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Robert C. Haas
Police Commissioner

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

October 19, 2009

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

Re: City Council Order # 17 dated July 27, 2009

Sir:

In response to City Council Order #17, dated July 27, 2009 regarding the feasibility of assigning one stationary police officer in a prominent location in the Central Square, I would offer the following response for your consideration.

It has been long established that the tactic of having a police officer assigned to one location so that they can go one place to report a problem or seek refuge has been an abandoned as a viable measure in terms of its overall efficacy and effectiveness. In fact, such an approach has proven to be somewhat counter-productive in terms of having any measureable impact in the reduction of crime or criminal behavior. Some of the underlying assumptions that support these findings include the following facts:

- There may be some degree of reassurance for people who may see an officer at a specific location (more of placebo effect), but that officer's effectiveness and ability to control crime activity is only confined to the area of that officer's vantage point. Once someone moves beyond that vantage point, the officer's sphere of influence and impact quickly dissipates with distance.
- With an officer assigned to a fixed position, all you may have done is displace a crime problem or criminal behavior to another location of the business district. At the same time you have created a degree of confidence among those committing crimes that they can do so with a degree of impunity because there is a greater degree of predictability of where you can find the police.

- By establishing a fixed post, it creates a false sense of security from the standpoint that an officer will always be at that location. One of two things will be in play: (1) if an officer is called off his/her post the officer is no longer at that location; or (2) you will need to double your police presence to support an officer who has been assigned to a fix post that cannot be abandoned.
- Because of the staffing level of police officers, a fixed post becomes a draw on a finite number of resources, thereby taking an officer for the number of shifts that this post will be staffed only to yield a reduced level of police service or policing impact.
- Given our present deployment plans, it would mean taking an officer out of the roster who otherwise has been assigned to provide a level of unpredictable police presence over a wider area within the Central Square business district.
- A call box that is directly linked into the Emergency Communications Center would provide the same level of protection in terms of providing a person with the ability to be directly connected to the police department at a much lower cost, without seriously drawing upon a police resource that will only yield a greater void in police presence.
- The notion of the actual location of the police station having a deterrent effect on crime rates is really a misnomer. Police officers do not respond from the police station. All available police resources are already deployed to their assigned sectors or patrol routes. When a call for service is received or there is a call that is initiated by a police officer, it is the officers who are already assigned to a patrol sector or patrol routes who will respond.
- The alternative tactics that the police department has been using with respect to the deployment of police officers has proven to be much more effective in reducing criminal activity. This is evident by the crime statistics from this year as compared to the same time period last year.

Toward the latter part of the summer of 2008, the Crime Analysis Unit detected a new set of crime problems and disruptive activities taking place in the Central Square business district that was a departure from what had been witnessed in prior years. During the months of August, September, October, and the early part of November, the Cambridge Police Department altered its deployment strategy in Central Square. Because of the additional deployment of police officers in Central Square business district, the department was able to focus on greater enforcement of quality of life violations without significantly depleting police presence within Central Square.

As the 2009 spring season began, the department once again observed a similar trend emerging as was witnessed toward the tail end of the previous summer. Rather than waiting for the crime data to drive a reactive response, the police department took a number of steps to get in front of the problem. Some of the more significant initiatives that were employed throughout the spring and summer, and are still being employed are the following initiatives.

- *Walking Officers:* Rather than relying upon one walking officer in the Central Square business district, the department routinely deployed two walking officers in the square during the highest activity hours. These officers were charged with the responsibility of enforcing low-level quality of life violations. If a police encounter resulted in an arrest, rather than removing the only walking resource from the business district upwards to two or three hours to book a prisoner, the arrest would be either turned over to a route car, or the officer would take the arrest leaving the other officer in the business district.
- *Bicycle Officers:* As has been the practice of the last two years, the department has deployed its bicycle officers on the day shift and the early evening hours into the Central Square business district to provide a mobile roving police presence along the entire length of Massachusetts Avenue. Just as the walking officers provided for a greater range of police presence, the bicycle officers provide even a greater police omnipresence and greater coverage than the walking officers.
- *Directed Patrol Activity:* Based upon the increased crime rates and reporting of police related problems, both the sector and route cars are being deployed on directed patrol activities within the business district. This additional police presence was designed to augment the police presence in the business district. Because of a deliberate effort on the part of the Patrol Operations Command Staff, the Central Square business district have experienced a greater police presence than what had been witnessed, even with the police station located in the Central Square area.
- *Dedicated Supervisory Oversight:* By reconfiguring the fourth platoon of the police department, which primarily comprised by those officers who are assigned to walking assignments, the department has placed a patrol supervisor in charge of this platoon, whose responsibility it was to focus his supervisory oversight specifically to the Central Square business district. This supervisor had the ability to pull walking officers from the adjoining residential areas to supplement the police deployments already assigned to the business district.
- *Homeless Outreach Officers:* During the course of last year, the department experimented with the concept of having police officers focus their attention on the homeless population, which has traditionally represented a significant drain on city services. Part of that project was to focus on those individuals who created a disproportionate amount of the problems in the various business districts across the city.

