

The Impacts of Police Consolidation on the Masten District

A Briefing Paper Prepared for
Masten District Councilmember Byron Brown

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The Problem

- The proposed police consolidation plan calls for the elimination of Precinct 12 located in the Masten Council District. The Masten District is currently served by Precincts 6, 12, and 16. The proposed plan would combine Precincts 6 and 16 into District E, with the station located in the University Council District; and Precinct 12 with Precincts 8 and 11 into District C, with the station located in the Fillmore Council District.
- The proposed plan creates five districts from 14 precincts, with one police station located in each district. These stations primarily serve as staging areas for officers in each district to receive assignments before going out into the field. Stations under the current proposal are:

District A (South): Precincts 4 (partial), 7, 9, and 15

District B (Central): Precincts 3, 4 (partial), and 10

District C (East): Precincts 8, 11, and 12

District D (North): Precincts 5, 13, and 17

District E (Northeast): Precincts 6 and 16

- In addition, six Community Oriented Police Satellites (COPS) have been sited throughout the city, and a seventh is planned. One of the COPS stations is in the Masten District, at 1490 Jefferson Avenue. These satellites are storefront locations that allow police officers to establish a presence in the neighborhood. There are no minimum requirements for staffing at the COPS sites, however, and their use has been uneven.

The remaining sections of this briefing paper consist of findings, arguments supporting the need for a station in the Masten District, and recommendations for making it happen.

Findings

- Precinct stations are being moved out of violent crime areas and replaced with district stations in low crime areas or in areas where there is less violent crime. In addition, the location of district stations is largely within white communities or areas that attract suburban whites. District A serves an area that is 93 percent white and four percent black, and District D serves an area that is 87 percent white and seven percent black; while District B serves the central business district, including the downtown office and entertainment districts.
- The prevalence of violent crime has been ignored in determining the location of new district stations. The precincts located in the Masten and Fillmore Council Districts are the most violent in the city, but station houses have been removed from these areas and placed in council districts with less crime or less violence.

- The Masten District and surrounding areas have more violent crime than other parts of the city. Fifteen percent of all reported violent crimes occurred in Precinct 12 in 1994, giving it the second highest violent crime rate in the city. This precinct also had the highest number of homicides in the city. Precinct 16 accounted for 12 percent of all violent crimes, giving it the third highest violent crime rate in the city. Precinct 6 had the fifth highest violent crime rate in 1994, accounting for 9 percent of all violent crimes. Precinct 11, the area with the highest violent crime rate in 1994, accounted for 19 percent of all reported violent crimes. Taken together, over half (54 percent) of all violent crimes in the city were committed in the Masten District and surrounding areas.
- Precincts 6 and 12 in the Masten District are being combined with other precincts that have the highest rates and greatest numbers of violent crimes in the city. Precinct 11, in the Fillmore and Lovejoy Districts bordering Masten, is to be consolidated with Precinct 12, and Precinct 16, split between the Masten and University Districts, is to be consolidated with Precinct 6. Precinct 11 had the highest overall crime rate in the city in 1994 while Precinct 16 had the third highest rate. These precincts also carried the dubious distinction of having the first and third highest reported incidents of violent crimes.
- The location of district stations is driven by opportunity rather than need. For example, the station in District A was sited largely based upon the availability of a vacant supermarket that could accommodate its spatial needs. Similarly, the station in District E was the result of a fortuitous linkage with the planned development of a community center in the Kensington-Bailey neighborhood, while the site being considered for District C is the unused and unneeded portion of a parking lot on Broadway. The stations have not been located based upon an analysis of the needs of the communities in question, or the most effective manner in which to deliver police services.

The need for a station in the Masten District

- The symbolic issue of a police presence in the community is of utmost importance. If district stations serve primarily as sites for officers to receive assignments before going out onto the streets, it should not matter where the station is physically located. If the stations are decoupled from the actual delivery of services, it makes far more sense to locate them in areas of violent crime to enhance the symbolic value that the police department provides to city residents.
- Violent crime creates much more fear and apprehension in communities than crimes against property. Violent crime discourages people from coming into an area to shop, patronize businesses and restaurants, and utilize institutions, services, parks or recreational facilities. Violent crime also undermines confidence, which could result in existing homeowners leaving the neighborhood, potential homeowners not considering it, divestment from businesses and institutions, and a halt in future development. The psychological effects of violent crime damages the neighborhood's residential, institutional, economic and business environments and accelerates neighborhood decline.

- Violent crime rates are the highest in Masten and the surrounding area, and there is simply no logic to removing stations from violent areas and placing them in low crime or low violent crime districts.
- The Masten District is rapidly becoming a major development zone, and needs a strong police presence. Critical investments in residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial development all depend upon safe streets and neighborhoods. The middle-income Hamlin Park neighborhood, three of the most important commercial districts in the African-American community (Jefferson Avenue, Fillmore Avenue and East Delavan Avenue), and major businesses and institutions such as American Axle, the Erie County Medical Center, Sisters Hospital, Canisius College, and Mt. Olive Baptist Church are all located in the Masten District. Much of the district is also part of the recently enacted Federal Enterprise Community, and a portion is in the State Economic Development Zone. In addition, new housing is targeted for the Cold Springs neighborhood, a senior citizens project is planned for Jefferson Avenue, the Apollo Theater is scheduled to be restored, and a site at the intersection of Fillmore Avenue and East Ferry Street has been identified as the location of a new community-owned supermarket. The development now occurring in the Masten District could lead to an increase in crimes against property, such as burglary and larceny. Bringing more wealth into a community is likely to increase these types of crimes. Unless this area is made safe from crime it will threaten future development.
- Although there is a COPS station located in the Masten District, the site suffers from sporadic staffing and lacks a regular police presence. The use of satellites cannot compensate for the absence of a district station in the community. In order to attract and retain middle income homeowners and the businesses and institutions that serve them, the area must be seen as safe and secure.

Recommendations: Making it happen

- Proposed district stations should be located in areas where the violent crime rate is highest. Stations should be located in those areas where their symbolic value to the community is the greatest.
- Two options exist for providing appropriate levels of coverage to the Masten District:

Option 1: Build a sixth station house and locate it in the Masten District. This would be preferable to moving stations from other districts.

Option 2: Relocate the station proposed for District B to the Masten District. Although solid arguments can be made for providing a police presence in the downtown area, crime rates and population densities do not support the location of a district station. Downtown could be adequately served by staffing a COPS station along Main Street. The combination of a COPS station with the downtown police headquarters can provide the symbolic presence needed in the central business district.