

## **POLICE COMMITTEE MINUTES**

June 12, 2003

The Police Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on June 12, 2003 at 8:55 a.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT	COUNCIL PRESENT	STAFF PRESENT
Rex Griswold, Chairman Janie Thom Claudia Walters	None	Mike Hutchinson

1. Discuss and consider issues associated with false alarm activations.

a. Licensing of alarm companies

Police Chief Dennis Donna and Police Commander Rick Clore addressed the members of the Committee relative to this agenda item.

Commander Clore reported that on April 7, 2003, the City Council approved proceeding forward with the implementation of an annual alarm permit fee and increasing the current false alarm assessment fees on an escalating scale. He stated that staff was directed to commence the public hearing process required for City Code amendments. Commander Clore explained that in conjunction with the Police Department's ongoing efforts to reduce Mesa's estimated 98% false alarm rate and continue to provide effective public safety services to the community, staff is proposing to further amend the City's alarm ordinance, through the adoption of a reciprocal licensing ordinance currently shared by Phoenix, Chandler, Scottsdale and Paradise Valley, which would require the licensing of all alarm companies doing business in Mesa.

Commander Clore informed the Committee that last year, the Police Department responded to approximately 21,000 false alarm activations, at an estimated cost of \$900,000. He explained that the proposal would ensure that legitimate and reputable alarm companies operate within the City, and added that the alarm businesses/employees would be subject to background checks. Commander Clore stated that the fees required under the standardized reciprocal licensing ordinance would include: 1. Alarm Business License (\$200 Initial Fee, \$20 Renewal License Fee); 2. Reciprocal Alarm License (\$75 Initial License Fee, \$10 Renewal License Fee), and 3. Alarm Agent License (\$70 Initial License Fee and \$20 Renewal License Fee).

In response to a question from Chairman Griswold, Commander Clore clarified that the licensing agreement being proposed would require that alarm companies instruct their customers in the

proper operation of the system in order to alleviate and/or reduce excessive false alarm activations. He also stated that if an alarm business agreed to provide maintenance/repair service to an alarm system, that the company would service the system within 72 hours of a request for service.

In response to a question from Committeemember Thom, Commander Clore explained that at the present time, the State does not require alarm companies to be licensed, despite the efforts of the Arizona Burglary and Fire Alarm Association to promote the issue at the Legislature. Commander Clore added that the reciprocal licensing agreement is somewhat of a grassroots effort to establish licensing standards across the Valley.

Committeemember Thom expressed a series of concerns regarding this agenda item. She stated that the proposal would result in the duplication of fees that alarm companies are required to pay to conduct business in various cities, be counterproductive and not "business friendly." Committeemember Thom suggested that it may be more appropriate for the City to pursue/support a Statewide alarm company licensing effort.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that the Arizona Burglary and Fire Alarm Association, consisting of Arizona police agencies and the alarm industry, support the adoption of the reciprocal licensing ordinance; that the alarm ordinance amendment would significantly reduce the duplication of fees that are currently assessed to alarm companies, and that the Police Department offers free alarm education classes and informational packets to Mesa residents in an effort to reduce the number of false alarm activations.

Committeemember Walters thanked Committeemember Thom for her input regarding the multitude of regulations with which an alarm company owner must comply in each city in which he conducts business. She noted, however, that in her opinion, the proposal does address the issue of reciprocity.

Further discussion ensued relative to the definition of a false alarm; the ability of citizens to appeal false alarm assessments, and the fact that no additional staffing is anticipated (with the exception of one full time employee to handle the increased workload related to the annual renewal program) relative to this agenda item.

Chairman Griswold expressed concerns regarding a change in the Police dispatch priority for burglar alarm activations from the current priority one to priority two.

Chief Donna commented that staff is prepared to address those concerns under agenda item 1b.

It was moved by Chairman Griswold, seconded by Committeemember Walters, to recommend to the Council that Mesa's Alarm Ordinance be amended through the adoption of the reciprocal licensing ordinance currently shared by Phoenix, Chandler, Scottsdale and Paradise Valley, as outlined and recommended by staff.

Committeemember Thom expressed opposition to the motion and stated that she would prefer that this matter be addressed on a Statewide level rather than a City level.

Chairman Griswold said that although he is supportive of the motion in an effort to address the issue in Mesa on a temporary basis, he would also be supportive of the Statewide licensing of alarm companies.

Upon tabulation of votes, it showed:

AYES - Griswold-Walters  
NAYS - Thom

Chairman Griswold declared the motion carried by majority vote.

b. Discuss Police response to alarms

Commander Clore addressed the Committee relative to this agenda item and provided a brief overview of the proposed changes to the Police Department's dispatch priorities for burglar alarms. He reported that currently, the Department utilizes five dispatch priorities ranging from "E" (emergency), with a dispatch time of 30 seconds, through priority four, with a dispatch time of up to three hours. Commander Clore explained that priority one calls include crimes in progress that could result in threat/injury to an individual, a major loss of property, or immediate apprehension of a suspect. He noted that these calls are dispatched within two minutes of receipt. Commander Clore also stated that priority two calls, which are dispatched within 30 minutes, include minor in-progress calls or just occurred calls where there is no threat of personal injury or major loss of property. He added that in 2002, the average dispatch time for all priority two calls was 16.9 minutes.

