

Interim Report - San Jacinto Police Department

Background

The City of San Jacinto has maintained its own police department since it was incorporated in the 1800's. The current administration has been in place since 1993. The department has funding for twenty-two sworn officers and ten civilian personnel.

Following complaints of favoritism and inconsistencies by administration regarding individual officer's reviews, pay raises and reprimands to both sworn and nonsworn, an investigation was initiated by the grand jury. Allegations of retaliation and excessive petty written reprimands (projecting) by some in authority with rank at the direction of the administration were made by several officers.

Interviews were conducted with all sworn officers, all nonsworn personnel, and several former San Jacinto Police officers. Three current sworn officers refused to cooperate with the investigation. Three of the five city council members cooperated with the investigation, but by lack of response, two council members refused to cooperate. The city clerk and city manager also were interviewed as part of the investigation.

Findings

1. A multitude of problems in the department have reduced personnel to seventeen sworn officers with fourteen officers available for patrol for four shifts.

This shortage of personnel has forced all administrative officers except the chief and the commander to be returned to patrol duty. The department has eliminated all detectives, bicycle patrol and canine units. As of this date, the motorcycle program has been suspended indefinitely.

2. A central theme of low morale, fear of retaliation, inconsistencies of reprimands, intimidation, "projecting" and favoritism exists.

This theme generated complaints, by most personnel, of a hostile work environment.

In September of 1997, a "no confidence" vote was given by the Police Officers Association (POA) against the police chief. The vote of seventeen to two resulted from nonranked officers and dispatchers with three abstentions.

3. There has been significant attrition of personnel since 1992 (twenty-eight of fifty-six total personnel).
4. Nonresponsiveness to more than one officer's call for assistance in dangerous situations were alleged.

5. Allegations were made of improper changing of evaluations and records sanitation.

Personnel incidents noted in yearly evaluations are being held against some personnel in subsequent evaluations.

6. Significant favoritism is shown to some officers while others are reprimanded for minor infractions that would normally be ignored.
7. There is a lack of response from a majority of the city council members regarding problems in the police department.
8. Current evaluation forms are too restrictive. The only categories for performance are "meets" or "does not meet" requirements. No area for "improvement needed" is included. Pay raises and promotions are denied if personnel do not "meet requirements" in any area.
9. There could be many benefits to contracting with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department for police protection in San Jacinto. These include:
 - a. A larger officer pool
 - b. Lower cost
 - c. Better patrols
 - d. Reduction of current personnel problems
 - e. Increase in pay, better benefits and earlier retirement for personnel hired by the Sheriff's Department.
 - f. An immediate increase in the morale of personnel
10. The main objection to contracting with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department is that a large number of citizens and a majority of police department personnel seem to prefer an autonomous city police department.

Recommendations

1. The City of San Jacinto City Council should consider disbanding the police department and contract with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department.
2. If San Jacinto City Council chooses to retain an autonomous city police department, the city manager replace current upper administrative staff.

If replacement candidates are personally known by any of the sitting council or any other hiring person or body, that person or persons should disqualify themselves from the hiring process. A representative elected from the Police Officers Association be included in the process, or optimally, the city council retain an independent entity to recruit and recommend any upper administrative replacements.

3. City of San Jacinto Police Department bring staffing of sworn officers up to funded level.
4. Police department reinstate motorcycle, bicycle and canine patrols, as well as the detective unit.
5. Police department reestablish a professional working relationship with the POA.

6. Police department change evaluation forms to include an area for "needs improvement."
7. Police department eliminate the use of the same negative information contained in previous years' evaluations for subsequent annual evaluations unless it still applies.