

**Police Dormitories**  
**Build it and they will come**

**by**

**Captain Alex Padilla**  
**Santa Monica Police Department**

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

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## Police Dormitories Build it and they will come

You are the watch commander and it's 2:30 in the morning, Night Watch has gone home and you glance up at the calls pending. The calls seem to be backing up. You soon realize you have five officers on the watch; you pray the night will be calm and peaceful. Just as you roll back in your chair, the building shakes. It's a major earthquake! You look over at your partner and ask him to assess any damage to the police building and to check on the status of the personnel within the facility. As he does this, you run down to the dormitories that are located in the basement and thank goodness there are eleven officers sleeping in the newly built dormitories.

Within 30 minutes, these officers are in uniform and in the field reporting on the conditions and conducting windshield surveys (building damage). The officers are thankful the Department had the wisdom to build these new dormitories, which allowed for a quick response. A year ago, you would have been on the phone for two hours trying to call in day watch officers and then waiting another few hours for them to arrive to work.

### Background

Although Fire Departments have been using dormitories for years, the concept of providing housing or dormitories for police officers is something that has been discussed more recently. For many years, police departments have depended on hiring police officers who grew up and lived in their respective communities. Due to housing costs and police officers' salaries, however, more and more officers are not able to purchase homes in the cities where they work or grew up. As a result, they are purchasing homes farther away from where they work. The daily

commute can range from forty-five minutes to well over an hour. As this situation has become more frequent, the term "The Hawaii Syndrome" has been used to identify people who can no longer afford to live where they were raised.<sup>1</sup>

In March of 2008, hundreds of Los Angeles residents and a broad-based coalition of businesses, housing advocates, labor and religious leaders hosted a press conference to present the mayor and council members with a plan of action to address the city's housing crisis. This group noted that many workers who provide critical services to our communities - firefighters, police officers, teachers and health care workers - cannot afford to live here. In Los Angeles, the median income of \$45,000 is not enough income to purchase homes in the area, which generally requires household income of \$135,000 or more.<sup>2</sup>

Amongst many others, the Granville Police Department in Columbus, Ohio is faced with the same dilemma. Their police officers are paid between \$25,000 and \$42,000 a year, yet the average price for a home in Granville is \$312,000.<sup>3</sup> As a result, many police officers and other critical city staff are forced to live further away from work and are looking for options to decrease their travel time.

### Density and Travel Time

Los Angeles County is already the most congested region in the nation. Recent estimates note that the region will add six million people to the nearly 10 million who already live here by

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<sup>1</sup> Leong, Grace. (2008) *Affordable-housing shortage in county*. Retrieved April 8, 2009. From Daily Herald site: <http://www.heraldextra.com/content/view/269330/18/>

<sup>2</sup> Scanph.org. (n.d.). *Housing LA Rallies Hundreds of city Residents for 3-Point Plan for Affordable Homes*. Retrieved April 8, 2009. From Scanph.org site: <http://scanph.org/node/396>

<sup>3</sup> Geboly's Debbie. (2006) *Zoned Out: Many who serve affluent communities can't afford to live in them - The Columbus Dispatch*. Retrieved April 8, 2009. From Dispatch/.com site: <http://www.dispatch.com/live/contentbe/dispatch/2006/08/21/20060821-A1-02.html>

2030.<sup>4</sup> At 7,068 people per square mile, Los Angeles is considered denser than New York, which -ranks fourth at 5,309 per square mile.<sup>5</sup> The distance we drive our cars each year is also growing much faster than our population.<sup>6</sup> Los Angeles ranks 14th out of the 37 largest metro areas in terms of highway miles driven per resident per day. Commuters in L.A. also spend more time stuck in traffic than any other drivers in the nation.<sup>7</sup> According to the Los Angeles Transportation Authority, Los Angeles violates the national air-quality standards for ozone by a factor of more than two every year.<sup>8</sup> Of course, this means police officers and other critical safety personnel, stuck in this morass, will have longer commutes. This would undoubtedly be exacerbated for those called in to work due to an emergency or natural disaster.

