

Proposed Study: Sheriff/Police Department Merger

Report of the 1999-2000 San Francisco Civil Grand Jury

SUMMARY

Our review shows that combining the San Francisco Police and Sheriff's departments could yield some benefits. Several large cities have derived substantial benefits from such a consolidation. Benefits of such a consolidation for San Francisco could include a lower dropout rate, greater economies of scale, possible reduction in duplicative administrative functions, coordination of departmental policies, lower personnel turnover, increased training and orientation opportunities, and more efficient hiring.

The Civil Grand Jury recommends that San Francisco convene an advisory commission to perform a detailed, in-depth study of the benefits of a merger between the San Francisco Police Department and the San Francisco Sheriff's Department.

BACKGROUND

Section 928 of the California Penal Code authorizes the Civil Grand Jury to review government structure with respect to cost effectiveness. We interviewed several San Francisco personnel from the Police and Sheriff departments regarding the possibility of a merger or consolidation between the Police and Sheriff's departments. None of the personnel we interviewed were aware of any discussions either in the past or present that had considered this issue; however, these personnel also did not present any material objection to consideration of the concept.

INVESTIGATION

The Civil Grand Jury reviewed experiences elsewhere in the United States, primarily by way of information available on the Internet, where cities and counties have studied consolidation or merger of services. Information available on the Internet was substantial for several of the city/county consolidation reviews, particularly for the cities of Las Vegas and San Antonio. We also conducted phone interviews with personnel from several of the affected localities. Several notable cases are briefly discussed below. Appendix A presents an overview of consolidations either actual or proposed around the United States. We note that the list in Appendix A is not exhaustive, but nevertheless comprises a good sample upon which to make our recommendation that further review of consolidation within San Francisco is warranted.

We also note that the consolidations discussed around the United States involved a variety of proposed types. For instance, many proposed mergers are one or more cities within a county that are proposing to merge with county services, while others involve only a proposal that police and sheriff departments jointly occupy the same building. Since San Francisco is already a merged city/county, some of the advantages such as economies of scale may not apply to the same extent since some of their advantages have already been obtained. However, at this point we cannot state whether or not there may be any further advantage to be gained in any one area. Therefore, we have included all areas identified for improvement in our discussion.

Further, we primarily review possible advantages to consolidation. One would need to study applicable laws, and a variety of consolidation models would need to be reviewed. For instance, State of California law requires an elected sheriff for each county. A full

study of these and other aspects should be done with the participation of a full complement of all stakeholders, which is not possible within the jurisdiction and one-year term of the Civil Grand Jury.

The City of Las Vegas and Clark County, Nevada

In 1973, the five police agencies in Clark County (Clark County Sheriff's Department, City of Las Vegas Police Department, City of North Las Vegas Police Department, City of Henderson Police Department and Boulder City Police Department) were consolidated into the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department.

Consolidation of the agencies had been studied several years prior to 1973, centering on records, criminalistics, detention and communications as areas that might prove feasible for consolidation. The Committee performing the study concluded that full consolidation of the five agencies was the most practical solution, rather than a more limited consolidation of one or more of the selected functional areas. The consolidation was finalized by Nevada Senate Bill 340 (July 1, 1973), which provided that the new Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department be headed by the elected county Sheriff (it was believed that an elected head would have more freedom from political pressure and would be more answerable directly to the public). Senate Bill 340 also provided for a police commission and designated funding sources. The new department retained responsibility for operation of the county jails.

Consolidation costs included:

- Short-term commitments that could not be canceled (e.g., fleet purchases that had already been bid, resulting in the need to repaint new cars);
- New uniforms;
- Standardization of weapons;
- Salary adjustments; and
- Benefits package modifications.

The consolidation did not save money initially. However, as noted by a member of the staff in a phone interview, the consolidation has saved a substantial amount of money over time and has also improved overall efficiency, eliminated duplication of fixed resources, increased purchasing power, and increased teamwork. Several years ago, claims were made that the merger had not been cost-effective for the City of Las Vegas, but the Metropolitan Police Department assembled statistics showing that in fact the merger still was cost-effective, and an initiative to disband the merger was abandoned.

