

**WHAT FORCES WILL SHAPE THE FUNCTION OF THE POLICE
FACILITY BY THE YEAR 2006?**

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This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

INTRODUCTION

Changes in modern law enforcement come as rapidly and as surely as the rising and setting of the sun, and those changes are reflected in police facilities. The tomblike building of yesterday that used to hold the old precinct house has evolved into a contemporary structure that fits right into a bustling office complex or residential neighborhood.¹

Today's modern police facility might house a communications center that rivals NASA's mission control. It might include a state of the art work-out room, a day care center for employee's children, or such non-traditional amenities as an automated teller machine in the station lobby for employees and the public.

Designing such a facility takes time, money, a dedicated team and a willingness to step into the future of policing.² Considering the dynamic eventuality in which social, technological, economic, environmental and political change occur at a whirlwind pace, determining what the impact of the future of policing will have on the function of the law enforcement facility of the future is a daunting task.

Tomorrow's police building may deviate dramatically from today's "modern" facility as the role of law enforcement is altered by forces external to the organization. Prior to the 1980's, organizational planning was largely based on internal dynamics. In

a rapidly changing world, however, it has been recognized that external forces must be primarily taken into account.³

The recognition that there must be a new approach to facility planning was re-enforced during research for this article. It was discovered that, in today's dynamic world, before one could determine the design of a future police facility, one must first determine its function because form follows function. However, as discussed above, there are complex dynamics at work that will ultimately determine the function of the future police facility. Therefore, it was the challenge and focus in producing this article to identify some of the significant "forces" that will ultimately shape the function of the future police facility, to indicate their importance and to discuss some of the potential effects that may arise as a result of their influence.

BACKGROUND

In 1954, the city of Whittier constructed its current police facility. Originally designed with just 14,000 square feet, it housed a police department of approximately 25 sworn and civilian personnel. Two additions have been made to the facility since then, adding an additional 6,500 square feet. Nonetheless, through population growth and the resulting increase in sworn and civilian personnel, the police department has outgrown the facility.

This is not an uncommon situation faced by numerous law enforcement agencies nationwide. According to a 1992 Kiplinger California Letter, population growth in California, though slowing, will still result in an increase from 29.7 million in 1990 to 39 million by the year 2005. This represents a 31% population gain in 15 years.⁴ Additional police staffing will undoubtedly be necessary to deal with the anticipated impact on crime and the resultant workload increase created by the forecasted population growth.

Population growth and personnel increases were two reasons that the city of Whittier began to consider building a new facility. Another reason, though no less important, was the simple fact that original equipment began to wear out. As Steven Polson has stated, "Your building is the one piece of equipment that all personnel use. When equipment fails, either the work doesn't get done or it doesn't get done very well."⁵ Considering that the modern police facility is operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, one might reasonably conclude that the police facility suffers three times the wear and tear of an office used for a more traditional purpose. At 42 years of age, the Whittier police building is substantially beyond the 25 years most public buildings are expected to endure.⁶

Last, there is evidence to support the point of view that the police facility can have a direct impact on the morale and efficiency of its employees. As William Caronna wrote in his study

on future police facility design, "In the law enforcement profession, perhaps the most essential resource is the police facility. It reflects the dignity of law enforcement and the community's philosophy towards the accomplishment of police service goals."⁷

To what extent the working environment has an effect on the employee has never been completely determined, but it appears this could be the subject of a future study that could be of substantial importance. This is not to suggest that the environment of an outdated facility could influence an officer to the point of provoking misconduct, but there is significant documentation to suggest that poor working conditions can contribute to and reinforce "negative" behavioral tendencies.⁸ Additionally, it would be interesting to determine to what extent the design of a law enforcement facility could enhance police performance or have an impact on the behavior of the population it serves. These are subjects to be addressed in another study.

With a workforce that has already exceeded its facility's capacity, and with a large population increase forecast by the turn of the century, it is clear that the city of Whittier, or any law enforcement agency facing a similar dilemma, must begin planning now for a new facility that will meet the needs of both the present and the future.

PLANNING THE FUTURE FACILITY

Since police facilities are unique in their design parameters, planning the modern police building presents an exceptional challenge. Considerations, in addition to the normal office space, are prisoner housing, secure storage of evidence, housing of sophisticated communications equipment, storage of dangerous weapons, workout areas, locker facilities, secure employee and public parking, to name a few, in a building constructed to survive any number of natural disasters.