The department quickly witnessed a dramatic reduction in the calls for service for this population. The officer who initially launched his project spent a great amount of his time in the Central Square business district as opposed to other business district in the city. This officer was an additional resource to the deployments already in place within Central Square. Unlike past years when the walking officer would arrest a homeless individual, only to be taken off his/her post, usually transporting the individual to the hospital (thereby taking another officer of his/her assignment to guide the prisoner). Then the walking officer transports the individual to court to be found guilty and released. only to start the process over again the next day, this officer would use alternative methods of finding more permanent solutions. This officer worked closely with other city resources and social services to find alternative placements and solutions. This approach allowed officers to remain on their assigned routes, and gradually we witnessed a reduction in reoccurring problems. During the course of this season, the department now has two officers assigned as Homeless Outreach Officers who cover the day and afternoon shifts over a seven-day period. Although their responsibilities involve the entire city, a disproportionate amount of their time is focused on Central Square. In fact, the problems that have been experienced in various areas of the city, has been primarily confined to Central Square.

- *Night Shift Detectives:* In addition to the deployments already outlined, the detectives assigned to the night shift were tasked to concentrate their patrol activities within the Central Square business district. This extra presence provided an unmarked or less than conspicuous police presence during the course of this past summer.
- *Community Relations Officers:* Two officers from the Community Relations Unit were specifically assigned to work with the business community within Central Square. These two officers, who are specifically trained in crime prevention measures and environmental design, were tasked to meet with each of the business places along Central Square. The purpose of these visits was to discover any change in the criminal or aberrant behaviors being observed, assess whether there were measures that could be taken to reduce or eliminate some of the disruptive behaviors being witnessed, and to take any recommendations back to the relevant city departments that would address safety concerns (overgrown trees, public lighting, or other attractions). These two officers are currently in the process of carrying out a follow up survey. At the present time, they have been able to speak with roughly 50% of the business owners/managers along the Massachusetts Avenue corridor. They have been successful in getting business owners/managers to change their lighting patterns to offset problem areas. The city has removed some of the foliage to yield greater lighting along Massachusetts Avenue, and we have seen a greater involvement of business owners/managers calling potential problems prior to waiting until the situation gets out of control (evidenced by the types of

calls being received, earlier intervention by the police, and an overall reduction in disorderly activity as witnessed in prior years).

- *Special Investigations Covert Operations:* During the course of the spring and summer months (4 months in total), members of the Special Investigations Unit conducted ongoing investigative measures to identify any narcotic or vice activities within the Central Square (surveillances, control buys, development of informants, etc.). The specific purpose of these investigative efforts was to identify and develop cases against those who were on the distribution side of the equation. Simply going after the consumers would never stem the tide of this kind of activity. In order to go after this higher level of criminal activity, it takes an inordinate of law enforcement investment and time to build cases that will result in the prosecution of these types of cases. Officers from other police departments were brought in who would not be easily recognizable to do the controlled buys. The outcome of this intensive investigative effort resulted in 32 arrests of distribution cases. There are still ongoing investigations taking place that are a follow-up on to the work that has already been done.
- *Central Square Business Association:* All during the course of the summer months, members of the police department routinely met with the Central Square Business Association (general body and executive board) to provide regular updates on the policing activities that were taking place in Central Square. The association was also looking for strategies that would get members of the association to take a more active role in contributing to the efforts that were already underway by the city departments.
- *Establishment of Central Square Reporting Stations:* At this time, the police department, in collaboration with the Senior Center and the Department of Human Services, is in the process of bringing a reporting station on line. The advantage of having a reporting station within Central Square keeps the officers in their assigned sector more frequently as opposed to having to leave the sector to do reports. It will increase the number of times police personnel will be in and out of the Senior Center. The police department is also exploring other locations along the Massachusetts Avenue corridor so that officers will not always be at one end of Central Square.

During the course of this past summer, there has actually been a decrease in the number of aggravated assaults, a slight increase in the number of commercial burglaries, a significant decrease in the number of drinking in public complaints (in large part due to the work of the Homeless Outreach Officers), an increase of disorderly conduct (with an increase in the number of arrests for this offense), and a decrease in shoplifting (despite the fact this type of crime would be closely linked to the downturn in the economy – increase in other business districts). As would have been expected from the number of arrests of drug dealers, there was a significant increase in the drug arrests driven by the investigative work of the Special Investigations Unit.

Although the City Council Order was normally focused on the feasibility of establishing a fixed post in a prominent location in Central Square. I didn't want to simply talk about the problems associated with such assignment, without giving some context as to having a fluid and mobile presence throughout Central Square.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns relative to this response.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Haas
Police Commissioner

RCH/bk