The City of San Antonio and Bexar County, Texas

In 1995, a City-County Government Commission was created jointly by San Antonio and Bexar County to recommend areas for functional consolidation and to study the "pros and cons" of city-county consolidation.

As part of their review, the Commission performed case studies of nine other city-county consolidations (included as Appendix A to the San Antonio consolidation study), including: Jacksonville, Florida; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Nashville, Tennessee. The Commission also reviewed a substantial body of political science and public administration literature, a bibliography of which also is included in its report.

The Commission studied in detail five functions that were similar between the city and county governments (parks, public housing, public works, purchasing, and information systems). The Commission used four criteria in their evaluation of the functional areas (efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and accountability). Essentially, the Commission viewed consolidation as the unification of a majority of functions and/or offices to achieve a more effective means for delivery of services. While the Commission did not choose to review police and/or sheriff services as one of their five functional areas, it is clear that these and many other public services would need to be reviewed once the Bexar County voters give their approval to move forward with the proposed consolidation.

The following Commission conclusions (as annotated) would apply not only to the functional areas and departments reviewed, but also to the other areas that would be reviewed as part of a full consolidation:

- Consolidation can improve efficiency by eliminating overlap and duplication of services. Additional gains can come from economies of scale. Evidence to support this benefit was substantial. For instance, Jacksonville reduced its combined city and county property tax by over 30 percent and is only one of many success stories. (Issues that could be addressed in San Francisco include duplicate administrative costs that could be more efficiently used in a shared environment, thus possibly absorbing overtime costs or allowing more police officers to be on patrol without increasing departmental budgets.)
- Consolidation can improve the effectiveness by eliminating problems of coordination and compatibility in service delivery systems. The San Antonio study noted that it was possible to be effective without necessarily being efficient. The study also noted that the areas that have gone through consolidation often upgrade service standards as part of the implementation process and increase effectiveness as efficiency is achieved. (Only a more in-depth review could estimate impact from this to San Francisco, but some areas that might benefit from review would include which of the Police or Sheriff departments would be more appropriate to accompany prisoners to San Francisco General Hospital for treatment.)
- Consolidation can rectify inequities between city and county taxpayers. (This element would appear not to be a factor for any San Francisco review since San Francisco is already a city/county.)
- Consolidation can provide more accountability and responsiveness in local government. (At present, we have no evidence that this element would be a reason to initiate any San Francisco review.)

The Commission report concluded that there were potential substantial benefits to be gained by consolidation, and recommended that the issue be permitted to proceed to a vote.

Northern York County, Pennsylvania

In 1997, John T. Krimmel, Ph.D. (Department of Law and Justice, The College of New Jersey) published an article titled, "The Northern York County Police Consolidation Experience: An Analysis of the Consolidation of Police Services in Eight Pennsylvania Rural Communities," in *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and*

Management (Vol. 20, No. 3, 1997). His study reviewed the experiences of the Northern York Regional Police Department in York County and similar police departments in the contiguous Lancaster County, both rural counties in Pennsylvania. The article also contains a literature review summarizing a number of police department consolidations around the United States.

Dr. Krimmel's study identifies many advantages of consolidation, including:

- more effective delivery of police services;
- eliminating duplication of services;
- provision of services previously unavailable, such as centralized record keeping, crime laboratories, and other specialized services;
- better trained personnel;
- lower personnel turnover rate due to increased opportunities within the larger department;
- costs for equipment are reduced (purchasing in bulk);
- hiring can become more efficient;
- lower insurance costs;
- opportunity for innovation.

Discussion with Dr. Krimmel regarding his report indicated that one aspect of combining a sheriff and police force is the increased opportunities to provide training to future police officers in the county jails. This familiarizes future police officers with the type of work and populations they will be dealing with in the field. This also reduces the number of Police Academy graduates who leave the force once they encounter the realities of the "street."

