

ORG Update and Park Squad, 5.15.2020

Operation Rio Grande (ORG) Update

Summary:

This correspondence addresses what the police landscape was during the beginning months of Operation Rio Grande, and what it currently is.

Details:

Operation Rio Grande launched August 14, 2017, as a collaborative approach to dealing with the lawlessness, drugs, and homelessness that was prevalent in the Rio Grande District. The common goal has been to prevent and minimize homelessness. Phase one of the operation focused on improvement of public safety and order through a robust police presence that enforced and deterred criminal activity.

Phase one of Operation Rio Grande has continued through the duration of the initiative. However, over the years the police presence has dropped with the crime rate in the area. The massive number of police resources dedicated to the small geographic Rio Grande District achieved the phase one goal through constant police presence and targeted operations to arrest violators that preyed on the vulnerable homeless population.

The number of police resources in the Rio Grande District during the first weeks of the operation was unprecedented. The effort was a collaborative approach between local, county, and state resources. This collective effort, with a common goal and unprecedented cooperation between agencies, unequivocally was responsible for the crime reduction in the area. As an example of the magnitude of the early police presence – The first day shift of the operation had 77 officers from various agencies that worked the operation exclusively. The swing shift of that day had 52 officers on duty. The graveyard shift had similar numbers. Any given 24-hour period during that launch phase of the operation had 100 to 150 officers exclusively working Operation Rio Grande issues.

Within months of initiating Operation Rio-Grande the police resources were scaled back. The county discontinued committed resources to the area; but maintained a readiness posture to assist when needed. Salt Lake City specialty resources committed to the area began to concentrate police work in other parts of the city that were left without certain enforcement (narcotics, vice, bikes, gangs, etc.). The state police resources were scaled back to the numbers that are currently allocated within the operational area.

The state has funded 45 dedicated UHP/SBI police resources to the Rio Grande district until July 1, 2020. Of the 45 officers, 16 are dedicated to varying shifts that account for 24/7 uniformed UHP coverage in the area (2 to 4 officers per shift). The remaining committed officers are undercover narcotics teams that are a statewide asset (could be deployed throughout the state).

While phase-1 has been a continued effort, the largest percentage of the public safety mission was accomplished within the first year of the operation. The emphasis has shifted to the other two phases of

the operation; 1) Support for those with mental illness and addiction; 2) Connect individuals to incomes that support housing. This shift has reduced the visible footprint of uniformed officers in the area.

There is a consensus the state will completely pull police resources from the area in the summer of 2020, as of July 1, and will be discontinued. Anecdotaly this has been mentioned during meetings. The combined police briefings have been reduced in the last year. The Operation Rio-Grande status board has not been updated since August of 2019.

The SLCPD has maintained a uniformed police presence in the area. However, the presence is less than it was during the launch of, and early months of Operation Rio Grande. The SLCPD's Community Connection Center and CIT officers are headquartered in the district. The SLCPD currently handles a large percentage of the major crime cases in the Rio Grande District. UHP officers will routinely hand off calls that turn into major crimes to SLCPD officers for follow-up and or investigative support.

The SLCPD's recent restructure supports an enhanced SLCPD presence in hot spot areas. The addition of a third patrol division has increased officers' responsibility and accountability in their geographic areas. This was not the SLCPD operational model prior to Operation Rio Grande. The current SLCPD model may provide a better policing path for the future of the Rio-Grande District.

Park Squad

In 2019, the police department committed to creating a Park Squad of 5 officers and 1 sergeant which would be responsible for working with Public Services to address issues across all City parks. Those personnel positions were hired in 2019 and will complete training in August of 2020. The SLCPD is still committed to creating this squad.

In the spring of 2020, SLCPD saw multiple requests from City, County and State departments requesting officers work overtime shifts in SLC parks. Funding streams and requests came from:

- State of Utah, DNR – Jordan River foot/bike patrol, 2 officers a day for 4 hours M-F, 4 officers a day for 4 hours Sat-Sun – 10:30am–2:30pm / 5:30pm-9:30pm
- SLC Public Services – Ensign Peak Park patrol, 1 officer for 3 hours on Fri and Sat – 10pm-1am
- SL County – Sugarhouse Park patrol, 1 officer for 4 hours on Mon/Wed/Fri – 9pm-1am
- SLC Public Services – Park bathroom/curfew issues, 4 officers for 4 hours 7 days a week – 10pm-2am
- SLC Public Services – Ensign Peak/Jordan/Liberty Park patrols, 4 officers for 4 hours Mon-Fri and 5 officers for 4 hours Sat-Sun – 5pm-9pm / 10pm-1am
- SL County Health Department – COVID Social Distance enforcement, 3 officers for 12 hours a day Mon-Fri and 4 officers for 12 hours a day Sat-Sun – 9am-9pm

Managing these park shifts and measuring our officers' activity had become disjointed and difficult to manage across multiple police department divisions. In May, the SLCPD created the Park Squad sergeant position to manage all these requests. This will facilitate coordination between these partner agencies and SLC Public Services with the SLCPD. It will also streamline services to those partners, enhance accountability within our own agency, and ensure effective distribution of officer resources across the city parks. These efforts will continue to be a collaborative effort to fill the gap until the Park

Squad will come online in August. The SLCPD will continue to meet with Public Services to make sure their needs, SLCPD's needs, and most importantly the community's needs are met.