along with this, it was highly suggested that contact be made with the US Department of Justice for information on available grants to fund the needs of the department.

During a discussion with Lt. Ryan Getty of the Lancaster Independent School District, the COPS grant from the federal government was explained in detail (personal communication, April, 2001). Another avenue for procuring much needed equipment was revealed. Vendors of numerous police equipment make available to police departments the procurement of items such as, weapons, ammunition, and bullet proof vests through test and evaluation programs. The items are purchased at a discount price after a trial period which spans 12 to 18 months.

From the interviews it was clearly found that the primary need of any police department is adequate funding. This not only allows for the procurement of necessary equipment but also safe equipment. On another issue, funding also allows for hiring of personnel.

Most if not all, police departments and companies face the same three obstacles when starting up. Those are: funding, personnel and equipment. There is very little to non-existent information on start ups of companies or police departments.

DISCUSSION

The first step in continuing the progressive development of the Combine Police Department is obtaining adequate funding. Currently, the City of Combine has no property tax in place, the only tax base is through franchise taxing. Convincing the city council and the citizens of the necessity of a property tax is an important issue that needs to be addressed in order to obtain future funding for the Combine Police Department. Accomplishment of securing a property tax will only occur through diligent dialogue with the community. The citizens of the community should come to

realize that without appropriate funding growth of the Combine Police Department will be stifled.

Increasing the budget of the Combine Police Department would enable the growth to include moving from the current 18 hour police coverage of the city to a full 24 hour staffed department. Currently, the department employs three full time paid police officers and four NPO's, which does not allow for 24 hour, 7 day coverage because of schedule conflicts occurring with the NPO's regular employment. Moving to having four full time police officers and one part time paid police officer would enable the move to 24 hour, 7 day coverage.

With the increase to 24 hour coverage would benefit the citizens of Combine. One of the benefits that would be in the forefront is a safer community along with the ownership of a full time department.

An increase in funding would also provide the capability to procure new and maintain the existing equipment. City governments tend to be stringent with funds, seeing this; other avenues are available for procuring more expensive items could enhance city funding such as Ford leasing for police vehicles. This type of avenue will allow for funds to be allocated in other directions, i.e. continuing education and training of officers. The well trained officer better serves the community for whom they are employed.

CONCLUSION

After researching and reading articles found on starting up, the author has come to the conclusion that every business or police department all seem to face the same problems of which were stated in the findings: funding, personnel, and equipment.

With so little information for review on this subject there needs to be further exploration through further research and development of this topic. Further development of this topic would not only benefit municipalities who are looking to possibly start up there own police services but may also be useful to other entities as well, such as private police or security departments.

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