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REORGANIZING PUBLIC SAFETY FUNCTIONS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR AND AGAINST

**Report No. 05-05
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Executive Summary

The terrorist attacks of September 11, the devastation left by the recent Gulf Coast hurricanes and the flooding in Massachusetts are potent and vivid reminders of the critical role of the public safety function of local government. What is the best way to organize police, fire and other public safety services? This was the question behind the Worcester City Council's request that the Research Bureau review the advantages and disadvantages of reorganizing public safety functions into a department of public safety. After interviewing officials in a number of cities inside and outside of Massachusetts which employ a variety of organizational structures for their departments of public safety, the Research Bureau makes the following observations:

- Communities in which police and fire chiefs are subject to civil service rules limit the city manager's or mayor's selection of a chief to the top three names on the civil service list. This means that the city's CEO is not free to appoint an individual whose views and management style are compatible with his own. In Massachusetts, all but five cities with a population over 40,000 have at least one public safety chief operating under civil service regulations. There is probably no other local, state or Federal department head covered by civil service.
- There are two primary ways of organizing public safety departments, those that are fully consolidated where "safety officers" are cross-trained and perform both law enforcement and firefighting duties, and those in which management is consolidated by placing a public safety administrator over traditionally organized police and fire departments.

The key characteristics under the full consolidation model include the following:

- One officer remains with the fire apparatus, while all other safety officers are assigned to police duties. This allows for a larger, more effectively deployed police force on a day-to-day basis as well as enabling a large force to be assembled for a major fire or catastrophe.
- There are no "turf battles" because there are only "safety officers" and no distinction between police and fire service.
- If police and fire departments in Worcester were fully consolidated, there could be additional personnel available for police duty based on current staffing.

The key characteristics under the management model include the following:

- Back-office functions and fleet management have been consolidated.
- Department personnel, especially upper management, have been moved into shared facilities.

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- Cooperation and communication between departments have improved; duplication of services has been eliminated.

Based on these findings, the Research Bureau makes the following recommendations:

- Even in the absence of any organizational changes, the police chief, the fire chief, and deputy chiefs should be removed from civil service. The CEO of a city must have authority to appoint and remove all department heads if he is to be held accountable for operations.
- Since civil service has statewide ramifications, the Massachusetts Municipal Association should file legislation on behalf of all affected communities. In the absence of such advocacy, the Worcester City Council should file a Home Rule petition to remove Worcester's police and fire chiefs and deputy chiefs from civil service.
- While public safety commissioners who oversee traditionally organized police and fire departments have been able to consolidate fleet management and back-office operations (under the policy-management model), the Research Bureau believes that those efficiencies can be achieved by directives from the City Manager without adding a layer of bureaucracy.
- While state statute (Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 41, Section 97F), long-standing tradition, and collective bargaining agreements currently prevent the implementation of a full-consolidation department anywhere in the Commonwealth, safety and security concerns in a post-9/11, post-Katrina era demand that our public officials consider an arrangement that could provide a more effective, efficient, and better coordinated public safety force. To that end, Worcester's legislative delegation should request a publicly-funded, cost/benefit analysis of a fully consolidated public safety department and legislative authority to establish such departments on an experimental basis.

I. Introduction

The Worcester City Council requested that the Research Bureau review the functions and organization of public safety services in the community to determine whether there is a more effective, efficient way of organizing Worcester's public safety functions.¹ In preparing this report, we studied 20 cities and towns inside and outside of Massachusetts. We conducted phone interviews with mayors, city and town managers, or directors of public safety in each city to gain insight about department organization and perceived strengths and weaknesses of departments of public safety.

There are two primary departments of public safety models: policy/management departments in which a commissioner of public safety (and a public safety staff) oversees day-to-day operations of more-or-less traditionally organized police and fire departments (and other departments as well, such as code enforcement and communications), and full-consolidation departments in which officers are cross-trained and all officers perform the duties of both police officers and firefighters. Some full-consolidation departments call their officers "public safety officers" and make no distinction between a firefighter and a police officer. The policy/management model is used in several large cities, including Indianapolis and St. Louis, but no large towns or cities in Massachusetts employ such a structure. The full-consolidation model is much less common across the country and is currently prohibited by state law in Massachusetts as explained further below. In this report we provide details about a variety of departmental structures found, report on the advantages and disadvantages of each, and consider the application of various organizations in the City of Worcester.

