

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 5, 2006

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #75: CLARIFICATION AND FURTHER EXPLANATION OF DETAILS IN POLICE SECTION OF BUDGET DOCUMENT

This is in response to a request from Councilman Krupicka regarding pages 9-26 and 9-32 of the budget document (Police Department).

Councilman Krupicka noted that the number of non-emergency calls are down compared to 2003 numbers, that calls dispatched to patrol are down, and that Community Policing hours are down. At the same time, the number of employees is up, the average dispatch time for non-emergency calls is up, and average dispatch time for non-emergency calls is up over the same period. He asked for an explanation of the discrepancy.

Highlights of the Response

- Calls for service (CFS) are a limited and incomplete measure of Police workload. Calls for Service are not directly tied to crime rates or staffing.
- As the City's population has continued to increase moderately, dense residential and commercial developments require more street or "beat" officers to provide routine patrols, manage traffic issues and accidents, and maintain vigilance around the City.
- As the Police Department has added officers, the overall CFS per officer has declined.
- In 2005, Chief Samarra held some vacancies open in the community policing and other units, assigning replacement officers to the patrol divisions instead to assist in covering beats.
- Traffic congestion is a primary reason for slower responses to non-emergency calls because officers respond in normal driving mode and are expected to obey traffic laws.

Table 1 shows the number of Calls for Service, the total number of officers, the Calls for Service per officer, and Calls for Service per street officer.

Table 1. Calls for Service (CFS) by Fiscal Year

	2002	2003	2004	2005
Calls for service *	77,080	71,500	75,848	62,120
Total officers	165	161	173	175
Calls for service per officer	467	444	438	355
Calls for service per street officer	688	638	677	555

* Total officers include commanders, supervisors, and recruits who do not typically answer calls; officers in training, on light duty, on leave, and serving in the military. The total available street officers averages 112.

Calls for Service

Calls for Service (CFS) are a limited and incomplete measure of Police workload. CFS are not directly tied to crime rates or staffing. In 2002, the Police Department received an increase in CFS due largely to post 9/11/01 concerns with suspicious activities, packages, and substances. CFS dipped in 2003, rose again in 2004, and dropped again in 2005. In 2005, officers on light duty due to injury were assigned to Communications on daylight shift for much of the year. As a result, they were able to directly resolve several hundred calls that did not go through the Communications call/dispatch software system and were not captured as CFS.

In addition, with the Police Department’s high level of commitment to community policing, officers in the communities are approached directly by citizens for assistance without calling the Communications Center. These activities constitute a police response but they are never counted as a call for service. Time spent on traffic stops and subject stops also are not captured under calls for service, yet officers spend considerable time on these incidents. CFS also do not provide any indication of the level of effort in responding to a particular call. For example, the Wyatt Avenue barricade incident last spring was only two CFS, but hundreds of officers’ hours were spent on that incident. A bank robbery may consist of one or two CFS, but several detectives respond to each one for a couple of hours.

CFS and Staffing

As the City’s population has continued to increase moderately, dense residential and commercial developments require more street or “beat” officers to provide routine patrols, manage traffic issues and accidents, and maintain vigilance around the City. The 14 police officers added in FY 2006 will bring us closer to the minimum staffing needed for the Patrol divisions.

CFS per officer show a downward trend, from 467 in 2002, to 355 in 2005. The number of officers used for this measure, up to 175, represents all sworn personnel assigned to the patrol divisions and the community support section. The number of officers actually assigned to patrol beats and handling CFS is much lower, about 112. The difference in the total officers assigned to patrol/CSS and those on the street is explained as follows: commanders and supervisors (31); those on light duty (8 to 12), new recruits (10 to 16) and those on leave, in training, or serving in the military at any given time. Using 112 available officers, the “true” CFS per on-duty officer ranges from 688 in 2002 to 555 in 2005. As we have added officers, the overall CFS per officer has declined.

