

municipal public

safety

A Guide for the Implementation of Consolidated Police-Fire Services

The complete range of procedures and plans necessary for the successful consolidation of police and fire services is contained in this volume. The text covers where and why this type of program is appropriate, how to plan and select a program, and what type of recruiting, training, and operational techniques are most effective. The list of dos and don'ts, sample directives, job descriptions, salary schedules and organizational charts will be

ESAI BERENBAUM

*Former Director
Department of Public Safety
Durham, North Carolina*

particularly helpful, as will the strategies for selling the program to citizens and employees. City administrators and public safety officials will find this book to be a valuable and practical tool in their efforts to provide improved public safety at a reasonable cost.

MUNICIPAL PUBLIC SAFETY

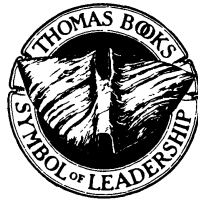
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By

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**Dedicated to the City Council of the
City of Durham, North Carolina who
in the year 1970 had the foresight to
recognize the need for change and the
courage to seek it.**

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MUNICIPAL PUBLIC SAFETY

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

THE purpose of this book is to provide municipal administrators, members of municipal governing bodies, consultants, and civic minded citizens with a guide for establishing consolidated public safety services.

The concept of consolidated services is not new by any means. The city of Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan established such services in 1911. The concept has spread very slowly since that time, and almost entirely among smaller communities. Most frequently, these communities had volunteer fire departments, or a combination of small paid departments supplemented by volunteers. They were also largely suburban or residential in character, with relatively low crime and fire incidence. Conversion to consolidated services could be accomplished without having to overcome the political, legal, and organizational problems more commonly associated with the larger cities. As a result, it came to be assumed that consolidated public safety services were desirable only for very small communities.

Some of these small communities have now grown to cities with over 100,000 population and their consolidated services have successfully grown with them. This has raised some doubts about the theory that consolidation is for small towns only. Today, cities of all sizes are studying the concept with a view toward determining its suitability to their circumstances. Some of these larger cities have successfully implemented such programs.

Before proceeding further, a word about the reasons for increasing interest in these programs would be appropriate. Municipal officials are under continual pressure to provide more and better services without tax increases. Citizens continually call for improved police protection; firemen desire shorter working hours; and all municipal employees seek higher pay.

It has been generally accepted that better police protection requires more police officers. The reduced hourly work week for firemen also requires the employment of more personnel, except in this case, the increase in personnel provides no apparent improvement in fire protection. Furthermore, studies of fire department productivity have revealed that, in most cities, firemen spend 1 percent or less of their time responding to fire calls. An additional small proportion of their time is spent in equipment maintenance and training, leaving the great bulk of their duty time either unproductive or applied to "make-work" projects. Faced with extremely difficult alternatives, municipal officials are looking to consolidated public safety services as a method of utilizing the unproductive fire department time to improve police effectiveness.

The implementation of consolidated services has aroused controversy wherever it has been considered. Those who have traditionally opposed these programs usually argue that the result will be a deterioration of fire protection. They contend that "one man can't do two jobs," and that fire teamwork will suffer because all the firefighters are not riding to the fire together on the truck. Advocates point to the potential improvements in productivity and in effectiveness of both police and fire protection. They contend that in recent years, there has been a significant reduction in the magnitude of the fire problem in many municipalities as a result of urban renewal, improved building codes, increased use of private fire protection systems such as sprinklers, and improved fire prevention programs by fire departments. Advocates further suggest that improved firefighting equipment, especially in the area of communications, makes it unnecessary for firefighters to remain, unoccupied, at the station while waiting for a fire call.

As the opponents of consolidated public safety services are eager to point out, some of the programs have not produced the desired results and have been abandoned. The author has studied both successful and unsuccessful programs around the country and has identified a pattern for failure. In general, those programs which failed were hastily conceived, poorly planned (if planned at all), and poorly administered. Many of

these programs failed almost immediately after they were implemented. In at least one instance, political considerations forced administrators to accept policies which, because of obvious inadequacy, led to the gradual deterioration of the program and its eventual demise.