II. Current Organization and Civil Service

Worcester's primary public safety functions are organized into two independent departments: police and fire, each led by a chief. The chiefs are responsible, under the direction of the City Manager, for policy-making, planning, training, budgeting, and other aspects of the day-to-day management of their departments. The police chief and fire chief are each members of the City Manager's "cabinet" of eight department leaders. Other safety-related divisions include communications, which is under the jurisdiction of a commissioner who reports to the City Manager, code enforcement, and public health which are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health and Humans Services, led by a commissioner who is also a member of the City Manager's cabinet, and Emergency Medical Services and ambulance transport which are provided to the City at no cost by UMass Memorial Healthcare.

Before considering the two major alternative organizations to Worcester's current public safety departments, it is important to understand the role of civil service rules in the management of the police and fire departments.

¹ Worcester City Council, Item #78, September 7, 2004.

A. Hiring under Civil Service

The Civil Service system, established in Massachusetts in 1884, was originally intended to develop a merit system for hiring public employees to reduce the number of unqualified political appointments to important positions.² This system still exists, although its operation has evolved over more than a century, and is very different from 1884. Most employees are “provisionally” appointed and do not take a civil service test. Public-safety employees are still tested, but their performance on those tests is only one factor in determining where they are placed on the appointment list. There are a large number of criteria given weight. These include race, veteran status, and relationship to public safety employees who were killed or disabled in the line of duty.³ When a Massachusetts city hires police officers or fire fighters, it must choose from among the top three candidates on a state-prepared, pre-ordered list of candidates and must justify a decision to skip a name on the list. A similar process applies to the hiring of police and fire chiefs. As a result, mayors or city managers are not permitted to use their discretion in hiring police and fire chiefs. This is a significant limitation of hiring authority, as candidates cannot be evaluated based on the degree to which they share the mayor’s or manager’s vision of a public safety department. No other city or state department head is appointed under similar restrictions. Police departments with no civil service requirement for their chiefs often conduct national searches to find police chiefs or commissioners and are able to consider hundreds of applicants. Under Massachusetts’ civil service system, the city may have to hire a police or fire chief who has no interest in working to achieve the advantages of public safety departments described below. A public safety commissioner in a city with civil-service protections for its police and fire chiefs would have to get the police and fire chiefs to “buy in” to a public safety department approach. Hence, civil service hiring rules effectively limit the implementation of new procedures even if a department of public safety were established.

B. Management Obstacles Under Civil Service

Similarly, civil service rules limit the ability of managers to remove employees from their positions. State law states that they may only be suspended or removed for “just cause” (Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 31, Section 41):

Except for Just Cause . . . a tenured employee shall not be discharged, removed, suspended for a period of more than five days, laid off, transferred from his position without his written consent if he has served as a tenured employee since 1968, lowered in rank, or compensation without his written consent, nor his position be abolished.

“Just cause” is a high legal standard to meet if a department seeks to discipline or discharge an employee. While the legal definition of “just cause” is a gray area, it has been defined as the following: “substantial misconduct which adversely affects the public interest by impairing the efficiency of public service.”⁴ The Massachusetts Courts and the Civil Service Commission do not require that officers break the law to be disciplined: “For purposes of review of disciplinary

² Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 31, governs the civil service system.

³ Jonathan Walters, *Toward a High Performance Workplace*, Pioneer Institute White Paper No. 13, September 2000.

⁴ *Murray v. Second District Court of Eastern Middlesex*, 389 Mass. 508, 514, 451 N.E.2d 408 (1983).

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decision by the Civil Service Commission, police officers are held to a higher standard than refraining from indictable conduct.”⁵ The courts have given the appointing authorities wide discretion in misconduct charges in police cases. If the facts are established, they require the Commission to defer to the appointing authority punishment in such cases.