### Recruitment and Retention

According to a 2006 study conducted by CA POST (reported in their Recruitment & Retention, Best Practices Update that year), many cities throughout the nation recognize and acknowledge that providing affordable housing may not only address some of the issues discussed above, but may also improve the hiring and retention of police officers.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> U.S.PIRG.com. (n.d.). *Statement before the Los Angeles MTA Regarding Proposals to Increase Public Transit Fare*. Retrieved March 19, 2009. From U.S.PIRG.com site: <http://www.uspirg.org/news-releases/transporation-news>

<sup>5</sup> Morris, Eric A. (2009). *Los Angeles Transportation Facts and Fiction: Sprawl*. Retrieved March 20, 2009. From The New York Times site: <http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/09/los-angeles-transportation-facts-and-fiction>

<sup>6</sup> U.S.PIRG.com. (n.d.). *Statement before the Los Angeles MTA Regarding Proposals to Increase Public Transit Fare*. Retrieved March 19, 2009. From U.S.PIRG.com site: <http://www.uspirg.org/news-releases/transporation-news>

<sup>7</sup> Morris, Eric A. (2009). *Los Angeles Transportation Facts and Fiction: Freeways*. Retrieved March 20, 2009. From The New York Times site: <http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/24/los-angeles-transportation-facts-and-fiction>

<sup>8</sup> Morris, Eric A. (2009). *Los Angeles Transportation Facts and Fiction: Freeways*. Retrieved March 20, 2009. From The New York Times site: <http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/24/los-angeles-transportation-facts-and-fiction>

<sup>9</sup> Church, Jeffrey. (2007). *Law Enforcement Personnel Retention*. Retrieved March 20, 2009. From Officer.com site: <http://www.officer.com/web/online/Leadership/Law-Enforcement-Personnel-Retention>

Some law enforcement agencies have had police officers sign residency contracts requiring the officers to live either in the city or within close proximity. For example, the Glendale CA Police Department requires their police officers live within 40 miles of the city, while the Ontario CA Police Department requires their police officers to live in that City. As a result of the high cost of housing, though, many departments have abandoned their residency requirements.<sup>10</sup>

According to Josh Roman, who served as a police officer with the Milwaukee Police Department, their agency did away with the residency requirement so that they could expand their pool of police recruits. "Doing away with the residency requirement also allowed us to recruit police officers from other agencies, saving us thousands of dollar in the cost of sending a recruit through the background process and police academy," he said.<sup>11</sup> Others are using their locale's affordability as a specific component of their recruiting strategy.

The Phoenix Police Department has launched a recruitment campaign to lure officers away from the Los Angeles area. The \$300,000 campaign includes TV and newspaper ads that tout Phoenix's lower cost of living. These officers are enticed with the notion they will be able to live in subsidized housing or be able to purchase a home in Phoenix, which has lower priced affordable housing than that found in metropolitan California.<sup>12</sup> The Honolulu Police Department

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<sup>10</sup> Johnson, Kevin. (2006). *Police, firefighters challenge residency rules; 'Recruitment and Retention Nightmare'*. Retrieved March 20, 2009. From Masscops.com site: <http://www.masscops.com/forums/hot-topics/19120-police-firefighters-challenge-residence>

<sup>11</sup> Roman, Josh. Personal Interview. March 17, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, Kevin. (2005). *Cops put out a dragnet – for more cops*. Retrieved April 7, 2009. From USATODAY.com site: [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-11-10-police-recruits-inside\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-11-10-police-recruits-inside_x.htm)

has followed Phoenix's lead, as they are having difficulty in finding police officer applicants on the Hawaiian Islands. They have sent recruiters to San Diego, California and Portland, Oregon.<sup>13</sup>