Commander Clore further advised that in order to reduce Mesa's 98% false alarm activation rate, it is staff's recommendation that the dispatch priority for certain burglar alarms be modified from the current priority one to priority two. He assured the Committeemembers that Panic alarm calls and/or holdup/robbery calls will be considered priority one calls. Commander Clore added that a major component in the success of the proposal would consist of increased neighborhood participation, including an enhanced awareness and willingness to report suspicious activity occurring in the area.

Committeemember Walters voiced a series of concerns regarding this issue and noted that in recent years, individuals have become immune to responding to alarm systems due to a proliferation of the technology used in vehicles, homes and businesses. She stated that as an alternative to the proposal, she would prefer that staff first pursue increasing the current false alarm assessments on an escalating scale and changing the dispatch priority for certain burglar alarms from priority one to priority two status on a phased-in basis. Committeemember Walters also noted that the Police Department will not necessarily save monies through the elimination of false alarm activations, but would be able to allocate the police officers' time in a more efficient manner.

Chief Donna concurred with Committeemember Walters' comments and stated that staff would be agreeable to a phased-in process to assess its impact on the community.

Committeemember Thom expressed support for staff's recommendation and commented that changing the dispatch priority for certain burglar alarms would be a more cost efficient method of operation and would still maintain the level of service that Mesa residents have grown to

expect from the Police Department. She also questioned whether these modifications would decrease the City's need to hire additional police officers.

In response to Committeemember Thom's comments, Chief Donna stated that with Mesa's rapidly increasing population, he does not foresee a time in the future when the Department will be in a position to cut back on hiring additional police officers.

It was moved by Chairman Griswold, seconded by Committeemember Walters, that staff's recommendation (Changing the dispatch priority for certain burglar alarms from the current priority one to the next lowest priority two) be a phased-in process; that the Police Department first attempt to reduce the number of false alarm activations by 50%, with the dispatch priority remaining at priority one; that the Department increase the current false alarm assessments on an escalating scale; that Mesa residents be educated, via the media, regarding the program, and that after a specified length of time, if the program is not successful in reducing the number of false alarm activations, that staff change the dispatch priority from a priority one to a priority two level.

Further discussion ensued relative to the fact that the purchase of a commercial software application is essential for the success of the annual alarm renewal program and that it will also provide officers with updated permit/records information prior to responding to a false alarm activation.

Carried unanimously.

2. Hear an update on the Burglary Reduction Program.

Police Commander Fred Ruhland addressed the members of the Committee relative to this agenda item and provided a brief update of the Burglary Reduction Program. He reported that the goal of the program, which was initiated on June 1, 2002, is to reduce the number of burglaries throughout the community through the identification and arrest of various individuals responsible for a large number of Mesa's burglaries.

Commander Ruhland outlined the eight components of the program including: 1.) Patrol officers responding to all residential burglaries and no longer taking burglary reports through telephone calls; 2.) Enhancing communications between investigative units, patrol and the County Attorney; 3.) Educating victims in crime prevention techniques; 4.) Providing refresher training to all patrol officers for crime scene investigation and searches, print examinations and victim/witness interviewing; 5.) Ensuring that all crime scenes are processed for trace evidence; 6.) Conducting semi-monthly burglary reduction meetings with representatives of the entire Department; 7.) Developing a "Top 10" List of burglary suspects who can be targeted and eventually posting those names on the City's web site, and 8.) Coordinating this program with the Repeat Offender Program to ensure that career criminals are sentenced appropriately.

Commander Ruhland commented on the success of the program this year, including a 20% reduction in residential and commercial burglaries in the City, and the ongoing success of the "Top 10" List.

Chairman Griswold commended the Police Department for their efforts to respond to all residential burglaries. He added that he would like this program featured in the local media to

illustrate the Police Department's efforts and hard work to ensure the safety of the residents in the community.

Committeemember Walters concurred with Chairman Griswold's comments and stated that she would include the Burglary Reduction Program on her "Top 10" List of City programs that have consistently received positive feedback from Mesa residents.

3. Hear an update on the BAIT car program.

Commander Ruhland reported that the BAIT car program, which began in February of this year, was initiated through a \$25,000 grant that the City of Mesa received from the Arizona Automobile Theft Authority. He explained that in April of this year, the Police Department received an additional \$10,000 grant which will be used to fund the purchase of another BAIT car and additional Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) etching equipment. Commander Ruhland stated that VIN etching has been a popular service offered to Mesa residents by the Police Department's Community Relations Division.

Commander Ruhland played a videotape in the Council Chambers of two recent occurrences in which individuals stole BAIT cars and were apprehended by the Mesa Police Department.

Commander Ruhland commented on the success of the program this year including six apprehensions and the arrest of nine suspects, an 8% reduction in the number of auto thefts and a 13% reduction in the number of vehicle burglaries. Commander Ruhland added that Mesa was the first municipality in the Valley to initiate a BAIT car program.

In response to a question from Committeemember Walters, Commander Ruhland clarified that staff anticipates applying for additional grants and/or coming before the Council to request funding for additional BAIT cars.

The Committeemembers thanked Commander Ruhland for his informative presentation.

4. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Police Committee meeting adjourned at 9:56 a.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Police Committee meeting of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of June 2003. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

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BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK