

EL DORADO COUNTY GRAND JURY 2019-2020



PLACERVILLE CITY POLICE FACILITY

CASE 19-01 • MAY 1, 2020

Public Release

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PLACERVILLE CITY POLICE FACILITY *CITIZENS DESERVE BETTER*

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The El Dorado County Grand Jury investigated the City of Placerville Police Department facility to determine its adequacy for modern police operations. In the opinion of the Grand Jury, the facility needs major renovation or replacement.

BACKGROUND

There are three police entities in El Dorado County - the El Dorado County Sheriff and the police departments for Placerville and South Lake Tahoe. Each have separate law enforcement facilities.

The El Dorado County 2000-2001 Grand Jury investigated the working conditions at the Sheriff's Office. They found numerous deficiencies and determined the existing facility was inadequate. The 2015-2016 Grand Jury again inspected the Sheriff's Office and again found the physical working environment substandard and in need of replacement.

In 2019, construction was completed on a new County Sheriff's Office. A Grand Jury tour while still under construction provided an understanding and appreciation for the requirements of a modern law enforcement facility. While the Sheriff's facility is obviously larger than would be needed for a small city, it served as a baseline when evaluating the Placerville police facility.

The Placerville facility was last investigated by the 2006-2007 Grand Jury. It was found to be outdated and inadequate and made numerous recommendations for improvement.

METHODOLOGY

DOCUMENT REVIEW

- Previous Grand Jury reports regarding county law enforcement facilities
- Findings of a Grand Jury consultant
- *Police Facility Guidelines: A Desk Reference for Law Enforcement Executives*¹
- 2014 Placerville Police Department's needs assessment²

SITE VISITS

- New El Dorado County Sheriff's Office while under construction
- The Placerville Police Department
- Retoured the Placerville Police Department with consultant

¹ The International Association of Chiefs (See attachments below)

² WLC Architects, Folsom, California

INTERVIEWS

- Placerville Police Department officials
- City of Placerville appointed and elected officials
- El Dorado County Sheriff's Office personnel
- Grand jury consultant trained and familiar with the requirements for a modern police facility
- El Dorado County Facilities Department representative

DISCUSSION

*Police Facility Guidelines: A Desk Reference for Law Enforcement Executives*³ reports the useful life of a police facility can range from 20 to over 50 years. It also states:

Most police facilities continue to operate well past the planned life span. They often become seriously overcrowded, suffer from a lack of sufficient infrastructure (HVAC, electrical, data, telecommunication) and make due [sic] with outdated security and safety systems. These conditions often impair staff efficiency and morale, occupant safety, policing effectiveness and public perception of the department.

The Placerville Police Department facility is over 42 years old; built in 1978. The Grand Jury was unable to determine the expected life span of the building when it was built. It was constructed as a city public safety center housing both the police and fire departments. Later, the fire department was annexed to the El Dorado County Fire Protection District and vacated its part of the building allowing the police department to expand. However, the large garage bay continues to house two large fire apparatus. In 2014 WLC Architects conducted an updated needs assessment for the Placerville Police Department concluding a required renovation of the facility would cost approximately \$4.5 million. Over the years, police department staff and community volunteers have made cosmetic improvements to the building's interior. Recently, the City purchased a vacant lot adjacent to the existing building which could accommodate expansion.

Placerville officials acknowledge the facility's inadequacies and recognize its renovation or replacement as a top City priority. However, funding remains a major obstacle. Funding streams such as grants or low interest loans have not been explored. All agreed the Police Department's current location is adequate, providing easy access to the downtown area, upper Broadway and Highway 50.

The Grand Jury's overall impression of the building is that despite being well maintained, there are numerous deficiencies.

³ The International Association of Chiefs (See attachments below)

Facility Exterior

The exterior of the facility is monitored by video cameras, but there appear to be gaps in the coverage. It can also be viewed from homes atop an adjacent hill, posing a possible security risk. While there is no apparent and reasonable solution, it is possible there may be efforts that could mitigate the risk.

There is a fenced parking lot behind the facility that is viewable from a public street. The bicycles stored there, indeed all property stored there, require a proper and secure storage area protected from the elements. There is not enough secure staff or visitor parking.

Facility Interior

The facility is of an older design having a cramped interior with narrow hallways, noticeable lack of natural light, restricted workspaces and lack of adequate storage. Usage to overcapacity leaves no space for future expansion. The water faucet in the hallway did not work.

Recorded surveillance cameras do not cover critical areas inside the facility. The small lobby is unsecured. While staff reported the public window to be ballistic glass, it does not appear to have been updated to maintain resistant properties. In addition, they do not believe some areas of the surrounding walls provide ballistic protection. There is no community meeting room and only one interview room, limiting the ability to interview multiple suspects and witnesses. There is no interview room where the public can make a private report to an officer and no *soft* interview room suitable for interviewing juvenile witnesses or victims.

There is a need for suitable press conference space, especially in the case of a major incident. Conference and briefing rooms lack teleconferencing capabilities necessary for modern law enforcement training and interagency meetings. The break room is too small to allow staff interaction to promote knowledge sharing and problem solving. The investigations office, adjacent to the apparatus bay, is separated from other police functions, hindering effective communication between detective and patrol officers.

The dispatch area needs additional space for an adequate break room, restrooms and the ability to upgrade to modern dispatch equipment and consoles. The community service officer's space does not have enough storage and the sergeant's office lacks space for expansion.

Electrical

Electrical equipment and the technology server share a single room with a partial wall dividing them. The lack of complete separation poses a possible code compliance issue. There are not enough electrical outlets to charge required electrical devices posing a fire hazard if existing outlets become overloaded. The facility has an emergency generator. It is not known if an uninterrupted power supply system was present to power critical technology in the event of generator failure.

Technology

There was exposed technology cabling and further expansion may be a challenge.

Evidence Areas

The undersized and confining evidence processing room makes handling evidence by two or more officers simultaneously a challenge. Additional counter space would be beneficial, creating more efficient handling of large or hazardous items. The evidence storage area, while currently providing enough space, may prove inadequate considering increasing evidence retention requirements.

Locker Rooms and Exercise Area

Lockers in the male locker room are too small to stow all the equipment required by modern police officers. They lack electrical outlets for securely charging electronic devices. There are no racks for drying wet clothing. The female locker room is in a restroom in a different part of the facility. Female lockers have the same deficiencies as those in the male locker room, including insufficient size for proper storage of required uniforms and equipment. The locker and rest rooms should be separated.

The exercise area is in the apparatus bay. It does not have enough space for the circuit type training now recommended for law enforcement personnel. It lacks proper heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

FINDINGS

F1. The Placerville Police Department facility is inadequate for modern police operations and requires funding for extensive renovation or replacement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. Placerville should have a professional space and facilities needs study completed with cost estimates for a new or renovated police facility.

R2. Placerville should explore funding options for the renovation or replacement of the current police facility.

R3. Placerville should move expeditiously to renovate or replace their current police facility.

ATTACHMENT

POLICE FACILITY GUIDELINES: A DESK REFERENCE FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT EXECUTIVES.

<https://www.hsd.org/?view&did=479722>

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

This Grand Jury report is an account of an investigation or review. It contains findings and recommendations, and names those who should respond to each finding and each recommendation pertaining to matters under the respondent's control.

Please review *Responding to a Grand Jury Report*, a separate document included with this report.

Responses are required in accordance with California Penal Code §933 and §933.05.

- **Responses to F1, and R1, R2 and R3 are required from the Placerville City Council.**