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INTEGRATION OF POLICE AND FIRE SERVICES

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An interesting experiment is being carried out in several of our smaller cities. At the present time there is no indication that it will be adopted by the larger cities, but it is being watched closely by those small cities who are finding it more and more difficult to provide the increasing services demanded of them with their ever dwindling purchasing power of city funds. In commenting on this problem which the small cities are having, in "Small Town Finances Hit Hardest By Rapid Growth",¹ the author made this comment:

"Costs for police and fire protection and for public education were among those that increased most in the four towns studied."

It was also pointed out that part of the reason is that other costs are absorbed by residential developers and also that part of the police and fire service was done by volunteers previous to the rapid growth. There is no question but that this experiment of combining police work and fire fighting was born out of a struggle to provide adequate and efficient public safety services at a cost to these cities which is compatible with their resources. The idea in itself is not entirely new but has had a long history beginning in Canada and moving across the border in a few instances in the northwest. Recently cities in states such as Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, California, Oregon, and South Carolina have been attempting to provide all public safety services through one integrated department. It might be pointed out that it has not proven acceptable or workable in all instances, and we find both proponents and opponents to the plan.

Cities in the United States which have integrated the services into a single department with population and public safety officers include:

	Population	Men	
1. Oregon City, Oregon.....	7,682	19	
2. Oakwood, Ohio.....	9,691	31	
3. Glencoe, Illinois.....	8,647	22	
4. Oak Park, Michigan.....	5,267		(1950)
	20,000	34	(1954)
5. Sunnyvale, California.....	26,064	39	

¹ AMERICAN CITY, March, 1955, p. 24.

6. North Augusta, South Carolina.....	3,659	(1950)
	9,400	7 & vol. (1954)
7. Buena Park, California.....	5,483	
8. Huntington Woods, Michigan.....	5,000	11
9. Grosse Point Heights, Michigan.....	1,200	
10. Sewickley Heights, Pennsylvania.....	5,836	

Public safety services commonly provided by municipal government include the police and fire services; however, there are variances from this, and there are variations in the services provided either by the police or the fire services.

Small cities find the public safety services one of the knottiest city problems, since one of the great problems arises out of the fact that it must be provided 24 hours a day. Another problem is that traditionally the smaller cities depend upon these services to include services remote to police and fire service. In the larger cities these services are provided by other specialized departments. A third problem is that the manpower needed for potential emergencies is always greater than the manpower needed for average operation and is usually greater than small cities can afford. As a result of surveys, James reports: "The public safety problem in small cities then appears to be quite similar in kind to that in larger cities, and it may be that, in proportion to size, the problem is not greatly different in magnitude."²

He points out that the variations in problems, policies, records, and personnel make it difficult to get reliable data on small cities. In criticism of this work of James it appears that he was primarily considering only the needs for emergencies and little on the efforts at education and prevention. In modern day police and fire protection, the field of education and prevention is assuming a larger role in the attack on crimes, accidents, and fires.

The advantages and disadvantages might be weighed by comparing and contrasting the two services. Both services arose out of volunteer services which at one time were performed by citizens. These early services were introduced as paid services when the tranquility of the community was threatened by criminals and lawlessness or a conflagration. Communities were smaller, and criminal attacks were much less frequent. Laws to be enforced were few, and simple, and avenues of escape by criminals were limited. Those fires which occurred seldom threatened the whole community, and the value of the property was seldom excessive. As communities grew and law enforcement problems arose more frequently, it became necessary to employ paid police personnel to provide this service. The police service clearly preceded the demand for full time paid firemen, and we still find many communities, some of them rather large, who still rely upon either volunteer or part time firemen. Even in those cities with paid firemen today, the general public looks upon this service as a more or less standby service which is called upon rather infrequently in spite of the fact that many of them are providing protection through inspection and prevention activities.

Both the police and full time fire services have recognized the need for working in the field of prevention and have adopted programs calling for a large share of their

² POLICE AND FIRE INTEGRATION IN THE SMALLER CITIES, CHARLES S. JAMES, Public Administration Services, 1955, pp. 3 and 4.

total effort to be directed in this field. Of the two, the fire services have probably found more spare time, due to less frequency in emergencies, to devote to prevention. It is true that emergencies in each of these fields tend to group themselves together in point of time, however no known study has attempted to determine whether emergencies in both services tend to occur at the same time.