More contemporary police buildings have features that are indicative of an evolution in police facility design and function in the future. Telecommuting employees, teleconferencing rooms, space for childcare, and public/private partnerships such as banking devices in the station house are all indications of a trend towards a future facility that may look and function far differently than now. The amazing levels of technological progress may make the facility of today totally obsolete in a few short years.

Forces such as today's community-oriented approach to policing may cause the decentralization of law enforcement services such that a number of satellite stations are located where calls for police service are highest. Economic conditions such as a major recession may justify mergers and regionalization of services. The threat of natural disasters such as earthquakes may lead to the construction

of police facilities that the public can rely on for food, clothing and shelter as well as law enforcement. To meet the challenge of the future, broad consideration of all the issues must be included in a plan where the future may look, from a law enforcement perspective, vastly different than today.

To plan successfully for the future, police architect Steven Polson has stated that it is essential to carefully assess an organization's current needs and critically important to assess its needs in the future.⁹ Polson goes on to state that the least expensive building is one that is carefully planned, is well designed, avoids extravagance and provides enough space, including room for change.¹⁰ Jeff Cameron emphasized planning in his study on police facilities of the future by stating, "the facility that works well is one that is built from a conceptual plan that considers strategies used by the police department today, as well as those seen in the future."¹¹ The possibilities are limited only by one's imagination. In the future, as Dr. Roger Selbert, author of Future Scan, postulates, "it may no longer make sense for every employee to have an assigned workspace with a name on the door, but the office remains an important touchstone - a place to share ideas, to drink from and contribute to the organizations culture."¹² Dr. Selbert feels that the workplaces of the future "will have to be flexible, multi-purpose, and designed to maximize communication, interaction, creativity, learning and fun."¹³

Dr. Selbert's comments are reinforced by those of Lois Pilant in an article on police facilities published in The Police Chief, "Gone are the cold, hard surfaces, the drafty, echoing corridors and the bunker-like mentality".¹⁴ Pilant's thesis has strong support from law enforcement professionals since conventional wisdom has shifted from traditional law enforcement methodology to community-oriented policing. The net effect may be a future in which the police facility will incorporate design features that encourage public interaction with the police, reflect the values of the community it serves and will include features that accommodate growth and technological change not yet imagined.

The changes presented by the future are, at best, uncertain. There are however, and will be, trends or forces that will mold and shape how tomorrow's police facility functions. These "forces" are what must be identified and studied in order to prepare for an unpredictable future. A governing body, whether it is a city manager, city council, or board of supervisors, wants to be confident that the cost of a facility is based on specific needs, and that the project is carefully planned at the beginning to yield successful results. A large part of that success depends on accurate forecasting of future needs in order to avoid the construction of a facility that is obsolete upon completion. As architect James Karl Robinson has stated, "It is clear with the growing complexity and technical sophistication of police

operations, the need for thorough long-range planning is critical."¹⁵

DRIVING FORCES

Before discussing any future issue, Dr. William Renfro of the Policy Analysis Company of Washington D.C. states that one must first preface the deliberation with a discussion of trends.¹⁶ Therefore, any forecasting of the future must begin with an academic exploration of current trends and possible future events which could reasonably be expected to have an impact on a particular issue - in this study - the forces that shape the function of the future police facility.

To this end, a number of professionals were impaneled in order to provide expertise in identifying key trends and likely future events that could influence the function of the facility of the future. In order to lend legitimacy to the panel and to assure credibility to the panel's analysis, it was necessary to select panel members with some degree of expertise in the subject matter. However, in an attempt to ensure that different perspectives were presented, some panel members were selected specifically because their background was dissimilar from law enforcement and were in architecture or other area specific to the futures issue. Therefore, the panel consisted of professionals from a variety of disciplines. Included on the panel were a chief of police, an assistant city manager, an architect, an automation systems

manager, two police lieutenants, a police captain, a city planner, a hospital facility manager and a graduate student in strategic management.

Their examination of the issues identified a number of driving forces worthy of further analysis. After extensive consideration of the issues, the panel of experts were able to reach consensus on those trends or forces they felt had the greatest potential impact on the issue of police facility function by the year 2006. Technology, finances, privatization and civilianization of services that do not require a sworn police officer to perform, an entrepreneurial approach to routine operations, the utilization of volunteers, regionalization of services, public expectations of governmental efficiency, community-based policing, natural disasters and the economy, to name a few, will all, to some degree, dictate how the facility of the future functions.

