

**OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT REPORT 2006-5:  
A BASE BUDGET REVIEW OF THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY PARK POLICE  
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**THE ASSIGNMENT**

This report is a base budget review of the Montgomery County Park Police. A primary focus of the assignment was to analyze Park Police patrol staffing. The Office of Legislative Oversight's methodology included informational interviews, comparative research, and detailed review/analysis of budget documents, staffing logs, crime reports, computer-aided dispatch system reports, and other records.

This base budget review is part of a broader initiative of the Montgomery County Council to explore ways of enhancing the Council's annual budget decision-making. The Council is interested in fiscal and program information and analysis, which extend beyond review of the marginal budget changes that occur from one year to the next.

**OVERVIEW OF THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY PARK POLICE**

The Montgomery County Park Police is a division of the Department of Parks, housed within the Montgomery County portion of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). The Police Chief reports to the Parks Director, who in turn reports directly to the Montgomery County Planning Board.

In FY06, the Council appropriated \$9.6 million for the Montgomery County Park Police; personnel costs account for 92% of the approved budget. The FY06 budget funds positions for 95 sworn officer and 21 civilians.

The Park Police have primary law enforcement jurisdiction on property owned by M-NCPPC. The work of Park Police patrol officers is structured around preventing crime. Patrol officers routinely check parks to identify and intervene on public safety issues, e.g., criminal activity, suspected criminal activity, violations of park regulations, potentially dangerous activity, and unsafe park conditions. Patrol officers decide how often to visit specific parks and related facilities based on their knowledge of the park system, information from other officers, data from the Park Police crime analyst, and input from the community.

**PATTERNS OF CRIME ON PARK PROPERTY**

Park Police crime statistics evidence that few serious crimes occur on park property. Data on the number and types of crimes indicate that Montgomery County residents are able to enjoy the many amenities of our large and diverse park system without encountering much illegal activity.

The Park Police filed 828 reports of crime during 2005, of which 633 or 76% were classified as Part II offenses, such as non-aggravated assaults, vandalism, weapons possession, disorderly conduct, and possession of stolen property. The other 195 reports of crime during 2005 were classified as Part I offenses (more serious violent and property crimes); however, it is noteworthy that 159 or 82% of these Part I offenses were thefts.

The number of crimes reported by the Park Police varies by season, geography, day of the week, and time of the day. The number of crimes reported on park property is highest during the summer months when park use is heaviest, and relatively higher in the more densely populated areas of the County, e.g., Long Branch, Silver Spring, and Wheaton. The Park Police reported more crimes on Monday than on any other day of the week, a pattern which likely reflects acts of vandalism that occurred over a weekend being reported by park users and maintenance staff at the beginning of the work week.

Last year, Park Police patrol officers made arrests at 149 incidents. The number of arrest incidents varies by day of the week and time of day. The largest number of arrests by Park Police occurred on Saturdays when parks are most heavily used, and on Wednesdays when Park Police shifts overlap. Relatively more arrests occurred between 6:00 pm and 2:00 am; the smallest number of arrests occurred between 2:00 am to 8:00 am.

## **BUDGETING**

The Department of Parks does not have a cost accounting system that reports expenses paid by one division for the direct benefit of another division. As a result, the actual cost of operating the Park Police is greater than the \$9.6 million indicated in the Park Police section of the approved budget. For example, the Central Maintenance Division pays the cost of the maintenance and fuel for Park Police vehicles; and the cost of replacement vehicles is charged to a general Internal Service Fund. Other operating expenses, such as telephone charges and building maintenance, are charged to other sections in the Department, with no chargeback allocated to the Park Police budget.

## **COORDINATION WITH THE EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS CENTER**

The County's Emergency Communications Center (ECC) receives all 911 calls. A 1998 memorandum of understanding between the County Police and the Park Police requires the County ECC call takers to refer calls for assistance on park property to the Park Police.

While conducting this study, OLO learned that an indeterminate number of calls for assistance on park property are not referred to the Park Police because: (1) the County's computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system does not label all M-NCPPC sites as park property; and (2) there are times when an ECC dispatcher sends a County Police officer to an incident marked as occurring on park property instead of referring the call to the Park Police.

There is no evidence of any delays in emergency responses provided to incidents occurring on park property. However, the gaps in CAD labeling and ECC dispatch make it currently impossible to calculate the total requests for police service that emanate from park property.

