

**City of Spring Lake Park - Police Department  
Climate Assessment Interviews  
Finding and Recommendations Summary**

Presented by Susan J. Herreid Ph.D, CEAP  
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**BACKGROUND:**

Susan Herreid Ph.D, CEAP (Organization Development Consultant) was initially contacted in October, 2020 by John Thames (City Legal Counsel) to discuss possible consultation services. Mr. Thames mentioned that he was looking into various consulting options based on a discussion with Dan Buchholtz (City Administrator). He shared some background including a brief overview of the current work environment, and they discussed several consulting options and recommendations. As a result of their conversation, Mr. Thames requested that Dr. Herreid provide a brief proposal or overview of the recommended climate assessment process. He let her know that he would pass along the proposal and her contact information to Mr. Buchholtz for his review and consideration.

Several weeks later Mr. Buchholz contacted Dr. Herreid to discuss the recommended climate assessment in greater detail. At the end of their conversation, he said that he would like to move forward with her recommendations. They discussed next steps including identifying several dates for conducting the interviews. She also shared information with Mr. Buchholtz that he could use to create a brief memo about the climate assessment process. Dr. Herreid suggested that he meet with his management staff to discuss the purpose of the climate assessment, so that they could share the plan with their staff groups. He would also provide all staff with a memo that provided an overview of the interview process (including dates and scheduling plans, interview confidentiality, summary of themes and a plan for sharing the information with all interview participants, etc.).

**APPROACH:**

Dr. Herreid met with staff members and management personnel on a voluntary basis on November 12, 13, 16, 17, 19 and 20. She also conducted several phone interviews due to staff being out of the workplace or in quarantine due to COVID exposure. Police department (PD) personnel were offered several dates and times for interviews that would accommodate their shifts/schedules. At the beginning of each interview, she described her role as an Organization Development Consultant. Interviewees were told the assessment process is a strategic approach to gathering feedback and their individual perspectives about the team and the current work culture. Dr. Herreid also brought up recent changes due to the pandemic and the impact on staff and their work duties and responsibilities.

Interviewees were reminded, per the memo, that their specific feedback would be kept confidential. She let them know that only common themes, issues and/or concerns would be outlined in a brief *Assessment Summary*, along with recommendations.

## **INTERVIEW FINDINGS, FEEDBACK AND THEMES:**

It is important to note that the information contained in the "Feedback, Findings and Themes" section was shared by a majority of those interviewed. It is an assessment of interviewee's perceptions and perspective about the current work environment.

Repeated concerns were brought up by a majority of PD personnel about the confidentiality of the information shared and concerns about future punitive actions or behaviors for their participation in the process. PD staff were hoping that PD leadership would be willing to hear the feedback themes that were a result of the assessment interviews and consider and support opportunities for positive change.

PD staff shared many positive comments about their jobs and the work they do for the city and the community. They talked positively about their professional relationships with a majority of their colleagues within the department and across the city. They talked with high regard about staff within the city who they have most often found pleasant and helpful. Interviewees discussed the pride they have in their work and expressed a strong commitment to the community they serve.

Interview respondents (staff and management) expressed the need for an improved work culture. Interviewees shared feedback about areas for improvement and many of the participants believe that current issues are significantly impacting staff's morale and the PD's ability to attract, support and retain high-quality personnel.

The common issues that have been identified in the assessment process have been grouped into the following themes (which are not listed in order of priority):

- **Communication**
- **Department Leadership**
- **Engagement, Empowerment and Inclusion**
- **Training Opportunities**
- **Equity and Consistency**
- **Retaliation and Punitive Actions**
- **Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution**
- **Employee Morale and Job Satisfaction**
- **Professional Trust, Respect and Accountability**

### **Communication**

- Consistent and transparent messaging from department leadership
- Respectful conversations that encourage interactive discussions and collaborative problem solving (encouraged by management and department leadership)
- Communication should be a two way street
- Share information or rationale regarding decisions or changes being implemented to facilitate improved understanding and organizational buy-in

### **Department Leadership**

- Perceptions of a sometimes intimidating and rigid supervisory style or approach with little opportunity for staff input or suggestions
- Inconsistent expectations within the PD (several examples were shared) often seen as mixed messages or changes without communication

- Greater communication and information sharing related to Chief/management's schedules and availability (on site, off site, accessibility or return to the work place, etc.)
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### **Engagement, Empowerment and Inclusion**

- Greater staff involvement or opportunity for discussions related to decisions or changes that impact job duties, responsibilities or "how" they do their jobs
- Feedback questioning the appropriate assignment of certain work duties and professional responsibilities to some members of the PD

### **Training Opportunities**

- Interest in a more thoughtful plan for employee's professional development opportunities (e.g., interests, qualifications or certifications for training others, etc.)
- Perceptions regarding the lack of support from leadership regarding valuable trainings that would benefit individual professional development as well as the department overall

### **Retaliation and Punitive Actions**

- Perceptions of punitive actions or behaviors (based on past experiences either witnessed or experienced by interviewees)
- Feedback was shared by a majority about concerns of retaliation in the future for their participation in this process

### **Collaborative Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution**

- Improved techniques for respectfully diffusing tense interactions (e.g., misunderstandings, conflict, disagreement, etc.) when they occur within the department (between personnel and/or with management)
- Desire for a more open work environment where issues could be discussed and differing opinions shared without negative consequences
- Identified need for city management/department heads to work together more collaboratively to improve the current workplace culture

### **Employee Morale and Job Satisfaction**

- Comments and negative feedback about the current morale by majority of the work group
- Feedback about personnel considering other professional opportunities due to the current work culture and a lack of confidence there will be sustainable change

### **Professional Trust, Respect and Accountability**

- Interest shared in developing a stronger sense of professional trust and respect with leadership (within the department and the city)
- The need for PD personnel to demonstrate a greater sense of self awareness (starting with leadership) and the impact their actions and behaviors have on professional trust and respect within the department
- Perceptions regarding a lack of respect or support for skills and abilities (examples shared where personnel have felt unsupported/not valued)
- Ability to lead by example and demonstrate accountability