Closer examination of these forces is required in order to assess which will have the greatest likelihood of affecting police facility function. The following is a list of those specific "forces" that were projected as significant and most likely to bear on the function of the facility of the future:

- 1) Developing Technology
- 2) Public Expectations of Police Services
- 3) Level of Financial Resources

- 4) Law Enforcement's Role in Providing for Non-Criminal Complaints
- 5) Impact of Privatization
- 6) Community Involvement/Activity at Police Facility
- 7) Future of Community-Based Policing
- 8) Impact of Housing Criminal Offenders
- 9) Liability Issues and Litigation
- 10) Public Expectations for Governmental Efficiency

Some of the above forces were predicted to have a greater influence on future facility function than others. Conversely, several intertwine and impact each other. To the extent possible in this brief analysis, the following is a discussion of each "force", its relative importance and some of the potential effects that may arise as a result of their influence.

Developing Technology

Seen as having the greatest likelihood of shaping the function of the police facility over the course of the next ten years is the level of technological assistance used by law enforcement. New and more sophisticated technology, methods and equipment are rapidly changing modern law enforcement and crime prevention. This trend is forecast to develop at a level significantly higher than any other. Huge advances in computer technology and communications will shape the way police departments do business and will also

effect facility design as technology increases efficiency, changes manpower needs and space allocation.

Virtual reality, interactive video, computer bulletin boards, "smart" work stations, and artificial intelligence are some of the common technological advances that are shaping the way police facilities in the future will function.¹⁷ The ability to carry massive amounts of information to police field units will open the doors to delivering the developing advances of the next century to the front seat of a patrol car, changing space needs and operational procedures for police facilities.¹⁸

As an example, one might imagine the impact on operations when a supervisor can watch and record the activity of each subordinate live, as it happens, through the lens of a digital video transmitter small enough to be concealed on each officer's uniform.¹⁹ Or, how will facility function change when in the future the public may file routine crime reports from home via their personal computer or at a machine situated for the citizen's convenience at the front of the police station?²⁰

The impact of technology on facility function is limited only by one's imagination. It was the panel's belief that technological advances will be one of the leading, if not the primary driving force in shaping the function of the next century's police facility. However, one might consider that technological

developments are often driven by the needs and wants of the market it serves. In this case that market would be the police and the community. What impact community pressures for certain kinds of products or services will have on the function of the future facility leads to the discussion of the next force or trend.

Public Expectations of Police Services

In an effort to be responsive to the needs of its community, one Southern California law enforcement agency surveyed its citizenry in an effort to establish a priority of public expectations. With one of Los Angeles County's highest per capita homicide rates, police officials were stunned to find that graffiti was perceived as the most critical issue facing that city's police department.²¹

Incredulous as this example may seem, the impact of public expectations on police services is a trend forecast to increase as law enforcement transitions to the future. Public pressure brought to bear on political leaders and law enforcement officials could significantly impact the type of services provided by the police. Indeed, the primary function of police could theoretically shift away from law enforcement to non-criminal services. For example, the facility of the future may serve as a community gathering place where public business or personal affairs such as banking or voting may take place. The future facility may provide a safe haven for social services such as programs for the homeless, battered women or rape victims.²²

As Jeff Cameron theorized in his futures study on police facilities, "It (the police facility) may incorporate other aspects, outside of traditional police work - perhaps there will be a senior citizens center built into the facility if senior citizen crime is a major issue or concern..."²³ Regardless of what services the police headquarters will provide in the next century, facility planners need to consider a future where public expectations of police escalate while, as the panel forecast, resources are expected to decline modestly over the next ten years.

Level of Financial Resources

The relevance of this trend was based on the panel's assumption that police facilities are financed and maintained from revenue generated by various taxes and fees charged to the public. The panel felt that the level of financial resources provided to law enforcement agencies have a direct impact on the ability of the police to take advantage of technological advances, expand services, and meet the expectations of the public. The panel also felt that the level of financial resources available to law enforcement have a direct or indirect affect on each of the remaining forecasted trends.

In a future in which technological development is forecast to play a major role in facility function, and public demands will significantly increase, facility planners will have to deal with an issue already facing governmental officials - how to do more with

less. It was recommended that innovative methods of financing be explored, and entrepreneurial approaches to operations be considered. Charging the federal government to house immigration detainees may be an example of an entrepreneurial approach to routine police operations that changes the function of the police facility from one of simply providing a jail for local arrestees to one of producing profits to be used in other areas. If successful, one could see where the planning of the function of a future law enforcement facility might be affected.

The trend of using the services of volunteers should be factored into any consideration of a future facility. Extensive use of citizen volunteers makes good financial sense. In this case, citizen volunteers could be reserve officers, cadets, or volunteer citizen workers. Facing a future of forecast decreases in resources, law enforcement may see volunteerism as a method of maintaining a high level of services. If so, future police facilities should be designed to accommodate a wide variety of citizen volunteers, many of whom will be performing tasks formerly handled by sworn personnel.