Dr. Krimmel's article notes that, following consolidation, the Northern York County police force provided police coverage to the same geographic area for 28 percent less total aggregate cost, with improvement in many aspects of department operation. A key component to successful consolidation is a careful plan; without such a plan, actual benefits may be less than expected. Dr. Krimmel noted that, should San Francisco ever proceed toward police and sheriff department consolidation, "before" and "after" data should be obtained.

Los Angeles County, California

Over the last several years, the Los Angeles (LA) County Sheriff's Office has absorbed several other agencies, including the LA County Transit Police, the Hawaiian Gardens Police Department, the Bell Gardens Police Department and the LA Community College Police Department. Discussion with personnel from the LA County Sheriff's Office indicates that in the case of each agency absorbed, the absorbed agency's budget has decreased by approximately 30 percent, even in those cases where the personnel from the absorbed agency have received a pay increase. Some other aspects of savings include background checks and physicals.

Similar to the comments made by Dr. Krimmel, the LA County Sheriff's Office has seen a direct benefit to its recruits by having combined jail and policing duties. The Sheriff's Office is able to give officers experience in the County jail prior to putting them on regular patrol, which has resulted in a much shorter on-the-job learning curve by new

officers and reduced total costs by ensuring that personnel who undergo training at the Academy do not subsequently leave the force when presented with the actualities of the job. Furthermore, they generally become better officers, and overall the officers are more effective.

The City and County of Denver, Colorado

Most counties in the United States (or parishes in Louisiana) contain one or more cities. The condition of one city and one county sharing exactly the same boundary is rather unique. San Francisco is one of these city/counties, and Denver and St. Louis are others. During our research, Honolulu had been suggested as a similar situation, but research shows that the County of Honolulu actually encompasses the City of Honolulu and many smaller cities. In 1970, the City of Indianapolis, Indiana, expanded its boundaries to include all of Marion County; however, there remain several other small townships within county borders that are not part of Indianapolis.

Denver has not explored a merging of police and sheriff forces. However, the City structure uses a model that reduces duplication of administrative services, in that the departments of police, fire, sheriff and other safety organizations report to a Manager of Safety, who then reports to the Mayor.

Interviews with San Francisco Personnel

Through interviews with personnel from the Police and Sheriff's departments, the Civil Grand Jury has identified several benefits that would arise from a consolidation of the two departments.

Interviewees indicated that the Police Department had been advertising available jobs to, and recruiting officers from, the Sheriff's Department personnel. Among the advantages to the Police Department is that personnel from the Sheriff's Department are already essentially trained and also already have familiarity with San Francisco. Since Police Department pay is greater than that of the Sheriff's Department, the Sheriff's Department in effect fills Police Department ranks at the expense of their own hiring and training programs.

Interviewees also noted that certain areas of jurisdiction could be better defined. For instance, in the case where police officers arrest someone who then turns out to have medical problems (such as an abscess) that must be taken care of prior to being put in jail, the arrested person must first be taken to San Francisco General Hospital for treatment. The process of waiting for and getting treatment for the arrested person can often occupy several hours, which means that whoever has custody cannot do anything else since that officer must stay until the person is released back to their custody. There is no clear policy as to whether this service should be provided by the Sheriff's or Police Department.