## **MUTUAL AID AGREEMENT**

State law authorizes the Park Police and County Police to enter into a mutual aid agreement to define the Park Police's jurisdiction outside of park property and clarify the roles of each police department in areas of concurrent jurisdiction. As of this writing, representatives of the M-NCPPC and County Government are in the process of finalizing a mutual aid agreement. In the absence of a signed mutual aid agreement, the authority of the Park Police to take enforcement action outside of park property remains subject to interpretation. For example, last year, a judge dismissed a number of DUI charges filed by Park Police officers based on the lack of clarity about the officers' jurisdiction outside of park property.

## **PARK RANGER PROPOSAL**

The Planning Board's FY07 budget includes a proposal to create a Park Ranger program as a unit within the Park Police. The Board proposes funding the Park Ranger program by increasing Park Police lapse. The proposal describes the Park Rangers' primary responsibilities to include: providing information to park users; inspecting parks and reporting unsafe conditions; educating park users about park regulations; enforcing parking violations; resolving facility permit disputes; managing traffic at special events, and conducting nature education and conservation programs.

There are Park Ranger programs in nearby jurisdictions that are funded and supervised in the Parks Department. Common practices in other places include assigning Park Rangers to perform non-public safety functions, and changing the number of Park Rangers and assignments by season.

**ACTUAL PATROL COVERAGE**

The Park Police divide the County into seven geographical beats. To achieve 24/7 coverage of seven beats, the Park Police need seven officers on patrol per shift. Staffing records from 2005 show that, on average, there were only 5.1 officers on patrol during each shift. The Park Police deployed seven or more officers during 17% of all shifts. On average, patrol officers spend 69% of their shift hours on patrol, with the balance of their time spent on leave, in training, or occupied with other non-patrol functions. This percent is somewhat higher when the shift supervisor also performs patrol duties.

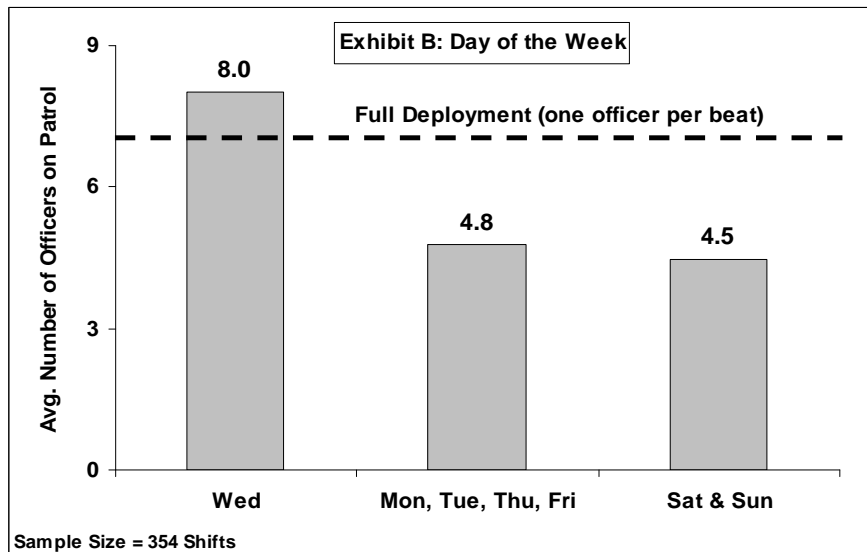
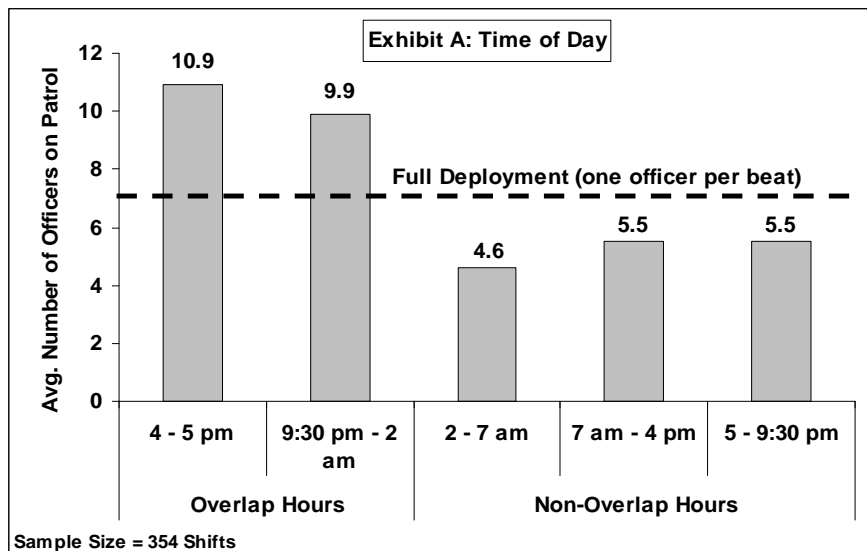
**PATROL SECTION STAFFING**

