



**To: Peter Pirnejad, Los Altos Hills City Manager
Gabriel Engeland, Los Altos City Manager**
From: Brian Uhler, MRG Consultant
RE: Initial Assessment for Los Altos/Los Altos Hills Police Services

November 2, 2023

Purpose

Through their respective City Councils, the Cities of Los Altos (LA) and Los Altos Hills (LAH) have agreed to examine the possibility of developing an agreement for shared law enforcement services. This document is to provide leadership with preliminary data so both jurisdictions:

- (1) are informed about progress,
- (2) have the opportunity to provide direction on the types of information needed for future decisions, and
- (3) may confirm their desire to continue to move forward (or not).

Feasibility

In initial meetings, there were a few broad requirements which were viewed as being essential:

- Improvement of service level/coverage for both jurisdictions
- Financial tracking mechanism to ensure fairness and transparency
- For LAH, costs must be reasonably close to current spending levels
- For LA, adequate time is needed for proper implementation

Structure

At the onset, legal experts were queried to ensure ongoing discussions and any future agreement would conform to California law. For example, we learned a simple agreement where LA would provide services to LAH would not require Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) involvement. One local model which may serve as an example between Los Gatos and Monte Sereno has been successfully deployed since 1995.

Operational Evaluation Elements Overview

Law enforcement deployment and staffing studies are commonplace. Most rely on a variety of established parameters which typically include¹:

1. Crime trends
2. Per capita comparisons
3. Existing/historical staffing levels or minimum staffing policy
4. Budget-driven decisions
5. Workload based models (call for service volume)

1. ICMA, Center for Public Safety Management (review of 62 agencies analyzed by ICMS).
https://icma.org/sites/default/files/305747_Analysis%20of%20Police%20Department%20Staffing%20_%20McCabe.pdf



Political realities affecting increases or decreases in the level of law enforcement funding, have been added in recent years. A more recent concern is understaffing for virtually all California agencies—now at lowest statewide levels since 1991². Of course, this causes hiring pressures for virtually all jurisdictions.

Schedule modeling for workload analysis in larger agencies can be quite time-consuming, costly, and complex. In these agencies, over extended periods of time, professional evaluators drill down into workload details, such as how often certain events take place and how long it takes personnel “on-the-scene” to handle such events. They do this for every type of service call and administrative function (e.g. training or court). In addition, some agencies seek to align workload demands by the time of day and day of week. Ultimately, such agencies seek to schedule enough personnel during peak times and balance the workload while maintaining some ideal level of unassigned preventive patrol time (called an “availability factor”).

For smaller agencies, other dynamics or realities negate the need for detailed and costly analysis. For example, size, population, or call volume, may readily justify a single officer working at certain times; however, practical deference to officer safety may dictate two officers on the schedule. Another practical consideration for smaller jurisdictions is the fact that “big” events do not happen often or happen at sporadic times/days. Anticipating or staffing for these is just not feasible. For these events, smaller agencies typically rely on mutual aid agreements with neighboring jurisdictions. Lastly, in smaller agencies, the total number of sworn staff often limits police leaders’ ability to deploy staff proportionately to the workload (e.g. peak activity hours may justify added staff, but doing so would run afoul of minimum staffing requirements during other times).

Financial Model

The LA/LAH law enforcement services working group, to include both City Managers, considered three financial structure models as follows:

- (1) Dedicated Position Basis—Specific positions are funded by the receiving jurisdiction
- (2) Call for Service Basis—Total budget shared proportionately by call volume
- (3) Service Hour Basis—Cost-per-hour coupled with agreed service levels

Through extensive discussions, the group believed using the Dedicated Position Basis provides the best structure for both jurisdictions. First, it provides maximum transparency and simplicity by defining specific positions with their funding source. Second, it provides clearly defined coverage. Third, when coupled with provisions for administrative overhead costs, it covers all costs for the services provided to the receiving jurisdiction.

NOTE: The Call for Service basis was overly complicated by the “residential only” nature of LAH. Further, the Service Hour Basis model implies a time-consuming, complex, and impractical accounting of all personnel’s activities on a minute-by-minute basis.

2. California Public Policy Institute, Law Enforcement Staffing in California, February, 2023 Fact Sheet. www.ppic.org/publication/law-enforcement-staffing-in-california/



Los Altos/Los Altos Hills Evaluation Elements

To guide future decisions and stay within reasonable budgetary and time constraints, the below combination of measures, commonly used in smaller jurisdictions, are provided. Ultimately, these data points may be used to guide staffing levels (and costs). This way, both jurisdictions fund sufficient staffing to handle “their” workload while they simultaneously provide mutually beneficial back-up/field operations capacity. Conversely, if one jurisdiction is comparatively understaffed, the other jurisdiction would disproportionately and unfairly prop-up the other.