The material which follows has been developed in conjunction with the implementation of a partially consolidated program. In its development, an attempt was made to identify those factors which appeared to have a heavy impact on the success or failure of other programs, and these factors will be given special emphasis. Except for this, the reader should realize that this book is written as a guide. Programs in some cities have failed because the program followed in every detail one that had been implemented elsewhere. Each city must tailor its program to fit its individual circumstances. Guidelines and procedures outlined in this book should be modified as required to fit the character of the community.

Chapter Two

PLANNING FOR THE PROGRAM

IT is realized that cities interested in consolidating public safety services will range in size from a population of a few thousand to over 100,000, and that the size of combined police and fire ranks will vary from a few dozen to hundreds of personnel. Naturally, detailed planning for the smaller community will not be as involved or lengthy as that for the larger city. These guidelines will concern themselves primarily with the needs of the medium-to-large organization and will assume that the planners for the smaller communities will select, modify, and interpolate to suit their individual circumstances.

The first planning action which should be undertaken is a study to determine whether there are any legal obstacles to consolidation. A few states have laws prohibiting the utilization of the same persons for police and fire duties. In some communities, civil service regulations or retirement programs make consolidation very difficult, if not impossible. Early action to eliminate these obstacles is obviously essential to further progress.

A key factor in the implementation and operation of a consolidated program is the early consolidation of the fire and police emergency dispatch centers. From the point of view of efficiency and productivity, this is desirable even without consolidation of the remainder of the police and fire services. For consolidation it is essential. These centers have, in most cases, become accustomed to different dispatch procedures. It can easily be argued that the two are not compatible. That the reasons are not valid has been demonstrated in many cities.

The first group of dispatchers assigned to the consolidated center should consist of former police dispatchers along with former fire dispatchers. After working together for approximately a year, they will all become adept at handling all types of calls. If circumstances permit, the former fire dispatchers

should be given the opportunity to ride in police cars, and the former police dispatchers should be allowed to answer calls with the more active fire companies.

The dispatch center is the heart of the operation, and thus should be functioning as a consolidated center as far in advance of any further consolidation as possible. Success of the program will depend heavily on the capabilities of the dispatchers; the more experience they have in dispatching police *and* fire equipment, the easier it will be for them to adjust to the dispatching of consolidated police and fire mobile response units.

Assuming that there are no legal obstacles, or that any obstacles present have been removed, a city should cease the hiring of policemen and firemen as early in the planning process as possible and begin the employment of "Public Safety Officers." One critical factor contributing to the success of these programs is the policy that all participants be volunteers. Lack of qualified volunteers from among existing fire and police personnel can increase costs during the early implementation phase of the program. It is therefore desirable to begin recruiting volunteers from among those desiring to be employed.

New recruits should be required to meet minimum law enforcement and fire service standards for the area of jurisdiction. If the position of Public Safety Officer has not yet been established, or if only a portion of the force will consist of Public Safety Officer positions, the new recruits should be required to sign a certificate whereby they agree to become Public Safety Officers at the convenience of the municipality. They may then be assigned initially to police or fire duties with the understanding that they will one day be required to perform in both capacities. An example of such a certificate may be found in Appendix A. Should a recruit eventually fail to qualify as a Public Safety Officer, or refuse to perform in both capacities, he should then be replaced. This procedure will permit the early recruitment of future Public Safety Officers while planning for the program is still underway.

A detailed plan of what is to be undertaken, as well as the reasons for doing so, should be developed. It is natural for some members of the municipality's governing body, policemen,

firemen, and the public, to have reservations about this departure from the traditional approach. A detailed plan will help demonstrate that the program is no "half-baked" scheme, hastily concocted to save money at the expense of the safety of the citizens. The plan will also help to insure a sense of purpose and meaningful direction, and to identify at an early date any potential pitfalls and problems which could become serious during implementation.

The beginning statement of the plan should be one of purpose. Generally, for most communities, this will include all or part of the following: a desire to improve police patrol and/or fire protection; a need to reduce the length of work week of police officers and/or firemen; as well as the desirability or necessity of accomplishing the above with a minimum of increase in expenditures.