Springfield, Massachusetts removed its police chief and subsequently removed the position from civil service protection after an independent study identified a number of serious problems in the management of the department, including inaccurate crime data reporting to the state and FBI, morale problems, and financial problems. Even with the documentation of the independent study, Springfield still paid the chief \$300,000 to resign rather than attempt a termination for “just cause.” The city is now searching for a police commissioner who will not be protected by civil service, and the city is also reviewing the civil service status of its fire chief.⁶

Table 1 on the accompanying page shows cities with populations over 40,000 in Massachusetts and the civil service status of their police and fire chiefs. Police chiefs are not covered by civil service rules in 40.6% of the cities listed below. Fire chiefs are not covered in 25.8%. Only five cities, Boston, Brookline, Framingham, Newton, and Waltham, have neither their police chief nor fire chief under civil service.

C. Removing Chiefs from Civil Service in Massachusetts

To remove the police chief, fire chief, and deputy chief positions from civil service, the City Council must file a Home Rule petition to request special legislation from the state. Worcester’s City Manager has the authority under the City of Worcester Charter to create a police commissioner position (and eliminate the position of police chief), but special legislation would be required to remove that position from civil service protections. Home Rule Legislation would also be required if the duties of the commissioner were to include oversight of other departments, such as the fire department.⁷

⁵ *McIsaac v. Civil Service Commission*, 648 N.E.2d 1312, Mass.App.Ct., 1995.

⁶ Associated Press, “Springfield Police Chief to Be Replaced with Commissioner,” *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, June 27, 2005, B1. Also, Research Bureau interview with the Springfield Mayor’s office, October 14, 2005.

⁷ Telephone conversation with City Solicitor, City of Worcester Law Department, November 2, 2005.

**Table 1: Police and Fire Chiefs Subject to Civil Service Appointment, 2005
Municipalities with Population >40,000**

	Population	Police Chief	Fire Chief
Arlington	42,400	Y	Y
Attleboro	42,100	Y	Y
Barnstable	47,900	Y	N
Boston	589,100	N	N
Brockton	94,300	N	Y
Brookline	57,100	N	N
Cambridge	101,400	N	Y
Chicopee	54,700	Y	Y
Fall River	91,900	N	Y
Framingham	66,900	N	N
Haverhill	59,000	N	Y
Lawrence	72,000	N	Y
Leominster	41,300	Y	Y
Lowell	105,200	Y	Y
Lynn	89,000	Y	Y
Malden	56,300	Y	N
Medford	55,800	Y	N
Methuen	43,800	Y	N
New Bedford	93,800	Y	Y
Newton	83,800	N	N
Peabody	48,100	N	Y
Pittsfield	45,800	Y	Y
Plymouth	52,000	Y	Y
Quincy	88,000	Y	Y
Revere	47,200	N	Y
Salem	40,400	Y	Y
Somerville	77,500	Y	Y
Springfield	152,000	N	Y
Taunton	55,900	Y	Y
Waltham	59,200	N	N
Weymouth	54,000	Y	Y
Worcester	172,600	Y	Y
Number subject to civil service		19	23
Percent subject to civil service		59.6%	71.9%
Cities in Bold have neither the police chief nor fire chief under civil service.			
Source: Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Human Resources Division, 2005.			

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In September 2004, Worcester's City Manager submitted a request to the City Council to initiate the process of removing the police and fire chiefs' and deputy chiefs' positions from civil service via Home Rule Legislation. It was part of his government reorganization plan submitted to the Council on September 28, 2004.

[S]tructural elements created by the Civil Service system prevent the fundamental changes necessary to meet the public safety challenges of the future. This is acutely apparent in the police department and has shown signs within the fire department as a number of highly talented and dedicated individuals have either declined to seek appointment to the top management positions in these departments or have sought demotions from those ranks. The current system of promotions and performance protected by Civil Service laws is dangerously hindering the ability of the City to deploy effective and efficient police and fire strategies. Change is difficult and simply does not occur in public institutions without the combination of visionary leadership and strong management tools. The Civil Service system in police and fire management denies us both because it typically results in individuals rising to the top management positions at the late stages of their careers who, should they recognize the need to seek change in outdated operational practices, must accomplish any such change working through the individuals who were not selected for promotion as their immediate subordinates.⁸

The Manager's argument points to the importance of hiring discretion for effective management. He needs to have a significant role in picking his subordinates, especially if there were an expectation for significant change in public safety departments.