ELEMENT 1: Call workload compared to sworn staff

Los Altos had 14,176 calls for service (FY 22/23). With its 32 officers, this equates to 443 calls per sworn position.

Los Altos Hills had 1,583 calls for service (calendar 2022). Using the same ratio, a total of 3.57 officer positions would be needed to provide the same level of sworn staff coverage on a per call basis.

NOTE: This element may seem to conflict with Element #3 (3.57 versus 8.37 officers). However, due to having a business component, call volume for Los Altos, per capita, is higher. By subtracting an estimated 40% of all Los Altos calls (related to businesses), Los Altos Hills would then need 5.95 officers to “cover” its residential call volume at the same level currently staffed by Los Altos.

ELEMENT 2: Call workload compared to budget

Los Altos—14,176 calls with PD budget of \$14,769,116* equates to \$1,042/call
Los Altos Hills—1,583 calls with budget of \$2,416,044 equates to \$1,526/call

The cost-per-call difference, suggests adding approximately 30% more service hours for Los Altos Hills could be accomplished at about the same cost.

*NOTE: Contracted fire services are subtracted from total PD budget of \$23,617,027

ELEMENT 3: Sworn staffing per capita

Los Altos, at a population of 31,625, has 32 sworn staff. This equates to 1.01 police officers per 1000.

Los Altos Hills has a population of 8,295. To match this ratio, Los Altos Hills would need the services of 8.37 sworn personnel.

Here, a simple ratio does not adequately describe the deployment situation. A portion of Los Altos’ sworn staff are administrative personnel, who would be providing their services for both jurisdictions. By comparing personnel who are assigned to field duties in Los Altos (27), the number of sworn personnel needed by Los Altos Hills to “match” drops to 7.08 officers.



ELEMENT 4: Existing/Historical and Minimum Staffing

Los Altos: Current minimum complement of 3 sworn (1 Sgt plus 2 officers)
Los Altos Hills: Minimum of 1 sworn

To maintain “no change” to these minimum levels, 4 sworn staff would be needed on the schedule at all times. However, with the goal to improve services for both jurisdictions, increasing the minimum staffing to 5 sworn personnel may be desired—representing a combined 25% increase in service levels.

NOTE: The LA Chief of Police may consider creating a hybrid minimum staffing model where 5 sworn staff are required during peak workload hours of each day and 4 may be sufficient at low activity times (e.g., only 4 needed between midnight and 8 a.m.).

Assessment of Evaluation Elements

Element	Description of Needed Sworn Staffing for LAH*
1—Call Workload	5.95
2—Call Workload/Budget	6.5 (30 % increase in hours)
3—Sworn per Capita	7.08
4—Minimum Staffing	6.25 (25% increase in hours)

*Adjusted as described in each element.

NOTE: 7,903 total hours of currently contracted services for Los Altos Hills equates to approximately 5 sworn positions (1,580 “field hours” and 500 administrative hours per FTE. For example, a total of 7,900 hours of field work can be derived from 5 sworn staff members).

Staffing Recommendation

In reviewing the issues and data, the LA/LAH Law Enforcement Services workgroup recommends adding 7 police officers and 1 dispatcher position. Key advantages include:

- 40% increase in LAH coverage (11,060 hours versus 7,900 hours)
- Improved dispatcher coverage
- Ongoing costs to LAH is approximately the same as current levels
- Improved supervisor to subordinate ratio for Los Altos
- Added nearby “back up” resources for events occurring in both jurisdictions

Detective/Evidence Services and “Back Up” to Los Altos

Analysis by Los Altos officials concludes that existing detective and evidence handling resources can “absorb” the added demands from Los Altos Hills. This said, we do not suggest this resource be provided for free. Likewise, we recognize that the overall workload in Los Altos is higher than in Los Altos Hills. This, coupled with overall staffing limitations means that the Los Altos Hills patrol officers will sometimes be “pulled” into call-driven demands in Los Altos It is believed that these two issues will balance out. To ensure fairness, we plan to monitor these factors.



Los Gatos/Monte Sereno Site Visit

In October, the LA/LAH Law Enforcement Services workgroup visited with the Los Gatos/Monte Sereno City Manager and Police Chief. This process provided an excellent framework for our continuing efforts. For example, we learned that a major crime occurring in Monte Sereno necessitated a huge commitment from Los Gatos detectives and leadership. This “extra” commitment led to a cost recovery process (shouldered by Monte Sereno). This serves as one example of the types of situations we may need to anticipate.