The plan should next include an analysis of the existing workload of police patrol and fire suppression units. In some departments, these statistics will be readily available, perhaps even through the use of computers. More frequently, they will not be easily obtainable and someone will have to undertake extensive research in order to acquire even minimal information. A particularly valuable statistic is the number of calls answered during the previous year by each piece of fire equipment, broken down to clearly identify those calls which required serious firefighting (1½" hose or larger). An example of this type of analysis may be found in Appendices B and C. This information will help the planners to decide whether consolidation is feasible and, if so, where and how the plan should be initially implemented.

Planning for the implementation of the program will require a decision as to the extent and the speed with which the consolidation will take place. Limitations of training facilities and the necessity of continuing to provide adequate service during the training period will prevent too rapid a transition in most communities. A phased implementation is recommended. The plan should specify the duration of each phase, how many fire companies will be converted to Public Safety, and how many personnel must be recruited and trained during each phase. It

would also be helpful at this point to make a preliminary determination as to how many existing police and fire personnel plan to volunteer, and how many new recruits may be needed, as these numbers will influence budget considerations. The more qualified existing personnel who volunteer, the lower the cost of conversion and the greater the speed with which the conversion can be accomplished.

The plan should include comparisons, in terms of cost and personnel, between the traditional approach to providing the needed services and the consolidated approach. Recommended salaries for Public Safety Officers and their supervisors should be included, as well as a salary schedule which might serve as an inducement for various ranks of policemen and firemen to volunteer. An example of such a schedule may be found in Appendix D. The preparation of job descriptions at this time is also desirable (see Appendices E through G).

Finally, it is highly desirable during the planning phase, or as soon as possible thereafter, that a Director of Public Safety be appointed. The characteristics and qualifications of the individual appointed should be determined by the size of the organization. In smaller departments, an officer with field experience in one or both areas would be desirable; it goes without saying that he must be sensitive and dedicated to his dual responsibilities. If he is a former fire officer and gives all of his attention to fire operations at the expense of the police operation, or a former policeman who ignores the fire operation, the program probably will not survive. In larger departments, it is far better to select a high caliber administrator than to select someone because of his police or fire background. A good administrator will acquire sufficient knowledge of police and fire operations in a short time, and will not be hampered by accusations that he is biased because of his police or fire background. A qualified police or fire officer who is also an exceptional administrator could effectively assume the responsibilities of the job. He should be selected, however, for his administrative ability, and not for his police or fire background. The selection of a competent Director of Public Safety could well mean the difference between success and failure. If

he succeeds, the community will realize in a few years, a savings of many times the annual salary of the Director. An example of a job description for the Director of Public Safety may be found in Appendix H.

Chapter Three

SELECTING THE PROGRAM

THERE are almost as many varieties of consolidated “public safety” programs as there are programs, and the selection of the proper program for each individual community is essential to success. The following is an examination of possible programs at the field operations level.

Some cities, in an attempt to utilize the time of their firemen more productively, have employed them as auxiliary police officers. These firemen are not sworn police officers, although they may have received some brief orientation training on police duties. They are expected only to patrol their designated areas by automobile and to look for incidents which they then report, so that sworn police officers may respond to the scene. Some cities have given police officers a short course in fire-fighting, so that they may assist firemen in situations wherein insufficient firemen are available to respond to a fire call. These auxiliary firemen are not considered to be fully qualified as firefighters and may engage in firefighting only as assistants to the regular firefighters. Both of these situations are designed primarily to make maximum use of available manpower and may prove useful in certain situations. However, they are major compromises and only serve to perpetuate the myth that a “policeman” is not capable of performing as a fully qualified “fireman,” and vice versa.

Some cities have gone a step beyond the above compromises and have fully trained the same personnel as both police officers and firefighters. They call these dual-trained personnel “Public Safety Officers.” This is an affirmative course of action. The development of this concept also met with compromise, when it was assumed that a Public Safety Officer, while capable of performing police duties and assisting in the firefighting, was neither qualified nor capable of being trained to operate a fire truck. As a result we find situations such as the

following: One or two Public Safety Officers are assigned to a patrol car and given a patrol area adjoining a specific fire station. These Public Safety Officers perform normal police duties under the supervision and control of the *Police Department*. The fire station in their area contains a fire truck manned by a Fire Captain or Lieutenant, a driver/engineer, and possibly an additional fireman. These firefighters work under the control of the *Fire Department*. In the event of a fire call, the officers in the patrol car are expected to respond along with the fire truck, and to assist in the firefighting, under the supervision of the fire truck commander.