Also, interviewees noted that the police trainee dropout rate after completion of training and being placed on the streets is a significant factor in the Police Department's inability to fill all available positions, which exacerbates the need to work overtime in the Department. As noted above, inclusion of training in county jails as part of the police officer training process tends to reduce attrition.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our review, the Civil Grand Jury believes that there is enough evidence to suggest that it would be worthwhile to investigate more thoroughly a consolidation of the Police and Sheriff's departments. We do not have evidence that either department is functioning inefficiently; we only suggest that further efficiency might be gained by such a consolidation. Possible benefits include:

- lower dropout rate
- greater economies of scale
- possible reduction in duplicative administrative functions that will allow more emphasis on operational duties, which could be achieved without reduction in staff (other locales have moderate to substantial benefit here)
- coordination of departmental policies, rather than independent policies that run counter to each other
- lower personnel turnover
- increased training and orientation opportunities
- more efficient hiring

We note that our research has not identified any evidence of a merger that did not ultimately realize financial savings or was subsequently undone. The evidence reviewed by the Civil Grand Jury strongly indicates that the benefits of a merger outweigh any disadvantages. Consolidation demonstrably reduces total city and county taxes in at least some metropolitan areas and appears to have substantially slowed the rate of tax increase over an extended period in others. In every place, the ultimate impact depends on the service levels chosen and the specific provisions of the consolidation.

Options for consolidation include complete merger or several varieties of partial merger, including consolidation of functional areas such as communication services, or a single administration office and administrative officer or chief (e.g., Denver, which has a safety chief to whom the fire, sheriff and police chiefs report).

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Mayor and Board of Supervisors convene hearings and form a taskforce or commission to perform an in-depth study of the potential benefits to San Francisco by a consolidation of the Sheriff's and Police departments.

Required Response

Mayor

Board of Supervisors

Sheriff's Department

Police Department

APPENDIX A

Cities/Counties that merged

municipal services (partial or full)

Internet Information Source

Anaconda - Deer Lodge Co., MT

San Antonio study

Athens - Clarke Co., GA	San Antonio study
Augusta - Richmond Co., GA	San Antonio study
Baton Rouge - East Baton Rouge, LA	San Antonio study
Columbus - Muscogee Co., GA	San Antonio study
Indianapolis - Marion Co., IN	San Antonio study
Jacksonville - Duval Co., FL	San Antonio study
Lexington - Fayette Co., KY	San Antonio study
Nashville - Davidson Co., TN	San Antonio study
Compton - Los Angeles Co., CA	Compton Police website
Las Vegas - Clark Co., NV	Salt Lake Tribune; Cincinnati Enquirer
Hawkinsville - Pulaski Co., GA	GA State Bill HB 197
Bessemer City - Gaston Co., NC	Gaston Gazette
Charlotte - Mecklenburg Co., NC	Gaston Gazette; Cincinnati Enquirer
Draper, Taylorsville, etc. - Salt Lake Co., UT	Salt Lake Tribune
Sunnyvale - Dallas Co., TX	Salt Lake Tribune
Several cities - Westchester Co., NY	Times Herald Record
Several cities - Suffolk Co., NY	Times Herald Record
Several cities - Nassau Co., NY	Times Herald Record
Cities/Counties considering merging services (partial or full)	Internet Information Source
San Antonio - Bexar Co., TX	San Antonio Study
Corpus Christi - Nueces Co., TX	San Antonio study
Tallahassee - Leon Co., FL	San Antonio study
Los Angeles - Los Angeles Co., CA	County POA newsletter, CBS Channel 2000, Pierce College Roundup, etc.

Atlanta - Fulton Co., GA	Research Atlanta, Inc.; Central Atlanta
	Action Plan
St. Petersburg - Pinellas Co., FL	St. Petersburg Times
Grand Island - Hall Co., NE	The Independent
Gastonia - Gaston Co., NC	Gaston Gazette
Salt Lake City - Salt Lake Co., UT	Salt Lake Tribune
New Orleans - New Orleans Parish, LA	Salt Lake Tribune
Grover Beach - San Luis Obispo Co., CA	The San Luis Obispo Tribune
Buffalo - Erie Co., NY	Buffalo Renaissance Foundation
Louisville - Jefferson Co., KY	Cincinatti Enquirer
Burlington - Boone Co., KY	Cincinatti Enquirer
Durham - Durham Co., NC	The Durham Chronicle
Several cities - Ulster Co., NY	Times Herald Record