Timeline

If both City Councils agree to continue moving forward, we project an “action item” would be presented to both jurisdiction’s City Councils in April, 2024 (coincides with budget for FY 24/25). Details on activities are depicted here:



* After Initial assessments from both council the Town would need to prepare a scope of work, have it approved by the Council, go through a competitive bid process and “if” Los Altos is selected or is the only bidder the Town would need to go back to Council to authorize the Town and City work on the financial structure and return for approval.

Community characteristics

As neighbors, both Los Altos and Los Altos Hills have very similar demographics. Importantly, the criminals victimizing both jurisdictions do not recognize the boundary.

From a police staffing standpoint, this could be viewed favorably. For example, law enforcement experience suggests the highest workload exists “where the people are.” If there are higher daytime demands in Los Altos’ business district, then law enforcement staff from Los Altos Hills could be used to augment/support these call-driven demands. Conversely, in the evening or during weekends, when demands are lower in the business districts and higher in neighborhoods, resources could be directed into Los Altos Hill’s neighborhoods.



Budget Structure

Description	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Off. Salary (7)	1,873,788.00	1,967,477.40	2,065,851.27
Disp. Salary (1)	217,773.00	228,661.65	240,094.73
15% Administrative	313,734.15	329,420.86	345,891.90
Liability Coverage (8 FTEs)	92,000.00	96,600	101,430
Total	2,497,295.15	2,622,159.91	2,753,267.90

Salary includes: CalPERS, Overtime, Uniforms (replacement), and all other traditional benefits.

NOTE: Data from the LA group liability provider indicates a cost based on salary of approximately \$44K per \$1M of payroll. Given added payroll costs of about \$2.1M, we estimate an ongoing annual cost for liability protection of \$92K.

15% Administrative Charge—Estimate (15%/\$313K)

Item	Description	Approx. Cost	Included (Y/N)
Sgt/Sup Hours	Call response, duty scheduling, etc.	\$93K	Y
Admin Support (Capt/Chief)	Meetings, strategic planning, correspondence	\$120K	Y
HR/Finance	Hiring, recruiting, financial reports	\$100K	Y
Total (for included items)		\$313K	

LAH to LA One Time Costs

Item	Description	Cost
Vehicle(s)	2 Fully Equipped Police	\$198,452
Equipment	Firearms, belts, vests, (\$2,500 each)	\$17,500
Initial Issue (e.g. uniforms)	Clothing, boots (\$1,500 each)	\$10,500
Dispatcher Equipment	Clothing, headset, training materials, etc.	\$2,500
Total		\$228,952

Goal: Service Improvement and Mutual benefit

- Deeper bench—through collaboration, both jurisdictions will benefit from relying on the other. Geographic proximity bolsters this. In short, officers working in either location can provide timely support for one another.
- Better responsiveness for local level issues—Los Altos is well-aligned with Los Altos Hills as it relates to citizen perspectives on crime. In all likelihood, the issues affecting the



citizens on both sides of the border can be prioritized by the police.

- Improved response times—a 40% increase in coverage means a responder may be closer when a call for service occurs. Additionally, since Los Altos is nearby, an available officer inside Los Altos may be closer to a Los Altos Hills call for service than a patrolling officer inside Los Altos Hills.
- Public engagement improvements—Los Altos has a robust combination of public engagement programs and a social media presence which can be regionalized and expanded to Los Altos Hills.
- Stronger regional approach—Criminals do not respect boundaries. Through improved resource coordination, both jurisdictions could benefit.
- Automated License Plate system sharing—through improved data sharing, both jurisdictions' ALPR infrastructure will be more effective and provide an increased ROI.
- More efficient Sergeant Span of Control—Expanding the number of front-line officers by adding police officers in Los Altos Hills is within the capacity of existing Sergeants. The benefit to Los Altos would include some cost-sharing for the Sergeant position.

Next Steps

In the event both City Councils express support to keep moving this concept forward, the following should be accomplished in advance of an “action item” coming to both City Councils:

- (1) LA Police, Finance, and HR staff to complete a framework for financial reporting and data collection
- (2) LAH officials to develop agreement on scope of work for inclusion in a potential agreement
- (3) LA to prepare an RFP, seek CC approval and include ample time for competitive bidding.
- (4) LAH to Review the proposals and go to City Council for award of contract.
- (5) Assuming LA is selected, City Attorney's from both jurisdictions to review and coordinate agreement documents
- (6) LA Finance staff to develop budget and payment structure
- (7) Staff to complete staff reports for “action item” to go before both City Councils

The data provided in this MRG report is informational only and any action to change law enforcement service providers by the Town will be conducted in a manner consistent with state and Los Altos Hills services procurement policies.