Many cities are also exploring housing options for teachers, nurses and other city or county employees that serve in critical positions. Everyone is competing for a quality workforce; however, finding affordable housing for this workforce may cause some impacts in obtaining qualified applicants.<sup>14</sup> In Charles County, Maryland 75 teachers and other emergency personnel have taken advantage of the Good Neighbor Next Door federal program that was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, allows for them to purchase a home at half-price when the original owner defaults on an FHA loan. Jackie Fulton, a special education teacher at Westlake High School, plans to buy a home. "I am sick and tired of renting. I may as well put my money into something that is mine and will allow me to live closer to work." she said.<sup>15</sup>

In Japan, housing is so expensive that police officers cannot afford to purchase homes or rent apartments within the area they work. Therefore, police officers are provided housing called a Chuzaiho (residential police box). The Chuzaiho's are strategically placed throughout rural areas of Japan, while the Koban's are placed in rural areas. Both of these are used as substations that also serve as residences for the police officer and are provided as an incentive and benefit.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Johnson, Kevin. (2005). *Police recruits in heavy demand*. Retrieved April 7, 2009. From USATODAY.com site: [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-11-10-police-recruits\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-11-10-police-recruits_x.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Findarticles.com. (n.d.). *Affordable housing taps eager market in Maryland*. Retrieved April 9, 2009. From Findarticles.com site: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4183/is\\_20060505/ai\\_n16356586/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4183/is_20060505/ai_n16356586/)

<sup>15</sup> Somdnews.com.(2008) *Easing Housing Costs for Teachers, Police*. Retrieved April 8, 2009. From Somdnews.com site: [http://www.somdnews.com/stories/0322008/indytop114431\\_32233.shtml](http://www.somdnews.com/stories/0322008/indytop114431_32233.shtml)

<sup>16</sup> Princeton.edu. (n.d.). *Japanese Police Organization*. Retrieved April 7, 2009. From Princeton.edu site: <http://www.princeton.edu/~tpeng/organization.html>

Is it time for agencies in California to consider similar unconventional approaches to resolve their residency issues for critical staff?

### Police Dorms - Is it Time?

Police officers often work long shifts, coupled with mandatory overtime and delayed court proceedings. After working these long hours, police officers then have to drive over an hour in traffic to get home with just enough time to take a quick nap and then drive back to work and do it all over again. Their physical and mental health can suffer, impairing their judgment and decision making abilities. If they don't get enough rest and find themselves too exhausted to return to work, there could be an increase in the use of discretionary time (sick, vacation or compensatory time). One California agency has taken a novel approach to resolve many of these concerns.

The Mountain View Police Department, serving a population of 78,000 residents, has 96 police officers and 70 support staff. To meet the needs of their staff, the Department provides sleeping quarters for their personnel. City-owned property with three 4-bedroom houses on one parcel had been converted into office space and was unoccupied. Two of the three houses were converted into sleeping quarters by the City, and the third house was converted into a day room. Each bedroom has two beds, accommodating 16 officers at any given time. The houses are divided into male and female sleeping quarters.

According to Captain Michael (Mick) Hamlin and Officer Travis Doerres, the availability of the sleeping quarters has had a significant impact on the retention of police officers. Captain Hamlin said, "Before the sleeping quarters, we had police officers that lived far away from the department and the ride got to them. As soon as they were off probation, they would lateral to an

agency closer to where they lived. Since the sleeping quarters were made available, we rarely have police officers leave the department due to the commute. We now use the sleeping quarters to recruit police officers and to retain the ones we have."<sup>17</sup> Captain Hamlin said that, although they have not tracked the use of discretionary time-off, in his opinion the use of discretionary time has decreased. Captain Hamlin and Officer Doerres said they both have used the sleeping quarters and after working 18 hour days. They found the option of using the sleeping quarters was a significant benefit to the quality of their work lives. Captain Hamlin said that it was nice to know that if there is a major incident, the department had several additional police officers available at a moment's notice.

