



New Policing Pilot in Nightlife Districts: Providence, RI

Deployment Style Improves Public Safety at Bar Closing Time

In Providence, R.I., a Roving Police Detail was designed and piloted in two entertainment districts to address safety concerns including, but not limited to, public drinking, underage drinking, loud music and disorderly conduct and to effectuate safe clearing of streets at bar closing time. Prior to the pilot, police were paid by licensees to create a safety presence; however their role was limited to monitoring the establishments' doors. Expanding the security details' reach led to measurable positive results.

Problem Statement

Providence R.I., one of America's oldest cities, is entering a Renaissance of its downtown and nightlife. With two vibrant entertainment districts hosting nightclub capacity of 10,000, managing crowds and their impacts challenged limited police staff, resulting in injuries and drawing police personnel from other neighborhoods.

When complaints of late-night crowds outside of clubs creating disturbances and impacts on resident safety and quality of life reached a peak, it was clear a new style of policing and resource allocation was needed to monitor parking lots, alleys and entertainment venues, reroute and direct traffic congestion, and cite people engaging in nuisance behaviors and unlawful activity including underage drinking, DUI, parties in parking lots, music from cars, property damage and fights.

Stakeholders

Providence Police Department provided a Roving Police Detail and captured statistics to measure effectiveness. Downtown Improvement District, as co-chair of the HRP, acted as a convener for the early sub-committee meetings, where-in the pilot program idea was brainstormed. Providence Hospitality Resource Partnership (RHP) is an alliance of business, government and safety, and community and neighborhood coalition representatives who work together to promote responsible hospitality principles and practices. Mayor's Substance Abuse Prevention Council had federal funding to do an alcohol environment assessment that included building capacity for comprehensive environmental strategies with bars and police to combat heavy episodic drinking and identification of risk factors related to 21 and under-aged population. Providence Night Clubs, though already assessed

for police details that monitor safety at the venues' door, compromised to self-assess and gain greater security for the overall positive perception of the District. Rhode Island Independent Higher Education Association and Providence Colleges and Universities supported and funded the entire fall pilot. Downtown Neighborhood Alliance and Downtown Merchants Association wrote letters to Council supporting the Ordinance.

Process

In 2006, RHI was invited by the Downtown Improvement District to conduct a Hospitality Zone Assessment in Providence. Observations and recommendations were based on input by stakeholders from four focus groups and RHI expertise. While bars paid for additional police details, they were limited to covering the establishments' doors. While the majority of disturbances were in parking lots and alleys, they were often attributed to the nightclubs.

The RHP prioritized their six month action plan and determined the highest priority was improving policing strategies and ensuring safe and efficient clearing of streets at closing time.

As part of their implementation plan, the RHP broke into four subcommittees and it was agreed that safety strategies took priority. Police were getting hurt in the entertainment district. They were understaffed and often had to draw officers from other neighborhoods, potentially putting those neighborhoods at risk.

In late winter of 2006, the idea for piloting a roving patrol that could address some of the safety gaps was introduced. In March funding needs had been outlined. The goal of the pilot program was to test the effectiveness of a Roving Police Detail in the Downtown and Jewelry District neighborhoods.

From May 25th-June 16th the roving detail consisted of ten officers that patrolled the district at large, including parking lots and alleys where many of the problems were known to occur.

After reviewing the effectiveness of the first pilot program, the Roving Police Detail was increased to twelve officers from September 1-October 6, 2007. The two additional officers monitored club capacity issues in the Jewelry District throughout the evening and assisted the traffic flow in the district at the end of the night.

Based on the success of the first two pilots, the roving detail was extended for an additional six weeks through funding provided by the Mayor's Substance Abuse Prevention Council.

Residents, club owners, police, ambulance drivers and patrons all deemed the three pilots a success. The number and type of arrests attest to the potential safety risks had adequate police coverage not been present. Closing time was quieter. Traffic congestion was reduced, and time it took to clear the district drastically improved.

It was decided that permanent implementation of the patrol should be sought and an ordinance should be drafted. The proposed ordinance required City Council and Board of

Licenses approval to establish a permanent roving police detail. The ordinance would permit 10-20 officers, 3 of which would be supplied at the Police Departments' expense, to staff the detail. The remaining officers would be supported through fees imposed through the Board of License on BX, EDX and N license holders. The fees would be prorated according to the capacity of establishments.

A hotly debated issue was whether or not the parking lots should be included in the assessment. Twenty five percent of underage drinking and felony arrests were located in parking lots. The prevailing practice was to staff the parking lot until full, then staff would leave the lot unsupervised. In the end it was decided that parking lots would not be included in the assessment, but would be enforced more. The Licensing Division of the Police Department would monitor them closely for violating laws already in existence which required parking lots to be supervised.

The ordinance provides for an annual review by Board of Licensees and an annual report required by the Police Department outlining costs.

The proposed ordinance was drafted and presented to the Hospitality Resource Partnership. Their feedback led to amendments and full support prior to presenting to the Ordinance Committee on November 13, 2007, then to the full City Council on December 6th.

The proposed ordinance was sent back to the Ordinance Committee and was referred to the Solicitor's office to determine if the city had the right to create this type of ordinance and the legality of the licensing board collecting the proposed fee. The proposed ordinance is pending ordinance committee revote in the RHI Leadership Summit Case Study - 24 April 4, 2008 near future.

Outcome

- Roving Patrol Pilot applied to 15 weekends for a total of 31 days in May, June and September through November 2007.
- 39 arrests for underage drinking, 5 for DUIs, 3 for possession of alcohol, 4 for felony assault, 35 for disorderly conduct, 133 citations for loud music, 3,565 parking tickets.
- Traffic rerouted to prevent congestion and increase pedestrian safety at closing time.
- Parking lots identified as a risk factor to underage drinking.
- Improved time and quality of clearing crowds from district.
- Ordinance proposing permanent roving detail funded through license holders is pending Council vote.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Getting everyone to compromise a little. Residents wanted complete peace and quiet. Property owners only wanted clean businesses. Parking lots didn't think they should have to pay the assessment. Club owners didn't want to pay more on top of the police detail they paid to cover their doors.

Jurisdiction

Business Districts, City

Funding

First Pilot (May-June 2007) cost \$9,292 and was funded by Mayor's Substance Abuse Prevention, Downtown Improvement District/Providence Foundation, Donations from Nightclubs, Jewelry District Neighborhood Association; Conrad Building Residents. Second Pilot (September-October 2007) cost \$17,916, and was funded by donations of \$3,000 each by University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, Brown University, Johnsons and Wales University, Providence College and Rhode Island School of Design. Third Pilot (October-November 2007) cost \$17,916 and was funded exclusively by the Mayor's Substance Abuse Prevention Council.

Spin-off Projects

Planning for data collection methods including GIS mapping.

Start Date: 2/1/2007 - 5/19/2008

Contact

Dean Esserman