

2008 Mendocino Grand Jury Report
City of Willits Consolidated Responses

Report Title: "THE #\$\$@*!! ROOF STILL LEAKS: A Report on the City of Willits Police Department and Holding Cells" Report **Date:** June 17, 2008

Response by: Mayor Holly Madrigal (Willits City Council)
Bob Christofferson (Willits Interim City Manager)
Gerardo Gonzalez (Willits Police Department Chief)

Findings

I (we) agree with the findings numbered: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,29,30

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the Findings numbered:
28

(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the Findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons therefore.)

Recommendations

Recommendations numbered: _____ have been implemented. (attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)

Recommendation numbered: 1 have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. (attach a time frame for implementation)

Recommendations numbered: 2,3,6 require further analysis. (attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of the planned analysis, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared, discussed and approved by the officer and/or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed. This time frame shall not exceed six (6) months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury Report)

Recommendations numbered: _____ will not be implemented because they are not warranted and/or are not deemed reasonable. (attach an explanation.)

Date: _____ Signed: _____
Mayor Holly Madrigal, Willits City Council

Date: _____ Signed: _____
Bob Christofferson, Interim Willits City Manager

Date: _____ Signed: _____
Gerardo Gonzalez, Willits City Police Chief

Number of response pages attached: _____

Consolidated City of Willits Reponses to 2008 Grand Jury Report

Title: THE #@\$*!! ROOF STILL LEAKS : A Report on the City of Willits Police Department Holding Cells.

Summary: The Grand Jury conducted its annual visit to the Willits Police Department (WPD) to inspect operations, holding cells, the evidence room and the facility in general. The WPD is located in a County building, which also contains the Sheriff's substation and the Superior Court.

Findings:

1. The annual budget for the WPD provides for one Chief, three Sergeants, 10 Officers and five Dispatchers.
Agree
2. At the time of the visit, the actual staff consisted of one Chief, who is bilingual; three Sergeants and one acting Sergeant; six Officers, one of whom was on sick leave and another who was out on worker's compensation; four Dispatchers and one Trainee Dispatcher. In addition, there is one part-time Officer in charge of prisoner transport, who also acts as an investigator; and one Reserve Officer, who assists at special events.
Agree
3. Staff shortages are covered by the use of overtime and supervisors are required to perform field duties.
Agree
4. WPD cannot contribute an officer to the Mendocino County Major Crimes Task Force due to staff shortages.
Agree
5. Officers work a 12-hour shift. Replacing an Officer on an eight hour shift is easier, as one Officer can stay four hours longer and another Officer can come in four hours earlier.
Agree
6. Recruiting applicants is difficult: about 30% of applicants fail the background check. There is a shortage of affordable housing in Willits, and the City is remote. On the plus side, employee benefits are excellent and the pay rate is competitive with nearby law enforcement agencies. The pay is not competitive with Santa Rosa or the Bay Area. Various agencies are contacted to locate potential recruits.
Agree

7. Training for new officers includes ride-alongs. The length of training time can vary with seasonal community activities.

Agree

8. All Officers have Peace Officer Standards and Training certification (POST).

Agree

9. The current budget contains funds for officer training.

Agree

10. Some Officers are trained in the use of tasers, a non-lethal weapon available to WPD Officers. Tasers are an effective psychological deterrent; it is seldom necessary to actually use them; usually when an individual sees the taser, they become compliant.

Agree

11. Gangs are not a major problem at this time; but they are a concern. There has been some tagging (graffiti) but little violence.

Agree

12. The Gang Resistance Is Paramount (GRIP) program is presently offered to fifth graders. The program is a collaborative effort of the schools, police departments, Alcohol and Other Drug Programs (AODP), the Nuestra Alianza of Willits, and other after-school programs.

Agree

13. The City has revised its ordinance to regulate the outdoor cultivation of marijuana.

Agree

14. Occasionally there are homeless encampments on the North Coast Railroad Authority property. The encampments are removed when requested by the property owner.