Fire emergencies create police emergencies. Emergencies arise as a result of the need for adequate traffic control and crowd control at the scene. This problem has increased as our population has become more mobile. If the public safety personnel are needed to meet the fire emergency, then they will necessarily be needed to meet a corresponding police emergency. The argument is that most fire emergencies are minor, either false alarms or small fires which are easily and quickly extinguished; however, this is not true of all of them and certainly the protection service provided should consider the greater emergencies which are always a potential threat and possibility. Therefore, we cannot necessarily assume that only one of these services are needed at any given time.

We have seen the influence of specialization in business and industry tending to be applied in the public safety services. This is probably more true in the police service than in the fire service, and it certainly is greater as the size of the community or city increases.

There is one great contrast between the two services, especially when they are working in emergencies; the police usually are working with people, while the firemen are mostly concerned with things such as property or equipment. The public has gradually grown to demand a professional performance from each in their own field and probably one of the great questions which we should be concerned with is whether a man can be found who can master two professions and give the type of emergency service which the public now demands.

In an article entitled "What Besides Money for the Fire Department", Charles N. Carrel, new Fire Chief of Santa Monica, California, discusses the problem of securing equipment in the small cities:

"We hear much about finding more useful work not related to fire duty for firemen to perform. Some advocate consolidation of fire and police departments, under one head and require the duties of both services to be interchangeable. A few small cities claim success in doing this, while others have tried and abandoned the experiment. One city manager with eight years experience with integration said: An effective fire program needs trained professional leadership."³

Another great contrast is the number of hours per week which each of the services are required to work at the present time. Many police departments are on 40 to 48 hour work-weeks, while firemen in the same communities are on duty from 60 to 84 hours per week. The firemen have been unable to get reductions in hours of the work week because portions of their duty hours consist in sleeping at the station.

James points out in his work on this problem⁴ that traditionally the smaller cities

³ AMERICAN CITY, October, 1954, pp. 5 and 11.

⁴ POLICE AND FIRE INTEGRATION IN THE SMALLER CITIES, CHARLES S. JAMES, Public Administration Services, 1955, p. 7.

use longer work weeks than the larger cities, however the general trend of shorter work weeks in industry will eventually force this down and further complicate the problem for small cities. In Indiana as an example, state law limits police to 48 hours per week in cities down to and including fifth class (2,000 population), yet there is no comparable limitation for firemen.

Both services are comparable in manpower needs. We usually find the per capita police and firemen in similar ratios, especially if the difference in the work week is considered, and we usually find this per capita ratio is greater in the larger cities. It is mainly governed by the ability of the city to financially support the service. In both services the greater proportion of the departmental budget is for personnel services.

Carrell points out:

"About 90% of the cost of a paid fire department is for personnel. There is no substitute for manpower in the fire department. The need for fast action in laying hose lines, advancing hose streams to the seat of the fire, performing ladder work in connection with rescue and ventilation, spreading salvage covers and removing water from buildings requires about 1.50 strong men per 1,000 population."⁵

Since neither can provide service without adequate equipment which involves most of the remainder of the budget, it is obvious that any financial savings by the city must be gained by reduction in total personnel of the two departments. If integration will reduce the total personnel costs and at the same time give comparable or more efficient service, then this step becomes advisable for the small city.

Police services have been constantly expanded to include the enforcement of more laws and more and more regulations, including the management of traffic. Of the two services the police have been beset with shortages due to these increased police problems in a much greater degree than have the fire services. Improved equipment available to both the services to control emergencies has probably relieved the fire services more than it has the police. In many instances the traffic problem probably absorbs 75% of the police manpower. Due to the rapid expansion in population in the past few years the increase in police personnel has not kept pace with the police problem either from the standpoint of population or the increased services demanded of the police services.