An independent study of the Springfield Police Department raised similar concerns about that City's chief executive hiring authority: "In the judgment of the study team, a chief of police in any city should be accountable to the chief executive officer of a city government. The chief executive of the city should have the authority to select a chief of police."⁹

The following were among the recommendations from the report for the City of Springfield:

- Remove the position of chief of police from the Civil Service System.
- Develop a contract of three to five years for the position of chief of police; this contract should have specific performance objectives and expectations delineated including roles and responsibilities.
- Conduct an evaluation of the chief of police periodically.

For the reasons cited above, Worcester should address the civil service status of its police and fire chiefs and deputy chief positions before or as a part of any restructuring of public safety

⁸ City Manager, Recommendation for Citywide Reorganization Plan, submitted to City Council September 9, 2004, Item# 29A.

⁹ Carroll Buraecker & Associates, "A Management Study of the Springfield Police Department," Executive Summary, May 4, 2005.

departments. Otherwise it will be much more difficult to realize the benefits of any organizational changes.

III. Full-Consolidation Departments of Public Safety

Full consolidation of a public safety department means that officers are cross-trained and provide both police and fire services. Generally, such departments keep a small number of officers on standby with fire apparatus while the remaining staff are actively engaged in police duties. Fire engines are driven to fire scenes by one or two public safety officers, where they meet police patrol officers who have changed into fire-fighting gear, assessed the situation, and are prepared to join the firefighting effort. All patrol cars are equipped with firefighting gear for each officer in the car. In some cities, public safety officers rotate regularly from police officer to firefighter for one or two years. Other cities have public safety officers who are not separated into fire fighters and police officers. In these cities, one officer is assigned to standby duty with each fire apparatus, while other officers serve on police duty.

A. Advantages of a Full-Consolidation Department of Public Safety

Full consolidation allows for an efficient distribution of people for the primary tasks of public safety. It increases both the number of personnel policing the streets regularly and the number of trained people who could turn out for a large fire or other catastrophe. As structure fires have become less frequent, many cities with traditional fire departments have sought ways to redirect the use of firefighters' time.¹⁰ Some communities have assigned firefighters emergency medical services (EMS) duties in addition to firefighting duties, but fire departments must still maintain a sufficient staff both to combat a large fire and to meet EMS needs in the city.¹¹ The full-consolidation model creates a more effective useable force for both policing and firefighting that does not occur when fire departments add EMS services.

In addition to efficient deployment of personnel, cities with fully consolidated departments benefit from a streamlined chain of command and an absence of "turf battles" between police and fire agencies.¹² The chain of command is established so that all public safety officers know who the decision-makers are in any given circumstance. Worcester police and fire departments have reportedly had some difficulty in this area, a problem that is not uncommon regionally or nationally.¹³

These departments benefit from unified planning and policymaking. Emergency responses are coordinated from a single place and with a single chain of command, eliminating layers of

¹⁰ Between 2002 and 2004, structure fires decreased by 42%, arson fires by 21% and vehicle fires by 20%. See "Benchmarking Public Safety in Worcester: 2005" (CCPM -05-01), p.12.

¹¹ Since 1991, Worcester's EMS has been provided by UMass Memorial Healthcare at no cost to the city. Having a first-rate, hospital-based EMS removes the need for the Worcester Fire Department to provide this service. For further discussion of Worcester's EMS, see Worcester Regional Research Bureau, *EMS in Worcester: Who Should Provide It?*, Report No. 96-7, December 19, 1996, and *Benchmarking Public Safety in Worcester: 2005*, Report No. CCPM 05-01, April 2005.