The Park Police have adjusted their deployment strategy to account for variations in crime by geography and time of day. The beat boundaries, as drawn and periodically adjusted, reflect the geographic variations in reported crime. For example, in 2003, the Park Police assigned more patrol officers to the Long Branch/Silver Spring area, where reported crimes are more highly concentrated.

The Park Police currently schedule two overlap time periods every 24 hours. (Exhibit A) One of these (9:30pm-2:00am) corresponds to the time of day when the largest number of arrest incidents occurs.

Park use and reported crimes on park property also vary by day of the week and season. As might be expected, there are more park users and more crime reported on weekends and during warmer weather months.

The Park Police have not adjusted their patrol officer deployment to reflect these variations. In fact, during 2005, there were relatively more officers on patrol on Wednesdays, and relatively fewer on weekends. (Exhibit B) With respect to seasonality, Park Police shift staffing levels remain essentially constant each month, with a similar number of officers on patrol per shift throughout the year.



## OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE PATROL OFFICER AVAILABILITY

A gap exists between the number of Park Police patrol officers needed for 24/7 beat coverage and the number of Patrol Section officers currently available. OLO identified potential options for using existing resources to increase the number of officers on patrol duty during peak period of park use. Exhibit C lists possible actions to increase the amount of time officers spend on patrol or to expand the number of officers available to serve on patrol. The actions focus on modifying current patrol shift schedules and the reassignment of officers from non-patrol sections.

### Exhibit C: Patrol Deployment Options

Temporarily or permanently assign officers from other sections to the Patrol Section.	Expand recruitment efforts to fill funded positions.
Hire civilians to perform certain non-patrol functions, and assign the officers currently in these positions to the Patrol Section.	Review all special detail assignments and assess which are higher priorities than keeping an officer on patrol.
When a Patrol Section officer is placed on light duty, temporarily switch his/her position with an officer who performs non-patrol duties.	Consider reducing patrol coverage during early morning hours to enhance officer availability during peak hours.
Require shift supervisors to perform more routine patrol duties concurrent with their supervisory responsibilities.	Make Saturday instead of Wednesday the permanent shift overlap day.
When a Patrol Section shift supervisor is unavailable, assign a platoon lieutenant or sergeant from a non-patrol section to serve as a substitute.	Adjust shift schedules to rotate overlap days from week to week.
	Create a new squad to work weekends during the summer and weekdays in the winter.
	Adjust special detail, training, and leave schedules to maximize patrol coverage during peak park use periods.

## OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT RECOMMENDATIONS

### OLO recommends the Council ask the Planning Board to:

1. Review the options listed in Exhibit C, and develop by September 15, 2006 a new Park Police staffing plan that uses existing resources to meet the following two core staffing objectives:
  - Maximize the number of shifts with at least one officer on patrol in each beat.
  - Maximize the total number of officers on patrol during peak periods of park use.
2. Work with County Government officials to expeditiously: (1) complete a mutual aid agreement; and (2) address data entry and training issues to assure that the ECC more consistently notifies the Park Police of all 911 requests for service on park property.
3. Develop a Park Police directive that defines procedures for conducting park checks.
4. Implement a program budgeting system that allows for more complete cost accounting of individual programs and other activities in the Department of Parks and Department of Planning, to include the Park Police.

### OLO recommends that the Council:

5. Consider the merits and funding for the Planning Board's FY 07 Park Ranger Proposal within the context of all park operations, including but not limited to the Park Police. If the Council decides to fund the Park Ranger program, OLO recommends an incremental approach to introducing the program, with funding contingent on development of a detailed multi-year work plan. Issues for the work plan to address include Park Rangers' deployment, authority, and specific activities; and strategies for coordinating Park Rangers with other Parks Department staff.

