



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Councilors

FROM: Rich Olson, City Manager
Eddie M. Buffalo, Jr., Chief of Police

DATE: May 20, 2015

RE: Consideration - Recommendation for Closure of Front Lobby of Police Department (After Hours)

BACKGROUND:

Historically, the Elizabeth City Police Department has functioned as a twenty-four hour facility open to the general public and surrounding law enforcement agencies. Until the emergence of Central Dispatch/E911 to this region of the State in the early 1990's, the Elizabeth City Police Department staffed full-time telecommunicators who dispatched all public service calls within the jurisdictional boundaries of the City of Elizabeth City and monitored sector boundaries for patrol operations on a twenty-four hour, continual basis. Central Communications, funded in part with police budgeted funds, has now served as the central repository for emergency calls received in the Pasquotank County/Elizabeth City and Camden County area for over the past twenty years.

With the arrival of Central Dispatch/E911, the role of the Elizabeth City Police Department's telecommunicator position was modified to that of a "Communications Officer." Today, Elizabeth City Police Department Communications Officers serve as customer service representatives to members of the public and provide support to all members of the Department.

Civilian staff members who work in the Records/Communications section of the Department have numerous tasks to perform on a daily basis, including but not limited to data entry and/or quality control of all incident reports, arrest records, juvenile custody records, infractions/citations, warning tickets, accident reports, field interview reports, security checks, federally mandated traffic stop reports, and in-house departmental records including training/career development, fleet management, equipment maintenance, precious metal gold buys, use of force reports, and citizen complaint logs. Elizabeth City Police Department Communications Officers provide assistance to the general public and support to all supervisors and officers within the Police Department.

With the addition of several community policing programs, the duties and assignments of our civilian staff members have considerably broadened over the past decade. The public expects and demands the highest level of services possible from our Department, which includes on-going participation in community-based initiatives such as the Police Athletic League, National Night Out, Citizens Police Academy, Community Crime Watch Program, Adopt-a-Block Program, Coffee with a Cop and others. These types of programs require full-time assistance in order for them to be effective and civilian support staff members play an important role in the effectiveness of these operations.

City staff is recommending that the Elizabeth City Police Department Records/Communications Bureau be restructured. As part of the restructuring, this section of the Police Department would remain open to the public during business and extended business hours until 10pm Monday through Friday, thereby reducing overtime costs associated with manning the desk twenty-four hours a day; seven days a week, while at the same time utilizing current staff members in a more strategic and well defined manner that will continue to meet citizens' needs and operate in effectively and efficiently.

ANALYSIS:

A survey of police departments in the surrounding areas was conducted and revealed that most modern day police facilities maintain a secure building equipped with a buzzer, swipe locking mechanism and phone for people to have access during working and after hours. Additionally, most facilities were equipped with bullet proof glass and provided a small slot/tray along with a speaker so that the general public could communicate with personnel. The majority of the departments surveyed were closed after normal business hours, or after extended business hours, with citizens being provided access to a telephone that was directly linked to E911 Dispatch for assistance.

An in-house departmental survey completed in 2013 revealed there to be approximately one (1) walk-in per day between the hours of 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. None of the walk-ins surveyed involved critical incidents or emergencies. Walk-ins surveyed included: (6) newspaper deliveries; (4) people requesting to see the magistrate; (2) people requesting to go to jail; (1) person wanting to get in out of the rain; and (1) person requesting us to buy him gas. The remainder of the walk-in requests included wishing to speak with an officer/leave a message, requests to pick-up copies of reports, and there was only one actual request to file an official police report.

A similar such survey conducted between December 13th 2014 and May 17th 2015 revealed 287 telephone calls and 77 walk-ins after 10pm and before 6am. This equates to 1.85 calls per night and .496 walk-ins per night. Of those calls and walk-ins there were no law enforcement related emergencies. Most of the walk-ins were looking for the magistrate's office, came to pick up an arrestee, or were witnesses in a DWI case. The majority of the telephone calls were people requesting information about legal processes or providing information about a crime that were routed to the 911 Center.

There are two options to consider in facilitating the closure of the Police Department. The first, and most cost efficient option, would be to place a sign on the front wall of the A. Midgett Parking building directing members of the public to go the Public Safety Building Lobby to request police assistance. The front lobby of the Public Safety Building is already equipped with a call box and link to 911/Central Dispatch. The second option would be to place a "call" box outside of the front doors of the A. Parker Midgett Building, which would involve additional costs, but have the added benefit of the Police Department having its own call box without directing citizens to the Public Safety Building. Both methods involve securing the doors of the Police Department, specifically between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. daily and to completely be closed during weekends and holidays.

Research has shown that the demand for public assistance greatly diminishes after normal business hours and citizens would still have instant access to 911 for emergencies should they come in person after this time. This change would not, in any way, jeopardize a citizen's request/receipt of assistance. This would in essence speed up the response by cutting out one set of communicators and getting a direct line to the 911 Center. This can be accomplished by directing citizens to the Public Safety Building (Front Lobby call box) or be installing a telephone call box directly in front of the A. Parker Midgett Building. Either method involves properly securing the Police Department after normal business hours and directing members of the public who wish to speak with an officer to do so by way of a telephone call linked to the 911 Center. Further, outside telephone calls coming into the Police Department's main line (335-4321) would be forwarded to Central Communications/E911 Dispatch so that no calls would be dropped during the time the office was closed. In addition, the Elizabeth City Police Department camera system would be transferred to the 911 Center for monitoring, where there are a greater number of personnel to view the system for an enhanced effect.

Front desk coverage currently costs the Police Department approximately \$10,000 annually in civilian overtime costs. The Department's one part-time Communications Officer may not exceed more than 29 hours worked on a weekly basis, which means that full-time members must make up the difference (outside of their normal 40 hour work week) of manning the Front Desk. If Records/Communications were restructured as described above, the overtime costs associated with manning the desk 24/7 would be eliminated and the four full-time employees and one part-time employee currently assigned to the Records/Communications Bureau would be reassigned to meet additional needs of the Department, including community policing programs/neighborhood initiatives, record-keeping, CompStat/statistical analysis, and other daily job functions and assignments.

Two employees would remain as Records/Communications Officers sharing a split 40-hour week shift: 6:00 am – 2:00 pm and 2:00 pm to 10:00 pm daily. The part-time Communications Officer would serve as back-up for the full-time positions and provide support to the Police Athletic League program and other community policing initiatives currently in place. Two employees will remain in the Records/Communications section on a full-time basis completing regularly assigned tasks. Lastly, with the reassignment of a Communications Officer position to Code Enforcement, we've had to fill the vacancy with

existing personnel, as supported in the plan described above. In closing, it is staff's firm belief that this change would be beneficial in eliminating civilian overtime costs while at the same time allowing non-sworn members to utilize their skill sets to their maximum potential, thereby providing a greater service to the public.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

City staff recommends closing the Elizabeth City Police Department between the hours of 10:00 p.m. – 6:00 a.m. daily, as well as being closed on weekends and holidays.

1. Option One will facilitate the change by placing a sign on the front wall of the A. Parker Midgett Building which directs members of the public to go the Public Safety Building (Front Lobby call box) for assistance;
2. Option Two will facilitate the change by erecting a telephone call box in front of the A. Parker Midgett Building for members of the public to use when requesting assistance.

Either option involves securing the front doors of the Elizabeth City Police Department during proposed hours and allowing public access via a phone link to 911/Central Dispatch.