Privatization of services and civilianization of duties formerly performed by sworn police officers are trends that are addressing today's financial challenges. They will be addressed in more detail later in this examination of the future.

Law Enforcement's Role in Providing for Non-Criminal Complaints

Many observers would likely be surprised to discover that 81 percent of the Whittier Police Department's calls for service are non-criminal in nature.²⁴ A substantial portion of total departmental resources are expended in such areas as traffic control and investigation, responding to "attractive nuisances" (broken windows on public buildings, ruptured water lines, abandoned refrigerators with doors still attached, abandoned vehicles, etc.), "public assists" such as delivering messages or checking on the welfare of the elderly. These are all non-criminal events which do not necessarily require the response of a sworn police officer, yet a substantial amount of time is spent in dealing with them.

The panel predicted that, in an era when police officers are seen as community-based problem-solvers, the demand for law enforcement to deliver services for non-criminal complaints will likely increase in number and scope as discussed below.

Community Involvement/Activity at Police Facility

The public uses of a police facility were once limited to a small lobby, bathrooms, and a fingerprinting area. Today's multitude of services often calls for public meeting rooms, social service offices, "soft" interview rooms for crime victims, press briefing rooms, and licensing windows.²⁵ The forecasted increase in community involvement and activity at the police facility points to

a future in which the function will be modified from a secure environment that is hostile and cold, to one where the primary concern is not dealing with criminals but rather the needs of the law-abiding public.

The panel forecast a substantial increase in the level of community involvement and activity at the police facility in the next ten years. Neighborhood Watch, public advisory panels, senior citizens groups, and direct involvement by these groups in decision and policy making may become commonplace.²⁶ These citizen groups may well determine how the facility of the future functions, particularly senior citizens as they are forecast to grow in number and influence as the baby boom generation enters retirement age.

Future of Community-Based Policing

Intertwined with the level of community activity at the police facility is the increasing role that community-based policing is forecast to play in the shaping of facility function. Panel members felt that the future facility would have to be "user friendly" and present a facade that encourages public interaction with law enforcement. It was felt that community-based policing dictated a move away from the "siege mentality" that some members thought resulted in fortresses rather than "community friendly" police structures. As George Miers pointed out in his analysis of community-oriented facilities, "Clearly, one of the challenges confronting the police profession is the need to balance the

inherently dangerous and security-oriented aspects of police work with greater community sensitivity and openness".²⁷

Taken to its extreme, particularly with agencies responsible for policing large geographic locations, community policing could result not in the public coming to the facility, but the facility going to the public. Small "satellite" offices or "store front" operations in specific regions based on population, calls for service, number of arrests, or political considerations may be a means of meeting the level of public service and interaction required of a true community-based approach to law enforcement.

The Impact of Privatization on the Police Function

There were interesting differences of opinion among panel members in forecasting the future impact of privatization on police facility function. The panel, on average however, felt that there would be a modest increase in its importance over the next ten years, although not to the degree of some of the more influential forces already discussed.

The panel felt that privatization and the forecasted level of decreased financial resources were also intertwined. The group felt that increased reductions in resources would lead to a greater need to consider privatization of services as a means of improving efficiency. Privatization could lead to the removal of traditional police responsibilities such as offender housing, fingerprinting,

polygraph (lie-detector) tests, employee background investigations and various other police services, out and away from the central headquarters and into the hands of private companies. What would be left behind may be a significantly smaller central facility whose function would have been drastically modified as only services requiring a sworn police officer would be performed.

Public Expectations of Governmental Efficiency

Trends that began in the 1970's with legislation such as California's anti-property tax initiative (Proposition 13) have persevered into the 1990's, with continuing taxpayer revolt. Exemplified by the recent passage of California's Proposition 218, which prohibits tax increases without voter approval, the public is demanding more accountability on behalf of government officials. In an attempt to improve efficiency, law enforcement leaders may look towards regionalization of such services as communications and crime analysis, privatization of non-essential services, and civilianization of many of the duties now performed by sworn personnel.

The panel felt that, in light of current political trends, the public would demand efficiency and expect justification for any capital outlay for police functions. Opulence or extravagance would not be tolerated. The panel felt it was extremely important that each component of the future police facility serve a specific function to satisfy public expectations.

It was speculated that advances in technology may enable the police to meet some of the public's desire to "do more with less." Future technological developments may offset costs by reducing manpower needs and speeding routine tasks so that the police department can serve as a showcase for governmental efficiency.