When a consolidated public safety program fails, it is most likely that the above mentioned was the type of program involved. So many violations of simple management principles and professional techniques occur in this type of program that the author is continually astounded by the number of communities which waste time and money on this approach.

As every experienced firefighter can testify, firefighting, unlike most police work, is a team activity. It is impossible to continually change the composition of the team and still expect effective firefighting results. Since the firefighters in the station are under Fire Department administration, and the Public Safety Officers in the cars under Police Department administration, the fire truck commander frequently does not know the patrol officers. The patrol officers may never, or only infrequently, train with the truck crew. The police supervisor may replace them at any time in accordance with his requirements and, in some programs, it has not been uncommon for the Police Department to occasionally overlook the assignment of any Public Safety Officers to that fire territory. The effectiveness of the fire truck commander at the fire scene is considerably reduced when he must supervise a different crew at each fire, or when, occasionally, a portion of his crew fails to appear.

In addition, the Public Safety Officer realizes that he is working for, and being evaluated by, police supervisors. His occasional service as a firefighter is an inconvenience, and his performance in this capacity may have no bearing on his pro-

motion in the Police Department. If anything, the label "Public Safety" may be held against him when police promotions are made.

Some cities have tried to correct the lack of fire team capability and interest in firefighting by assigning the Public Safety Officers to the Fire Department. Senior fire officers could then insure that the same personnel would always be available for each firefighting crew, and that there would always be some Public Safety Officers available to the fire truck commander. This also becomes awkward because Public Safety Officers spend the great bulk of their time on police duties, and require more police supervision than fire supervision.

The most effective field operations organization recognizes that the Public Safety Officer must work as a member of a regularly assigned fire team, that as such, he has only one supervisor to whom he is responsible for the performance of *all* of his duties, and that he has clearly identified opportunities for career development and promotion. This program requires that the lowest level field supervisor be given responsibility for both police and fire operations in a given territory, and that all of the officers in that territory work directly under him. It means that this supervisor, when his crew is on duty, is responsible for the fire station and its equipment, the Public Safety patrol cars, and the personnel who operate the truck and the cars. He is responsible for responding to fires and supervising the firefighting of his entire crew. He is also responsible for responding to police incidents and supervising the police activities of his crew.

There are no auxiliaries or part-time performers under this concept. Every member of the crew is a fully trained, fully qualified, sworn police officer and firefighter and most, if not all, can serve as driver/engineers on the fire truck.

Budget considerations may prevent the immediate conversion of entire fire companies to this concept. It is acceptable, *as an interim measure*, to assign firefighters to operate the truck, *if* the firefighters work the *same hours* as the remainder of the crew *and* work for the Public Safety Supervisor of that crew. Unless these requirements can be met, every effort should be

made to maintain the homogeneity of the crew; that is, only Public Safety Officers should be assigned thereto.

When Public Safety Officers are assigned to take over the operation of a fire station, the station is referred to as a Public Safety Station. It is manned by officers who normally will be working eight-hour shifts. Each shift is under the command of a supervisor, who may be given any number of formal titles but who will be referred to hereafter as a Supervisor, with the upper case "S."

Since the Public Safety Supervisor and his crew will be relieved every eight hours, it follows that there is no one person entirely responsible for the station and its activities. This lack of continuity can cause problems in proper maintenance of both the equipment and the station itself. In addition, with the assignment of Public Safety Officers to a station, that station can become a point of contact for local citizens with problems, and can help plan and supervise public safety activities for that area. It is therefore highly desirable that each Public Safety Station be placed under the full-time command of a Public Safety Lieutenant.

The Lieutenant must be a very capable, mature individual who is equally adept at dealing with the public, supervising the activities of the Public Safety Supervisors and their personnel at his station, and performing personnel administration and training functions. He is primarily an administrator; that is, he is not expected to respond to or supervise activities at a fire scene or police incident. These operational requirements are handled by fire and police Watch Commanders who are on duty around the clock, and who respond from headquarters. The Public Safety Lieutenant works an eight-hour day, five days per week, but his hours and days are flexible and are left to his discretion.