Officer Doerres said, "I live 94 miles away from work. In 2002, I had contemplated leaving the department because of the daily commute. Once the sleeping quarters were built, I started using them for three of the four days I work. The sleeping quarters kept me here."<sup>18</sup> Officer Doerres also said that amongst the police officers, they feel that having the sleeping quarters has been a big morale booster. When he worked as a detective and spent the night in the sleeping quarters, several times he was called out to major crime scenes. "Being just a few minutes away was good for the Department, and saved me from having a two-hour response time." he said.<sup>19</sup>

Officer Doerres said that if it had not been for the sleeping quarters, he and many of the other police officers would be using more of their discretionary time off. Quite a few of the police officers that live in Modesto, Fresno and Sacramento use the dormitories on the days they work. Many of the officers use the sleeping quarters in between their shifts (i.e. court, special

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<sup>17</sup> Hamlin, Michael. Personal Interview. March 23, 2010

<sup>18</sup> Doerres, Travis. Personal Interview. March 23, 2010

<sup>19</sup> Doerres, Travis. Personal Interview. March 23, 2010

events). Both Captain Hamlin and Officer Doerres felt that having the sleeping quarters has been positive for the department and the community. They feel that other police departments should explore the option of sleeping quarters or dormitories to realize similar benefits.

In May of 2009, a group with expertise on the subjects of housing and public safety met to discuss the issue of dormitories for police officers and other emergency personnel. Their findings largely concurred with the perceptions of staff at Mountain View. The group's consensus was that, due to increased traffic, lack of affordable housing and the increased awareness of terrorism or other natural disasters, the availability of having dormitories as a housing option was a trade-off for having additional police officers available.<sup>20</sup>

### Implementation & Maintenance

Police Chiefs Statewide have noted that even if the salaries are on par with other agencies in the region; with the high cost of living, housing shortage, long commute and working shifts at odd hours make the job less attractive.<sup>21</sup> This is where the use of dormitories will make a difference. Police departments would be able to hire and retain police officers who may live far from work, but would be able to utilize the dormitories on the days they work or if they have to work on their days off (i.e. court or special events).

For police officers to be available at a moment's notice in a way that minimizes costs, dormitories would ideally be located within the existing police facility. The make-up of the dormitories could be similar to those currently used at fire departments. Construction of these dormitories can range from cubicle configurations constructed of the same material that is used

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<sup>20</sup> Nominal Group Technique (NGT). Meeting held in Santa Monica, CA. May 5, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Heiman, Jeremy. (2008). *Carbondale adds new police officers*. Retrieved April 9, 2009. From Valley-Journal.com site: <http://www.valley-journal.com/article/20080924/NEWS/809249956/1059&ParentProfile=1001&title>

for office space to construction of solid walls (rooms) with doors. As for the cost of constructing the dormitories and providing the beds, Mountain View's Police Officer's Associations solicited donations from the business community to offset the cost of providing bedding and other necessary supplies (i.e. tables, chairs, television and microwave).

Keep in mind, the use of the dormitories are designed for short term use by police personnel to get rest and sleep for several hours in between their shifts so they do not have to drive several hours to get home, just to turn around and come back to work. If building dormitories at existing police stations becomes too costly, consideration can be given to having police officers utilize dormitories already available at some of the fire stations. Although this may not be an ideal solution, it would still allow for police officers to have a place to rest and sleep, while avoiding the long commute.

### Conclusion

It's no surprise that more and more police officers live farther away from the communities they serve. With the increase in population and overall traffic, this commute time will increase substantially by the year 2018. This increase in commute time has caused police officers to seek employment closer to home, even if this means taking a cut in pay. An opportunity to have an option to use a dormitory during their work week would have a positive impact on their ability to continue to provide quality patrol services, as the officers would be rested and the fatigue factor would be minimal.

The minimal cost of building and providing dormitories, along with the benefit of having police officers sleeping in the dormitory and being available in case of an emergency or natural disaster is a win / win for the department and the community. For those that have had the task of

scurrying up personnel during morning watch hours to respond to an emergency, the availability of additional personnel just a few feet away is a blessing. The alternative is to lose even more quality personnel, to exacerbate commuter congestion, and to diminish the capacity of police agencies in any metropolitan area of the State. Think about it. In fact, sleep on it.