¹² John Buntin, "Battle of the Badges," *Governing Magazine*, September 2005, pp. 46-52.

¹³ Chris Kanaracus, "Backfire: The Cops Won't Cry if the Firefighters' Union Becomes a Victim of its Own Success," *Worcester Magazine*, September 19, 2005, p.3. Jean Laquidara, "Fire Chief Defends Turf—Police Chief Targeted 'Kingdom' at Webster Meeting," *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, May 18, 2005, p. B1.

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communication. Applications for grants are developed in a uniform way that avoids duplication. Other back-office functions, including payroll and record keeping, are also addressed through a single staff and management structure. Consolidated departments also share headquarters facilities, training facilities and other facilities, reducing building construction and maintenance expenses. Similarly, fleet management is unified in these departments. Traditional departments, including Worcester's, tend to have separate facilities, back-office operations, and fleet management.

B. Disadvantages of Full-Consolidation Model

Full consolidation is not a common structure, particularly in larger cities. It may not be well-suited to large cities, which tend to have more specialized operations in both police and fire departments (hazardous materials teams, or gang units, for example). Of the six cities we surveyed with a full-consolidation model, only two, Sunnyvale, California and Kalamazoo, Michigan have populations over 50,000. (Sunnyvale's population is 131,000, Kalamazoo's is 80,000.)

The full-consolidation model may not require as many public safety personnel, but it will not necessarily reduce the costs. The training requirements are much higher, and the required skills from each officer are greater. The training expense in terms of cost and time required to cross-train an existing, traditionally-organized department would be considerable. Fire academy training typically runs nine weeks or more and police training lasts at least sixteen weeks. In addition, public safety officers are in a position to command higher salaries. For instance, in Sunnyvale, California, public safety officers are paid 11% more than the average police salary in comparable districts—and that salary differential is maintained as a provision in the safety officers' collective bargaining agreement. Fewer officers do mean fewer benefits packages, however, and savings on administrative staff could also materialize. To determine the total cost would require a full cost/benefit comparison study that includes the savings from consolidation as well as the costs of training and potentially increased salaries.

Some cities have encountered difficulty in making a transition to a department of public safety. Brisbane, California, for instance, attempted and eventually rejected the fully consolidated public safety model. Veterans of both law enforcement and fire service interviewed for this report describe differences not only in the job descriptions of police officers and firefighters, but in the kinds of people who are drawn to each profession that make transition from traditional departments to consolidated departments difficult. Similarly, the skills required for the positions are different. As a result, attempts to convert veteran firefighters and police officers into public safety officers could face serious personnel and work-culture obstacles.

Legally, cities and towns in Massachusetts cannot create a fully consolidated department. State statutes prevent firefighters and police officers from performing one another's duties.¹⁴ In addition to state legal obstacles, cities and towns would face high hurdles in making this transition because of local collective bargaining agreements which specify work expectations and duties. Required cross-training—even if it were permitted under state law—would have to be negotiated into union contracts, as it would represent a substantial change in work conditions. For example, when the City of Worcester planned to purchase sport-utility vehicles

¹⁴ Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 41, Section 97F.

(SUVs) for the Fire Department to use on rescue calls, to help responders move more quickly through the city, reduce wear on the fire engines, and reduce costs by staffing the vehicles with two rather than three firefighters (3 officers ride an engine to rescue calls), the Fire Department challenged the change of work conditions, and as a result no SUVs have been added to the Department's fleet.¹⁵ More dramatic changes—such as required cross-training—would be certain to generate stiff union opposition.

IV. Policy-Management Consolidation

Cities like White Plains, New York have established departments of public safety directed by a commissioner who oversees police and fire operations which remain organized as separate and distinct departments. The commissioner (supported by an administrative staff), is responsible for policy formation and oversight of public safety departments. The chiefs are responsible for day-to-day operations of their respective departments. The police chief and the fire chief report directly to the commissioner, while the commissioner reports to the city manager or mayor. A department of public safety can provide improved coordination and cooperation between departments with public safety functions.

