

Survey gives police snapshot of service

By Jennifer Rios

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SAN ANGELO, Texas — San Angeloans have voiced their opinions, good and bad, and now the city's Police Department is digesting that information.

In January the department sought public input on how officers were doing their jobs, which services residents wanted and what safety concerns and fears they had.

After collecting about 1,100 online and handwritten surveys, Angelo State University's Community Wellness, Engagement and Development program completed an analytical report for the department.

What stood out was a positive citywide response to police satisfaction and a low perception of crime.

"I think it's a great way to grade ourselves," Police Chief Tim Vasquez said. "I think it's something we need to do."

Vasquez said he plans to use the results as a starting block for a database that gauges how perception changes over time. He, his assistant chiefs and lieutenants are planning on putting out more citywide surveys — possibly one a year. Smaller, more issue-specific surveys may be seen in the future.

He said the results were enlightening and have begun to shape the department's future. Talks with architects included making the desk officer more accessible to the public — something that residents had voiced concern over.

Other results, such as a positive reaction to police interaction, were pleasantly surprising.

"It's a morale booster," he said. "It reaffirms what we try to get across to our police officers. Our community is supportive of our Police Department."

The survey included 39 questions grouped into six categories that the department will use to evaluate and compare perception across neighborhoods. Categories include officer satisfaction, department satisfaction, significant concerns/issues, fears, essential services and crime prevention techniques.

Scores varied through the city's six districts, but the overall score was positive when it came to officer satisfaction. Questions covered officer competency, professionalism, respectfulness and whether someone was satisfied with the outcome of their contact with an officer.

Beat 30 — a southwest area of the city extending to Lake Nasworthy and including College Hills — had the highest rank with a score of 0.76.

Beat 35 — which encompasses an area from Washington Street to 19th Street and Main Street through downtown San Angelo — gave the lowest officer satisfaction score of 0.28.

Kenneth Stewart and Casey Jones, both with the WED Center, said the survey is an accurate representation of the city. They and Susan McLane, a student at ASU, conducted the survey. Each statement was given a score on a minus 1 to 1 scale, then organized by district into each category. From there, statements and categories were ranked and compared among the districts.

Drug-related crime was the top concern for residents, followed by burglary and violent crime, according to the report. Panhandling was the only item to receive a negative concern.

Of the nearly 1,100 surveys, 239 were paper surveys gathered mostly by West Texas Organizing Strategies, which went to neighborhoods underrepresented in the survey, including some in District 35.

Stewart and Jones broke down the 127 comments attached to the surveys and grouped them into three sections — negative comments, which received the fewest responses; positive comments; and a section that dealt with concerns, requests and suggestions, which received the most responses.

"I think the one thing our department knew, but really needed something to grasp on, was each area in our community requires different services and has different desires of how they want to be policed and what they want to be policed," Vasquez said.

Beat 33 — an area in north San Angelo from O.C. Fisher Reservoir to Bell Street — showed the highest concern for drug-related crime.

Vasquez said one area he wants to look more into is the fear index. While he was glad residents weren't very fearful of crime, that particular result could also mean that people could feel safe to the point that they neglect crime prevention.

Other questions, such as "the SAPD does not need improvement," also deserve further scrutiny, Vasquez and Assistant Chief Jeff Fant said. Based on comments, that question could have been interpreted in different ways.

A question asking if San Angelo needs more social programs, which scored the lowest in its category, could also have several meanings. Other questions in the category, asking whether the city needs more after-school youth activities or increased resident involvement, scored among the highest.

Fant said the department is looking at the questions to determine if they were worded precisely or answer what the department wanted to know — and at how to address crime concerns.

"We looked at it from 'what can we do more?' " he said. "Do we need to go in and do more study on specific types of crime?"



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