Community policing, or assigning officers directly in neighborhoods to identify and resolve quality of life issues, often leads to a decrease in CFS. This decrease is due to more of the patrol officer’s activity being either self-directed, or generated outside of the Communications Center. We increasingly assign officers to respond to issues that are raised in community meetings, from City Council requests, from citizen or officials’ e-mails, through our civic liaison contacts, from within the schools, or from other sources.

A recent example illustrates the substantial investment of police staff resources leading up to the Arlandria Community meeting that was held last winter. Police staff expended more than 100 hours preparing for the meeting (gathering crime information, preparing a Powerpoint presentation, discussing concerns with residents, and publicizing the meeting.) Another 50 hours of staff time were spent by the officers attending the meeting. As you know we have reassigned a police Captain to coordinate quality of life issues in Arlandria. Although 150 hours of staff time were expended on this important event, it did not constitute a call for service. Calls for service alone do not correlate with staffing levels, staffing hours for a particular problem, or crime activity.

Community Policing

Councilman Krupicka requests an explanation for the reduction in COP or community policing hours. A relatively slight reduction in measured COP hours occurred from 2003 to 2004 (page 9-28). In 2005, Chief Samarra held some vacancies open in the community policing and other units, assigning replacement officers to the patrol divisions instead to assist in covering beats. To assist Patrol, one community-policing officer worked an evening shift beat 4 nights per week in 2005. This measure reduced community policing hours.

Community policing includes the Residential and Community Police Officers, School Resource Officers, Bicycle Patrol time, and specific checks performed by Patrol officers each tour of duty. These programs experience turnover and vacancies periodically, which affect total hours of community policing.

On average the Police Department has maintained about 20,000 community-policing hours per year for several years. Based on this level of commitment, we expect to see crimes in the COPS areas decrease, as they have generally for some years. If we are not having a positive impact on crime, we examine the allocation of community policing officers or their program activities.

Response Time

Response time for non-emergency calls has increased over time. Traffic congestion is a primary reason for slower responses to non-emergency calls, because officers now are responding in normal driving mode and are expected to obey traffic laws. Our CFS are not distributed evenly across a 24-hour period. Many of the busiest times are during morning rush hour periods, so police officers are slowed by the same traffic as other drivers. Emergency responses, in contrast, allow police officers to activate lights and sirens to arrive as soon as possible.

Crimes by Jurisdiction

Page 9-32 of the Alexandria budget shows a comparison of the number police per 1,000 population across several jurisdictions. Councilman Krupicka asked for a comparison of the number of crimes by jurisdiction as well. Chart 2 below expands the chart on 9-32 of the FY 2007 Proposed budget to include the number of crimes in 2003 and 2004. Data is not available for some jurisdictions for 2003. Based on data collected by the Police Department as reported by departmental staff, every local jurisdiction included in the comparison increased sworn police staffing between 2002 and 2006 except Montgomery County and Roanoke.

Crimes by jurisdiction, 2003-2004

Jurisdiction	Population	Sworn Strength	Police per 1,000 population	Part 1 Crimes 2003	Part 1 Crimes 2004	% Change 2003-2004
Alexandria	137,600	317	2.3	5292	4431	(16.3)
Arlington	198,267	363	1.8	5424	5104	(5.9)
Fairfax County	1,041,200	1,372	1.3	20803	19160	(7.9)
Hampton	147,000	284	1.9	5714	5444	(4.7)
Montgomery County, MD	896,000	1,050	1.2	27581	23720	(14.0)
Newport News	185,242	417	2.3	N/A	9162	N/A
Norfolk	234,403	757	3.2	15237	13890	(8.8)
Portsmouth	100,565	250	2.5	5903	6288	6.5
Prince George's County, MD	842,967	1,460	1.7	51599	52889	2.5
Prince William County	336,820	483	1.4	7804	8241	5.6
Richmond	192,000	729	3.8	N/A	15789	N/A
Roanoke City	94,911	240	2.5	N/A	6806	N/A

Source: City of Alexandria FY 2007 Budget

2004 Crime in the United States, Uniform Crime Reports (published by FBI)