Agree

15. There are more homeless transients during the summer months.

Agree

16. The closing, in 2000, of the Psychiatric Holding Facility (PHF) in Ukiah has hampered the WPD. Now, if an officer detains an individual, under §5150, who poses a danger to him or herself or to others, but who has not been accused of a crime, the only facility available is Howard Hospital which has no mental health worker on site. The Officer must wait for a crisis worker from the County Mental Health Branch.

Agree

17. Mendocino County Mental Health Department operates a satellite clinic in Willits staffed with a mental health crisis worker, who is available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays. If the Willits clinic is closed, a crisis worker has to be sent from Ukiah to assess the patient. The WPD tries to stay and watch the person at the hospital, but, if they are called out, the patient may well leave the hospital. The patient can only be detained for 23 hours. After that, the patient must be released or transferred outside the County because the County has no appropriate facilities.
Agree
18. An individual detained under a "5150" who is accused of a crime is transported to the Mendocino County Jail, where there is a mental health worker.
Agree
19. The officer in charge of the evidence room was working the night shift and was unavailable for interview or to provide access. The WPD has a bar coding system for identifying the stored items.
Agree
20. A Homeland Security grant was used to purchase a new electronic fingerprinting machine, which is used for those who are cited and released. The machine is connected to the County's secure internet connection.
Agree
21. WPD has limited access to the County's JALAN criminal justice records system. This system will produce limited statistics. If more extensive statistics are desired, a request must be submitted to County Information Technology for custom programming.
Agree
22. WPD does not routinely participate in the Sheriff's teleconferencing muster at 7:00 a.m.
Agree
23. A visual examination of the three holding cells showed that they were clean and sanitary. Holding cells, if occupied, are under constant visual observation. The holding cells are shared by the Sheriff and WPD pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding regarding use and maintenance.
Agree
24. Staff shortages require that prisoners be transported promptly.
Agree
25. The sally port is fully operative. **Agree**

26. Some cell phone 911 calls are forwarded to the WPD by the California Highway Patrol; others go directly to WPD. Landline 911 calls from Willits go directly to the WPD. The 911 system is being updated.
Agree
27. WPD dispatches for the Little Lake Fire District. **Agree**
28. There is no sign near the street to direct people to the County owned building which is occupied by WPD, the Superior Court and the Sheriff's substation. There is no sign at the corner of Main Street and Commercial Street directing people to the WPD, the Little Lake Fire Department, or the County complex on Commercial Street.
Partially Disagree. However there is a metal Willits Police Sign hung at the Entrance to the parking lot with a red arrow pointing towards the building.
29. Since this County-owned building was constructed in 1988, the roof has leaked into the WPD downstairs offices. It is still necessary to cover the office equipment with plastic tarps when it rains.
Agree

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. WPD fill vacant Officer positions (Findings 1-6)

Response: This recommendation is still in the process of being implemented. Most law enforcement agencies in the area suffer from manpower shortages and the list of qualified applicants seems to forever fall short of current openings. Currently there exists one open vacancy which can be filled and all efforts are being devoted to filling that vacancy.

2. The Willits City Council augment the budget for WPD to permit hiring of additional Officers (Findings 1-6)

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis and while augmenting the Police Budget seems logical it may not seem fiscally prudent at a time when state revenues are in a decline. An additional police officer and part-time officer were requested by the Police Chief and were added during the 2008-2009 Willits City Budget process. This matter will have to be studied further during this next budget cycle due to ramifications yet undetermined because of the 2008-2009 State of California Budget effect on local municipal budgets.

3. The Willits City Council budget for five Reserve Officer positions to work community events (Finding 2)

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis and while augmenting the Police Budget seems logical it may not seem fiscally prudent at a time when state revenues are in a decline. The allocation of additional part time employees of which Reserve police officers are classified as would affect the 2008-2009 Willits City Budget process. This matter will have to be studied further during this next budget cycle due to ramifications yet undetermined because of the 2008-2009 State of California Budget effect on local municipal budgets.

6. City of Willits put a sign near the corner of Main Street (Highway 101) and East Commercial Street to direct people to the Little Lake Fire Department and the WPD (Finding 29).

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis. The placing of Signage on Main Street which is also U.S. Highway 101 in this area requires Cal-Trans approval and cooperation. This recommendation would have to be further studied to determine its feasibility and discussed with Cal-Trans.