Many cities, short on police personnel, and confronted with school crossing problems at the very hours of the day when their services are called for in other police services are finding it expedient to employ part time school crossing guards. In many instances this service is being rendered by women, acting as part time employees of either the Police Department or School Corporation. A recent survey in Indiana indicates the trend in this service.⁶ The survey of 114 cities in Indiana ranging in population from 3,000 to 35,000 indicates a total of 120 civilian employees as crossing guards and only 85 police officers assigned to crossing guard duty. Of the 114 cities, 69 did not assign a police employee and 77 did not assign civilian employees.

It is interesting that the group between 5,000 and 25,000 which included 78 cities reporting were assigning 69 police officers to school crossings and using 89 civilians as

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 2

⁶ SURVEY OF INDIANA DEPARTMENTS, PAT STEELE, Department of Police Administration, 1956.

school crossing guards. The 69 officers assigned were from 31 departments and the 89 civilians were employed by 27 departments. The trend toward the use of school crossing guards as part-time officers indicates the pressing need of personnel for the emergency traffic control problems created at the schools. This releases the police personnel at the hours when they are most needed for emergencies and traffic control. In some cities the firemen are utilized in protecting school crossings near the fire station.

One of the questions which arises is the definition of a small city. In the study made by James, the population group below 10,000 was arbitrarily selected; however, we find this experiment is being attempted in much larger cities, such as Trois Rivieres, Quebec, which has a population of 50,000.⁷

James, in his test lists four functions or activities of these services in cities under 5,000 "(1) police service; (2) fire protection; (3) inspectional duties that involve enforcement of local ordinances and regulations but do not require extensive technical knowledge of skill; and (4) other emergencies or regulatory services that are municipal functions, and are not performed by any other city department."⁸

James further points out that in the field of prevention the approaches are through inspection and enforcement of regulations and through safety education. He feels these two fields are closely enough related in their separate approaches that they are often overlapping in their efforts, therefore could be just as effective if carried out by one department.⁹

It is quite evident that two essentials are needed before the plan can work effectively. These are; first, a good communications system; second, competent personnel, well trained. The first is essential to any effective police operation and has been so recognized and provided by most municipalities. Therefore, the integration would call for little additional equipment, personnel, or expense in most instances. The second requisite has only been recognized in a few cities, and in many departments would present a difficult problem in integration. In some departments there are numerous personnel of older age who would be neither amenable to, nor capable of effective training and would find it difficult to adapt or adjust themselves to a second field. In other words, these departments would require several years to effect the change and provide efficient service in both fields, while in those departments which have a majority of young personnel the adaptation would be effected in a much shorter time. It is generally agreed that a higher caliber or type of personnel is essential to the integration. Tenure protection in many instances would require years to build up some of these departments so that suitable personnel could be available. It is the writer's opinion that any city contemplating integration should give this factor primary consideration and survey their personnel to determine the ability of adaptation and degree of cooperation which they might expect. He strongly suspects that in those cities where integration failed the failure was mainly due to the personnel available and possibly the degree of training given to or absorbed by the personnel. All who have studied this problem of integration are emphatic about the need for personnel which is above that of the average police or fire department of today. They also agree that

⁷ *The Integration of Fire and Police Services*, PUBLIC MANAGEMENT, Feb. 1954.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 16-17.

higher salaries are necessary to attract them. They further point out however that this would lead to more efficient service with less manpower. The experience of the Berkeley, California, Police Department tends to support this argument as far as police work is concerned. The possibilities of greater efficiency with less manpower at the same or comparable overall expense is greater in the large city than in the small city. It is the same old problem which confronts small business in competition with large business in industry. The overall cost can be reduced by efficient operation in the larger business whereas this is not always possible in smaller operations. The small city is confronted with the problem of having sufficient manpower on each shift to meet emergencies, and this places an irreducible minimum upon them. This is particularly true of those cities under 10,000 population. If this is true, we see little chance of success for the small city to reduce the cost appreciably and provide comparable service. It may well be that the answer for those cities which are experiencing a vast growth and a gradual increase in the personnel in both departments may be the careful selection of new personnel and the proper training which would make the personnel adaptable to the integration.

