

# Can LA Afford to be Safe?

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LA WATCHDOG--At the Tuesday morning meeting of the City Council's Public Safety Committee, Police Chief Charlie Beck told Mitch Englander and his fellow committee members that our Police Department needed to beef up its ranks to 12,500 officers by 2020 to "most effectively protect the City and keep crime down."

But there was no discussion about the cost of adding 2,500 officers, not an insignificant issue since the City is anticipating years of red ink as a result of the budget busting contract with the City's civilian workers.

Over the next four years, the City is expected to have a cumulative deficit of over \$400 million. This does not include any additional funds to fund the proposed homeless initiative, the hiring of 5,000 new civilian workers as outlined in the new labor contract with the civilian workers (some of which will replace retiring employees), or the repair and maintenance of our lunar cratered streets.

Assuming that the LAPD could increase the size of the department to 12,500 officers and an all in cost (including pension contributions and healthcare benefits) of \$100,000 a year for the new hires, the four year budget deficit would

increase by over \$600 million, resulting in a \$1 billion shortfall over the next four years.

However, it is highly unlikely that the LAPD will be able to hit the 12,500 officer target by 2020 as many experienced veterans will be retiring. This is compounded by the LAPD's difficulty in attracting qualified recruits given its poor reputation relative to other law enforcement agencies.

The LAPD has the difficult mission of maintaining public safety. It also has to report to the Police Commission and the City Council who often second guess the Department, relying on their 20-20 hindsight, especially now the crime rate has spiked and there have been some unfortunate killings of civilians.

The Police Department is also a large, complex organization with almost 14,000 sworn and civilian employees and a budget, including all related costs, of almost \$2.6 billion, an amount that may be understated because of all the recent liability claims that have contributed to this year's budget deficit of almost \$100 million. The department also needs almost \$300 million over the next five years to replace old equipment.

As with any large, complex organization, the most important factor is management and its ability to develop and implement a strategy and communicate with its constituency. But that seems to be lacking at our Police Department as Chief Charlie Beck is under fire by the Department's union and many members of the minority communities.

That includes many voters who remember his threat that a "minimum of 500 officers that patrol our neighborhoods will be laid off and our historically low crime rates may be in danger" unless the voters approved Proposition A, the proposed permanent half cent increase in our sales tax. Of course, shortly after Proposition A was rejected by 55% of the voters in March of 2013, Mayor Villaraigosa announced that there would be no layoffs.

The Police Department cannot afford to increase the size of the police force to 12,500 officers unless there is a sizeable tax increase that will most likely be in the range of \$500 million. This equates to a 10% increase in our real estate taxes or a 1% increase in our sales tax. But Chief Charlie Beck does not have the necessarily credibility with the voters which would result in another failed ballot measure.

Maybe it is time for Chief Charlie Beck to retire.

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