A. Varieties

Most public safety departments include the police department and fire department as well as other safety-related departments, such as code enforcement, emergency management, communications and dispatch, neighborhood stabilization, environmental enforcement, health and human services department, animal control, and weights and measures. Not all departments include all of the above, and some departments of public safety do not even include both police and fire. The nature and degree of coordination and cooperation vary from city to city. White Plains, New York (population 56,000) has a department of public safety which combines policy-making and management for both police and fire departments. The commissioner is responsible for all aspects of public-safety activities, including budgeting, purchasing, policymaking, training, and coordinating departments. The St. Louis Public Safety Department includes the fire department, six divisions (emergency management, corrections, buildings, neighborhood stabilization, excise, and emergency medical services), a correctional institution, and the city jail but does not include the police department. Toledo, Ohio has a safety director who reports to the mayor and serves as a liaison between the mayor and the police and fire departments, but the position does not include true policy-making or management authority over the public safety departments. The Toledo charter requires there to be a safety director, but the position has often been assigned to an assistant city manager along with many other duties.¹⁶

¹⁵ In 1999, an independent fire department operations study by TriData stated that “most medical calls could be handled by two personnel, but three to four are being sent by the Fire Department because the engine company is the smallest unit it currently has.” TriData Corporation, “Fire Department Operations Study Worcester, Massachusetts,” December 1999, p. 21.

¹⁶ Tom Hoover, former Worcester City Manager, was such an assistant city manager during his career in Toledo before coming to Worcester. He was assigned the title of safety director while his primary role remained that of assistant city manager.

Stamford, Connecticut, implemented a public safety department in 1996 as part of charter reform. As a result of the reform, the number of departments reporting directly to the mayor has been reduced from 23 to 6. Previously, the mayor's span of control was found to be too broad for him to oversee the day-to-day operations of the public safety departments. Under the new structure, the director of public safety, health and welfare, who reports directly to the mayor, oversees the departments of police, fire, and health and social services, as well as other services.

B. Advantages of Policy/Management Department of Public Safety

1. Eliminate duplication

Policy/management consolidation provides some of the same opportunities to eliminate duplication that are found in the full-consolidation model. Indianapolis reports advantages from applying for grants from one location such that duplication between police and fire grant-funded services is avoided. In Stamford, the city consolidated back-office functions for all city departments (including public safety departments).

Eliminating or reducing duplication may be accomplished by dividing up duties that were once performed by both departments. For instance, White Plains has established clear protocols for which department responds to each kind of call. The protocols identify the dispatch priorities and command structure for fires, crime scenes, motor vehicle accidents, bomb threats, structure collapse, hazardous materials, water/ice rescues, fire investigations, elevator incidents, and others. For example, police officers are dispatched to motor vehicle accidents, and they call in the fire department in the event of fire, hazardous materials, or extrication. If an accident involves injuries, then a single fire apparatus with an extrication tool is also dispatched. According to Worcester's Director of Communications, there are no written protocols for which departments are dispatched to what calls. The Communications Department dispatches police and fire according to each department's expectations. There is no central point for dispatch protocol decision-making to avoid duplication or eliminate the unnecessary use of resources. The Department is about to initiate a process to develop written dispatch policies and procedures.¹⁷ A public safety director could have responsibility for dispatch policies and procedures and could settle disputes between departments about who should respond to what kinds of calls.

White Plains repairs all municipal vehicles in a central city garage, reducing the need for duplicated repair facilities. The Research Bureau recommended that Worcester consolidate and/or privatize its fleet management (including the Department of Public Works fleet) in earlier reports.¹⁸ A report from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government recommended that Worcester adopt a consolidated maintenance system for all city vehicles.¹⁹ Worcester's police and fire departments currently support separate garages for the repair of vehicles. While public safety departments may be better able to coordinate resources for fleet

¹⁷ Telephone conversation with Worcester's Director of Communications, November 10, 2005.

¹⁸ Worcester Regional Research Bureau, *Worcester's FY06 Budget: Are Increasing Taxes and Reducing Services the Only Options?*, Report No. 05-02. *Windshield Time or Wrench Time: Some Proposals for Improving Worcester's Fleet Management*, Report No. 00-02, April 6, 2000.

