

Station needed; questions remain

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In the May 10 edition of the News-Graphic there was a piece about the need for a new police station.

Nowadays it seems that a new building, morale and staffing seem to be in the forefront of discussions about the police department.

While no one disagrees that the police should have one building to house the entire police department, how, what and where remain in dispute.

Did you notice the picture on the back page?

According to the article, “At roll call, about 15 officers, some standing, gather in a hallway outside the office of the patrol lieutenant, the detective’s office and a room shared by two sergeants...”

If you looked at that picture, you could count four patrol officers, one patrol sergeant and some administrative staff. So where are the 15 officers? There are only three or four per shift anyway (unless it’s a Tuesday).

Also remember that the shifts overlap. So while roll call is going on, the off-going shift is still on the street.

In the past, roll call was led by the off-going patrol sergeant and the prior shift usually wasn’t present. Also in years past, the only roll call at the Quality Drive location (where the picture was taken) was the 0700 roll call. The 1400 and 2200 roll calls were held at the Outlet Center location.

Again, let me restate that I believe the officers deserve one building. But is it what they want the most?

In this article, the chief said, “There’s not a police officer here who will mind paying the extra money to make sure things get done right.” Really? I bet if you polled the patrol officers about what was most important to them a new building would be down the list. Pay raises, new vehicles and respect would be near the top of the list.

Officers are paid (in part) to patrol the streets and be a presence to deter crime. With the advent of MDTs (mobile data terminals), officers can do the bulk of their reports in their vehicles. I bet if you asked any officer, he (or she) would say that they don't spend a lot of time in the station, mainly because they are told not to. A police car is the office for a patrol officer.

The other thing that was mentioned in the May 10 article and also in the mayor's budget message was the **"national standards"** for staffing. If I recall, it was 2.5 officers for every thousand in the population. So the chief is saying he should have 72 officers. Let me just quote the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the International City/County Management Association.

First, the IACP: **"Ready-made, universally applicable patrol staffing standards do not exist.** Ratios, such as officers-per-thousand population, are totally inappropriate as a basis for staffing decisions. Accordingly, they have no place in the IACP methodology. Defining patrol staffing allocation and deployment requirements is a complex endeavor which requires consideration of an extensive series of factors and a sizable body of reliable, current data."

ICMA says: "The use of officers per thousand for police or fire deployment is an ineffective performance measure. Instead, the determination should be made by what time is required to perform the given tasks on a daily, monthly, and seasonal basis and deploying the appropriate resources to manage the workload. **Many chiefs will state that the officers-per-thousand is a "national standard."**

Police agencies routinely speak about:

- **"Recommended officers per 1,000 population" or**
- **"National standard" for staffing or**
- **Comparisons to other municipalities**

There are no such standards. Nor are there "recommended numbers of officers per thousand." It is not useful to make comparisons with other communities.

So the bottom line is that it appears the chief is misleading the mayor, the council and the community. Maybe it's time for an independent audit of the police department. Public safety is a necessity for any community. But there needs to be transparency and accountability within the police department and I think it is painfully clear that at least one member may be promoting his own agenda.

Tom Bell, of Georgetown, is a former Georgetown Police Department detective.