The discussion up to this point has been concerned with a relatively fixed Public Safety organization for the field or local level. Organization in the higher echelons will, out of practical necessity, have to be more flexible.

The ideal and ultimate objective is represented by the diagram in Figure 1. In this organizational structure the chain of

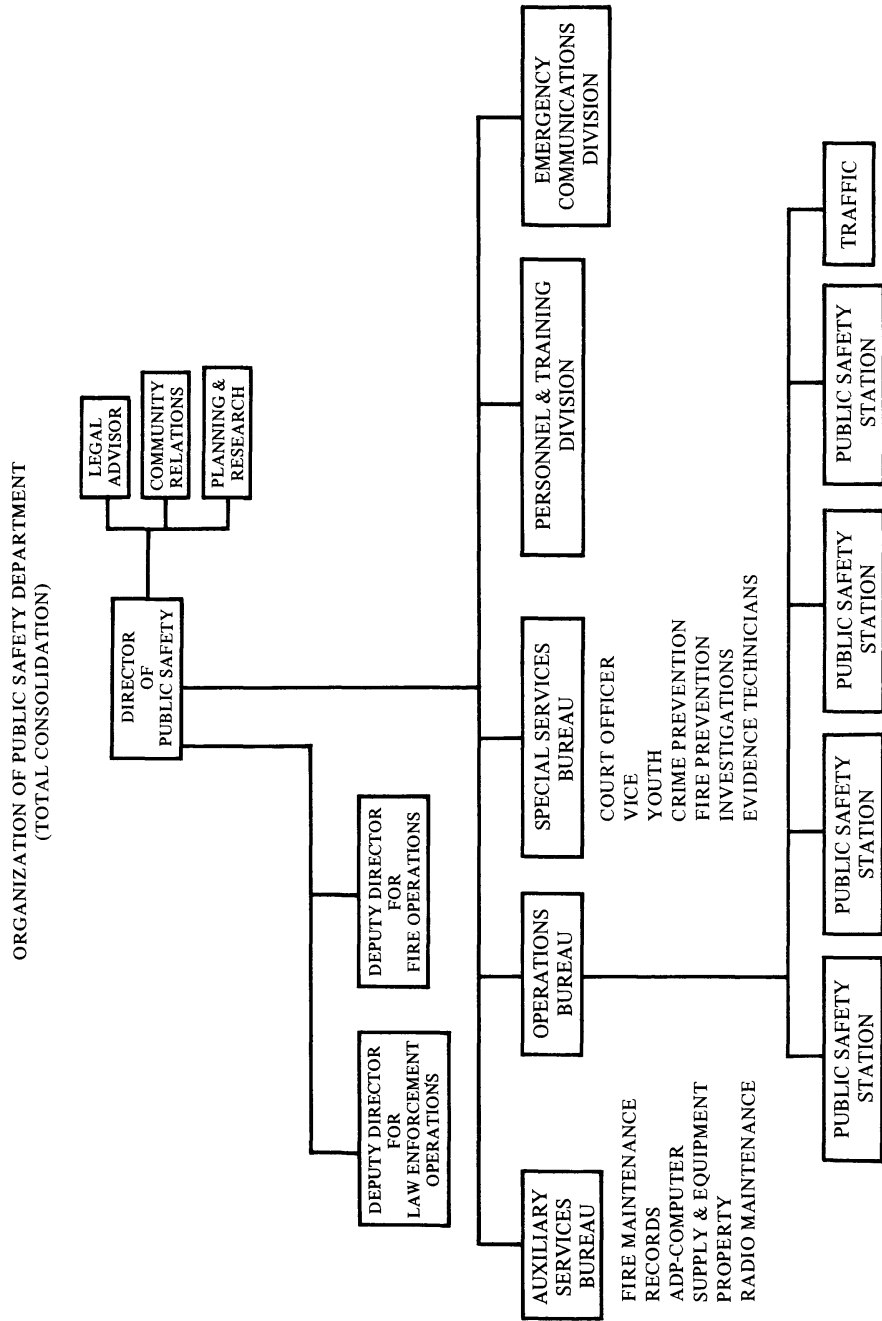


Figure 1.