¹⁹ Vlada Bogdanova and Taiyu Chen, "Efficiency Improvements to the Fleet Management Systems in the City of Worcester," April 5, 2005.

management this function could be consolidated by directive of the City Manager without establishing a public safety department.

In Worcester, the police and fire departments together currently have 53 non-uniformed clerical, financial, mechanical repair or facilities staff some of whom could be merged into one public safety support system, particularly if the City had one headquarters for both the police and fire departments.²⁰ Both departments also have some uniformed officers performing what may be more appropriate for civilian staff, for example, management of the police garage.

2. Cooperation/elimination of “turf battles”

Establishing a department of public safety has the potential to eliminate or mediate “turf battles” between the police and fire departments. Many public safety directors cited the central role that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 played in convincing public officials that coordination between police, fire, and other safety departments was essential. As Stamford’s director of public safety reported, “post 9/11, you can’t have turf battles.” In response, many communities have begun to address interdepartmental cooperation and coordination issues. Phoenix, Arizona, established a “Homeland Defense Bureau” comprising over 100 police officers and firefighters who work together on security and emergency/disaster response. Other cities have begun by making small steps at interdepartmental cooperation. The following excerpt from *Governing* Magazine describes the coordination that has grown at the White Plains Department of Public Safety:

All of [Commissioner of Public Safety Frank] Straub’s actions have been aimed at one thing: persuading fire and police officers to work together on a routine basis. One such area concerns safe housing. Every spring, hundreds—if not thousands--of immigrants move into affluent Westchester County for seasonal jobs. Many of them crowd into run-down boarding houses, which often fail to meet code. At Straub’s initiative, White Plains police answering calls in these areas learned how to identify problems and report them to the fire department. Likewise, fire fighters have received training in how to look for telltale signs of gang activity, such as graffiti tags, and report them to the police. The two bureaus’ elite rescue and emergency services units also have trained together on an increasingly regular basis.²¹

The City of Worcester currently trains code enforcement officers and police officers together so that Worcester police officers are aware of the problems that may need the attention of code enforcement.

3. Facilities sharing

Some public safety departments share facilities, but most preserve separate structures. In Stamford, Indianapolis, and White Plains some facilities are shared. White Plains houses both police and fire chiefs on the same floor with the public safety commissioner in a public-safety facility that also serves as the headquarters for the police department. Ann Arbor, Michigan also has a unified headquarters building, but separate operational facilities. Discussion of a

²⁰ City of Worcester FY06 Budget, Police Department and Fire Department organizational charts.

²¹ Ibid.

combined headquarters for police and fire is particularly timely since some members of the City Council have raised the issue of building a new building for police functions.²² The cost of such a facility needs to be factored into discussions of establishing a department of public safety.

4. Accountability

A public safety commissioner is in a position to follow the performance of each department on a day-to-day basis. The City of White Plains uses a Compstat system to follow public-safety issues and weekly Compstat meetings are attended by police and fire officials.²³ (Compstat is a system for tracking performance indicators on a regular basis.) In White Plains, Compstat reporting includes information about crimes, traffic enforcement, fire calls, code inspections, parking enforcement, overtime, and other personnel data for both departments. The police chief and fire chief report directly to the commissioner daily and review Compstat data weekly.

C. Disadvantages

1. Additional layer of bureaucracy

Establishing a public safety department with a commissioner of public safety (and a staff) to oversee public safety operations adds a layer of bureaucracy. White Plains is a good example of a public safety department that failed to achieve the benefits of cooperation until recently. Although White Plains has had a public safety department for decades, prior to the arrival of the current commissioner, the police and fire departments were as isolated from one another as any traditionally organized departments, and the fire department was perceived as isolated from the central public safety administration.²⁴ The City of Providence, on the other hand, had a commissioner of public safety, but the current mayor did not fill that position when he came into office because he wanted to have direct contact with the police chief, the fire chief, and the head of emergency management.²⁵ The position was perceived as an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy between the mayor and the police and fire chiefs. These examples seem to indicate that the key to success is not the organizational chart but the quality of the leadership.

