

Council aims for thinner blue line

COUNCIL: 100-officer goal

L.B.: City Manager Batts will examine report on efficiency in police department.

By Samantha Gonzaga
Staff writer

LONG BEACH — The City Council on Tuesday unanimously voted to have City Manager Anthony Batts and the Long Beach Police Department review an efficiency report on the department, which aims to find ways to add 100 more officers.

Batts and the LBPD are to return in 90 days, then six months and a year with strategies to implement the study's recommendations.

The study was initiated last fall by City Auditor Laura Doud. Batts participated in the process as police chief, a position he vacated when appointed to his current position July 3.

"It was very rewarding for us all," Batts said of the process and its findings.

Mayor Bob Foster has said that adding 100 more officers to the LBPD is one of his goals.

The recommendations were in four categories:

- "Civilianization" of administrative positions now held by sworn police officers by hiring civilian employees to fill them.

- Upgrading police department technology to reduce duplicate data entry.

- Examining fine enforcement. Doud said fines could be a poten-

tial source for revenue. The city collects about \$4.4 million in tickets, but about \$1 million goes uncollected, she told council members.

- Redeployment, which suggests moving officers to either higher-priority calls and temporary assignment to other departments or from investigations to patrol; cycling non-patrol officers such as detectives to patrol duty; possibly cutting back on overtime costs through temporary reassignments; and reviewing whether specialized units could be cut.

The police department in its response to this recommendation said reassigning the 10 detectives — who are already handling tremendous caseloads — would "exacerbate an already difficult situation."

"You flex their hours, and you can't sustain that," Police Chief Robert Luna said.

Furthermore, said Luna, any change in working conditions would require working with the police union.

According to the study, overtime accounts for \$12 million of the LBPD's \$169.5 million budget, which in turn accounts for more than 45 percent of the city's general fund budget.

Steve James, president of the Long Beach Police Union, said police overtime needs to be regarded differently.

"Our overtime is not like overtime everywhere else," he said.

Police overtime is accrued when officers have late arrests, put in for court time and have "reactionary overtime" in response to situations such as school shootings.

Overtime "tends to go up when we have more officers," James said.

Some council members were hesitant regarding some of the recommendations, such as sending police cadets — those in a four-year program for college students interested in law enforcement careers — to low-priority calls.

"I really have some questions about that," said 4th District Councilman Patrick O'Donnell, "safety questions."

Batts said cadets would not be dispatched to calls that involve suspects.

Council members also had suggestions of their own.

O'Donnell expressed interest in selling two of the LBPD's helicopters and purchasing instead two smaller models, as well as adding more harbor truck enforcement at the port.

Eighth District Councilwoman Rae Gabelich said she would like to see staffing at police substations past 5 p.m., while Vice Mayor Bonnie Lowenthal questioned whether placing more "boots" on vehicles in the city's most parking-impacted areas would only worsen the problem.

The recommendations put forth by the study aren't firm, Doud said.