Liability Issues and Litigation

According to the panel's forecast, it seems that the litigious nature of society will continue unabated in the future. Current and future legal rulings will likely have an impact on the types of services provided by law enforcement agencies and, to an undetermined extent, dictate design considerations in future facilities. As an example, past legislation has already mandated certain design requirements in all public buildings, such as accommodations for the disabled.

How facility function will be affected by liability issues and litigation is difficult to predict. The anticipated increase in the level of community involvement and activity at the police department, as an example, could reasonably be expected to generate a similar rise in the level of lawsuits and civil actions against the agency for the actions of these new agents of the organization. The outcome of the litigated issues would certainly bear on the services deemed appropriate by the courts and thereby the function the facility serves.

Regardless of the difficulty in assessing the consequences of liability issues and litigation on facility function in the future, it is a force that the panel felt confident would increase or remain constant in importance over the next five to ten years.

Impact of Housing Criminal Offenders

The forecasting panel felt that the housing of criminal offenders would have a significant impact on operations at the future law enforcement facility. With the panel forecasting an increase in the number of arrests in the future, the group projected a similar increase in the number of convictions and incarceration rates, exacerbating an area of operations already considered by police managers as an extreme liability.

As a result of liability issues surrounding prisoners, particularly ones with medical problems, some counties have refused to house pre-arraigned misdemeanor offenders. In one case, the City of Santa Ana, California took an entrepreneurial approach to prisoner housing by constructing a multi-million dollar jail facility specifically designed to make a profit by charging individual communities for the housing of their pre-arraigned misdemeanor prisoners.²⁸

Given the forecasted reduction in financial resources, the panel felt that this type of innovative measure would be necessary to accommodate the burden of providing temporary room and board for

prisoners at the future facility. Others ideas brought forth by the panel included the total privatization of jails, regionalization of custody facilities, and the assumption of prisoner housing responsibilities exclusively by the county, state, or federal government.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What is strikingly clear upon review is the crucial importance of analyzing the trends or forces that would have an impact on any long range plan for a major project such as the construction of a police facility. The importance of analyzing the data, and then forecasting the impact of any decision based on the data, cannot be emphasized enough.

In considering the function of the police facility by the year 2006, it is apparent that, before one can consider the function of a police headquarters, one must first address the forces that will bear on that function. It is clear that finances will have a definitive impact on what functions can be afforded. It is recommended that innovative methods of financing be explored, and new approaches to operations be considered. Privatization and civilianization of services that do not require a sworn police officer to perform are promising ways of reducing day-to-day costs. An entrepreneurial approach to routine police operations such as the housing of prisoners could change the function of the police facility from traditional police operations to a profit-producing

enterprise that generates its own operational revenues. One could certainly envision a future law enforcement facility that functions far differently than in the past.

The increasing level of community involvement and activity forecast at the police facility in the future emphasizes the value of untapped human resources such as citizen volunteers. Citizen volunteers could be reserve officers, cadets, or as predicted, the volunteer citizen worker who may bring to the police department any number of areas of expertise. By soliciting the interaction of these community members with the police department, community-based policing is enhanced. The public, when their input is solicited, feel they have a stake in the organization and the development of loyalty to that organization is not an unreasonable expectation. When private citizens are invited to participate inside the facility, the function of the facility serves a new purpose. Those who are stakeholders in the organization are more likely to support its function.

Regionalization of services is another possible future development that can modify the function of the future facility. A regionalization of communication centers, as an example, would change the space allocation within a building. Regionalization could be considered for such functions as crime analysis (criminals rarely confine themselves to city limits), crime scene investigation, and records processing and storage.

Technology, as mentioned earlier in this article, should have a tremendous impact on the function of the future police facility and may be the solution to forecasted operational and budgetary problems. The ever-expanding role of computers and their increasingly smaller size allows planners to use previously allocated space for other purposes. The development of telecommuting and teleconferencing reduces the necessity of an officer physically being at a police station and should alter the space allocations for future police buildings. Methods of communicating, such as portable computers, may allow the officer of the future to work at small satellite stations or, alternatively, any location a police manager decides.

Natural disasters, though not one of the primary driving forces, are potential occurrences that must be considered when pondering the facility of the future. Not only does the structure have to be able to withstand any number of nature's assaults, but the facility of the future may serve as an information center or temporary shelter for employees and the public. In times of crisis, the facility could serve any number of uses.

Overall, the process of determining the function of the police facility by the year 2006 is driven by forces occurring today and by unforeseen events that will occur in the future. By analyzing those forces and forecasting future events, we can plan a future in which the use of our resources are maximized.

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