There is the argument that cities with separate services have overlapping coverage in the field of prevention, since both police and firemen are covering the same premises in inspection and that through integration this overlapping is reduced. The tendency, particularly in the smaller cities, is for the police service to become almost completely mobilized. This has become necessary because of the shortage of manpower, the need to respond to emergencies more quickly, the need for mobility in covering larger areas, the traffic control problem, and the need for communication with headquarters. Actually, the smaller cities probably do less in the field of prevention than the larger cities in either of the services. This is due to their lack of ability to provide for or afford this type of service.

In a survey of six cities (Grosse Point Shore, Grosse Point Woods, Huntington Woods, of Michigan; Sunnyvale, California; and Shawinigan Falls and Trois Rivieres, Quebec), where the same men provide both police and fire services, it was pointed out that:

"By far the most widespread use of integrated public safety services is to be found in the province of Quebec. Departments of this type are in fact the rule there rather than the exception. While only two departments have been examined in any detail, twenty other cities of over 5,000 population and practically all under 5,000 in the province reportedly have similar organizations."¹⁰

James also pointed out that the cities he had studied had some characteristics which were favorable to integration. The Canadian cities studied had a minor crime problem and the smaller cities have limited fire problems; while the other cities had low fire incidence with mutual aid available. He also pointed out that the Quebec industries have good internal fire control teams and facilities.

In a report on integration of police and fire services in Oak Park, Michigan, it was pointed out that while Oak Park has a population of 26,000 and expects 45,000 by 1960, "it is a suburban community of fine residences," and "90% of the homes are of

¹⁰ *The Integration of Fire and Police Services*, CHARLES S. JAMES, *PUBLIC MANAGEMENT*, Feb., 1954, p. 29.

brick veneer, and the industries which are confined to perimeter development on the north and south are small industries not exceeding one story in height. There is no single building in the city exceeding two stories in height."¹¹

SUMMARY

In most instances a close study of the operation of integration will indicate that not as much real integration takes place on the operational level as we are led to believe. In some of them, there is still a division of duties and specialization practiced in the two areas. In other words, former firemen are still firemen except in police emergencies and other part time activity such as filing reports, copying reports, and other non-specialized police duties. At the same time the former policemen are still basically police officers except in fire emergencies. Under this type of operation the greatest gain is made in reducing administrative and supervisory personnel and the actual employment of firemen for more or less non-police duties, thus making it possible to obtain a reduction in the weekly hours of firemen and getting better compensation for them. It has not been indicated whether these cities will eventually move toward complete integration or not. It would appear that any department changing over to integration might make the change in this manner, then go to full integration in gradual steps if this seemed desirable.

It might be pointed out that this program seems to have found favor in cities where the city was more or less a residential rather than a business or industrial type city. The fire hazard is slightly reduced for several reasons, and the size of the potential fire emergency is less in this type city. It is probably too early to say whether this is a prerequisite to successful operation. It is also noted that in most instances where there is integration, the city will have mutual aid agreements on fire service with nearby cities. These mutual aid agreements are in existence in many instances where integration does not exist and are certainly desirable where possible; but whether mutual aid agreements with nearby cities are considered necessary where integration exists is not known.

The key to unification of the services is a good communications system as previously pointed out so that emergencies may be met in either field with the same efficiency and greater concentration of manpower than is now possible in the small city. Many of these cities still find it expedient to use volunteer or part time help in emergencies created by fires, with a core of fully trained full time firemen and to some extent the police services rely upon some part time or volunteer assistance in extreme emergencies.

Two factors appear to be common to those cities which have gone to integration: (1) They are fast growing cities, and (2) they are home rule cities under city manager forms of government. The first indicates that they have found it necessary in the interests of economy and meeting the demand for a greatly expanding public service. The second is almost an essential to the adoption of integration. It is quite probable that it will continue to be adopted by other home rule cities; however, its adoption in states requiring state legislation to implement it will probably come much slower.

¹¹ REPORT ON THE INTEGRATION OF THE POLICE AND FIRE SERVICES IN THE CITY OF OAK PARK, MICHIGAN, GLENSFORD LEONARDS, Director of Public Safety, Oak Park, Michigan, Sept. 20, 1954.