2. Additional expense

A public safety administration may require additional staff expense, at least a commissioner and some assistants. The City of Stamford, for instance, added two public safety positions when it created a department of public safety in 1996. White Plains has a commissioner of public safety and deputy commissioners for the police department and the fire department (in addition to the traditional structure with chiefs of police and fire). However, Stamford reported that the savings from consolidation of clerical staff created more savings than the cost of the additional positions.

3. Collective bargaining

Establishing a department of public safety is unlikely to change the collective bargaining landscape. No city reported a significant change in bargaining relationships due to the

²² Sean Sutner, "911 for HQ," *Telegram & Gazette*, October 16, 2004, p. B1.

²³ For a complete explanation of Compstat, see *Compstat and Citistat: Should Worcester Adopt These Management Techniques?* Report No. 03-01, February 18, 2003.

²⁴ John Buntin, "Battle of the Badges," *Governing Magazine*, September 2005. pp. 48-52.

²⁵ Statement from Mayor Cicilline's office, October 18, 2005.

establishment of a department of public safety. Changes to work rules and traditional practices would still be subject to collective bargaining and union grievance as they are under the current structure.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

- Fully consolidated departments of public safety may offer a more effective and efficient deployment of personnel by making fire department personnel available for police work on a day-to-day basis, while at the same time having the entire police department trained to participate in fire and rescue services in the event of a major catastrophe. Fully consolidated departments provide other advantages as well, such as the elimination of traditional “turf battles” between police and fire departments. The disadvantages of this structure are best characterized as obstacles to transition. State law, longstanding tradition, and the unionized public safety professions all stand in the way of making such a radical transition in Worcester (or perhaps anywhere in the Northeast, due to its long tradition of unionized police and fire departments).
- In spite of the obstacles to establishing fully consolidated departments of public safety in Massachusetts, the Research Bureau recommends that the Commonwealth contract for a cost/benefit analysis of such an organizational structure to determine if it better meets current safety and security needs of our communities. The Commonwealth should also provide incentives to establish one or two consolidated public safety departments on an experimental basis to assess their effectiveness in practice.
- There is a greater possibility for Worcester to take more immediate advantage of the possible benefits of a policy/management department of public safety. However, many of the advantages of such a department may be achievable without actually creating the new department. Those advantages will be more difficult to obtain, however, if the police and fire chiefs and deputy chiefs positions remain under civil service rules, as those rules limit both the hiring and management authority of the City Manager. As a result, the Research Bureau recommends that the City Council pursue the City Manager’s proposal to remove both the police and fire chief and deputy chiefs positions from civil service protection as described above. (The change will not apply to current officeholders.) This will allow the City Manager to set the public safety agenda and pick the department heads who are supportive of that agenda. No other city department head has civil service protection. Indeed, generally, department heads at the local, state, and Federal level are subject to executive appointment and removal precisely because they are executives in a position to formulate policy. The same should hold true for heads of the police and fire departments.
- After such a change, some of the advantages of public safety departments can be achieved without actually creating such a department. For instance, Worcester should consolidate or privatize fleet management of both departments and the Department of Public Works, and combine back-office functions including record-keeping, payroll, and purchasing. Constructing a combined headquarters for police and fire should also

Reorganizing Public Safety Functions: Considerations For and Against

be considered. These changes could be initiated with or without a new department of public safety.

The City of Worcester is right to consider the benefits of cooperation, consolidation, and—in some cases—cross-training, but the structure alone is unlikely to make significant changes to the operation of public safety departments in Worcester. The political, administrative, and union leadership have to want to make these arrangements work, which hold the promise of being more effective and efficient in meeting 21st century public safety needs.



To Our Friends and Supporters:

*Many thanks for 20 successful years.
Best Wishes for a happy and healthy 2006.*

The Staff and Directors of the Research Bureau



Mission Statement: The Worcester Regional Research Bureau is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to conducting independent, non-partisan research on financial, administrative, management and community issues facing Worcester's municipal government and the surrounding region.



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