

Law Enforcement Review Advisory Committee (LERAC)  
6 August 2008, noon  
Conference Room B, County Courthouse,

Attendance: Neal I. Sanders (chair), Byrd Lochtie, Larry Miller, Garr Nielsen, Gary Philp, Sheila Nitzel, Larry Glass, Rick Botzler

Neal called the meeting to order

Minutes of 30 July 2008 were approved after minor corrections. Minutes will be entered onto the HRC website each week, after approval by the Committee.

Christina's report of her discussions with Barbara Attard and NACOLE is postponed to the next meeting.

Byrd reported on her inquiries for funding. Laura Olson of the Humboldt Area Foundation (HAF) thought that the work of our Committee meshed well with some HAF grants and encouraged us to apply by the December 1 deadline. Leigh Oetker of the McLean Foundation was interested in the work of the Committee and encouraged us to submit a letter of inquiry immediately. If we are invited to apply, based on that letter, the full application must be received by September 30 to be considered for the current funding cycle. It was agreed that Neal would submit a letter as soon as possible. The Committee discussed a possible one-year pilot project for a citizen review program, with matching funds from the Board of Supervisors.

Neal contacted Bob Aaronson who reported that County of Los Angeles is the only County in California with a program to use an auditor. It was noted that the Los Angeles Sheriff agreed to do this as part of a county-federal government agreement. Aaronson had no additional insights on how the work of an auditor would work with a Sheriff's Department except that any such program likely would require the consent and cooperation of the Sheriff.

Gary reminded the Committee that both the Board of Supervisors and the Sheriff's Department are relatively autonomous and neither would welcome the other to dictate policies to them, or would want to relinquish their own responsibilities to the other.

Neal reported a discussion with Bonnie in which she suggested that some funds might be generated from sources other than the Sheriff's budget. In response to a question, Gary was agreeable to having a periodic review of the Sheriff's Department policies and procedures by an auditor such as Aaronson. With regard to cost savings, it was suggested that the Los Angeles County risk manager could be contacted to determine if litigation costs have declined since they started using an auditor; also, Humboldt County could look at their past expenditures for litigation to see what potentially could be saved.

On further inquiry, Gary thought that the primary benefit of an auditor's review would be more for others, including the general public, than for himself. He acknowledged that

in the event of a larger controversial event involving his Department, it could be of benefit for the mainstream public to have the assurance from an independent review that the Sheriff's Department had properly handled that event.

General proposals for the nature of the Citizen's Advisory Committee followed. Byrd thought it should be primarily a county committee, but might be of value to other municipal committees wishing to cooperate and draw ideas from the committee.

Larry M. noted that most cities have similar law enforcement policies and procedures. He noted that having an advisory committee that included a liaison to each major law enforcement agency could be a good model.

Larry G. saw our current committee's (LERAC) role as setting up a template to bring in an auditor, with all major cities and the county sharing costs, and gaining from the work of the auditor. However, each active municipal advisory committee would retain its autonomy, and, at least in the case of Eureka, only the municipal advisory committee would make recommendations to the City Council.

Byrd supported having an auditor shared among all interested cities as well as the county.

Neal and Byrd noted that a citizen's advisory committee would not be a part of the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and that the HRC would not have oversight of it.

Larry M. thought that committees of smaller municipalities may not have much work and tend to become inactive.

Gary noted that a number of community law-enforcement committees have become formed and inactive over the years, and that such committees often put an extra time and energy burden on law enforcement personnel serving on them. While Gary likes the auditor model, he has reservations about the idea of a citizen's advisory committee.

Larry G. pointed out that the public wants some dialogue with the police and that a citizen advisory committee could be a key part of the program; when there are circumstances where the public needs this dialogue, the advisory committee could provide such a means.

Discussion focused on whether a citizen's advisory committee should be revised to serve as a community education committee. However, Sheila noted that there still are intense feelings centered on controversial law enforcement events of months ago, and encouraged that communications from a citizen's advisory committee include law enforcement agencies as well as the general public.

It also was noted that the Sheriff would not have to serve on the citizen advisory committee, but that this committee could review law enforcement policies, procedures, and actions, and make recommendations to the Sheriff and perhaps other

law enforcement agencies. The advisory committee could be part of a more formal program to address some public concerns before they go to the Sheriff's office, saving the Sheriff Department's staff time from having to address each directly. Gary noted that some of this has been in place through past committees; but it also was pointed out that, while there may be some redundancy with past committees, the citizen advisory committee was one part of a much larger coordinated program between an auditor and citizen committee focused on both public education and strengthening communication with law enforcement agencies

Byrd proposed that, for the next meeting, everyone evaluate the proposed characteristics of the Citizen Advisory Committee on Law Enforcement in the "First Draft Proposal" from the HRC committee, and more specifically assess a) the general purpose, b) membership, and c) work that the committee would be expected to accomplish (process).

Garr noted that the challenge of our current (LERAC) committee would be in the details of fleshing out the proposal for the citizen advisory committee. He added that incorporating an auditor into the proposed program would lead to greater credibility and accountability for local law enforcement. He also was encouraged by the work of the current (LERAC) committee in moving this process along effectively and constructively.

The next meeting will be at 12 noon on Wednesday, August 20, in Conference Room B of the County Courthouse.

Rick