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RPD Strategic Plan with Cpt Smyrnos

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DURATION

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4 SPEAKERS

Katie

Steve

Captain Chris Smyrnos

Speaker4

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:05] Katie

I'm Katie.

[00:00:06] Steve

And I'm Steve, and this is the City of Redding podcast.

[00:00:09] Katie

Today we connect with Captain Chris Smirnovs of the Redding Police Department regarding the new RPD Strategic Plan. This strategic plan represents a comprehensive and focused, centered approach to public safety, community engagement, and crime prevention and Redding. It outlines the department's goals and priorities for the coming years and reflects a commitment to transparency, innovation and collaboration.

[00:00:28] Steve

This plan not only helps RPD track and measure goals and outcomes, but lets the community know where they will focus their efforts in the next three years. The overall result will help the department reflect on challenges and successes over time to better serve the community.

[00:00:41] Katie

In this episode, we'll explore the key components of the strategic plan, what it means for the residents of Redding, and how it aims to enhance the safety and quality of life for everyone in our community. We'll also discuss the process of developing this plan and the role that community input played in shaping its priorities.

[00:00:57] Captain Chris Smyrnos

My name is Captain Chris Smyrnos. I've been with the Redding Police Department since November of 2003, so I'm coming up on 21 years with the city. My current assignment is a captain, so I oversee the field operations division of the Running Police Department. Field operations is all of the really what you see when the uniform patrol officers out on the street, those are part of field operations. Our traffic unit, our school resource officers, uh, really were the the heart and soul of the police department is in field operations because that's the the largest division by far that we have and also the busiest because it's the first responders responding to calls, responding to traffic collisions, um, responding to incidents in progress. Our neighborhood police unit, this part of field operations, our downtown bike team, our park rangers, all of the folks that you see in uniform, out in the field doing the work of a police department, typically fall under the field operations Division. Thank you for joining us, Captain Smyrnis.

[00:01:53] Steve

And thank you for all that you and the team do.

[00:01:55] Captain Chris Smyrnos

For our community.

[00:01:56] Steve

I know we're all really appreciative, so thank you for that. Today we're talking about the recently released Redding Police Department Strategic Plan. Get a little bit of background about what the plan is, why it's important for the department, what it consists of and how that might shape what RPD looks like and does over the next few years. So maybe we could just start with that. Why is it important that the Redding Police Department has a strategic plan?

[00:02:16] Captain Chris Smyrnos

The strategic plan really is a it's a collaborative document that's not just created by the police department in a vacuum. We have a lot of stakeholders that gave some input, and we can chat about that a little bit further. But I think at a high level, the purpose of a strategic plan is to outline the goals, objectives and priorities for our department over a specific time frame. And so in speaking with Chief Brian Barner, when he wanted to when he came in as a new chief, he really wanted us to have a strategic plan. So we knew as a department with when we have officers coming to us, as you know, leaders saying, what do I need to be working on? What are the priorities of the department? Then we had something that we could share, both internally we could share with the public if the public ever wants to know, okay, what is what is the department working on? Where are we at now? Where are we trying to go and how are we trying to get there? The strategic plan really is the document that describes those efforts. It describes our the main areas of focus that we feel are the most important that we need to be addressing. And then it describes the specific steps that we over the next three years are going to take to try to meet those goals and objectives.

[00:03:20] Captain Chris Smyrnos

The other part about a strategic plan that's neat is that it really is a living document. So as we meet our goals, they can be updated and changed. If we need to tweak them for, let's say we get a year in and certain goals and objectives we meet, and we're comfortable that those have been satisfied, then we can pivot and see what else do we need to be working on? Or if we're not meeting our goals or if things are not working as we expected, we can also, we can take a step back, look at what we're doing and look at what we need to adjust, and then publish an update to the document. And so it's designed it's also designed to be very, very consumable in that we didn't like. Part of this process was we researched and looked at strategic plans from a lot of different agencies and entities within the state of California, and we found some that were super, super basic and didn't have very much at all. And we found some that were, you know, 70, 80 page documents that just had a lot of language in them. And so we wanted our plan to be something that is it's easy to digest.

[00:04:16] Captain Chris Smyrnos

It's simple, but it really does get at the core of what we are, what we as a department are trying to do and how we really fit into the community and what our or what our enforcement priorities are, and also what we're doing. It covers a lot of different areas. We talk about, like the health and wellness of our officers. We talk about our recruiting and retention of our staff, in addition to more like field directed enforcement priorities. So it really does cover the gamut of what we as a department want to be working on over the next three years. We've also been one of the things that we do is we test for when we have an opening for a special assignment, like in our traffic unit or in detectives or these other areas of our department, we're asking officers questions in these interviews that we're having. We're talking about the strategic plan. We're talking about the plan in our shift briefings, the expectations that we give our staff. We really want this plan to be an integral part of the day to day operations of our department. We want it to be something that people reference often, and that way we're all as an agency, collectively working together to meet these goals and objective and get where we want to be.

[00:05:22] Katie

The strategic plan has, as you mentioned, some very specific goals in it. How did you, as a department, come up with those goals in the Redding area? How did you identify these areas as things that were goals for you and was there? Was there any community input in that process?

[00:05:38] Captain Chris Smyrnos

Essentially, the way that we started it was we as a our leadership team here within the department, we came up with what we felt needed to be our goals and priorities. So we wanted at least have a springboard to start from. And this is based on not just in a vacuum of our own experiences, but we we talked to a lot of community members. We speak at a lot of community events. There's a lot of feedback that comes through the chief's office and to the captains and lieutenants, just in our day to day interactions with members of the community. So we came up with an initial set of what we felt were okay. This is where we want to start with the strategic plan. Rather than having a complete blank slate, we at least said, hey, we know that traffic enforcement is important. We know that the wellness of our staff is important. We know that illegal encampments and transit related issues are important. So we came up with this framework, but then we really wanted to make sure that we had buy in and involvement from our community, from our department, from other city leaders and so forth. And so with that initial super basic framework, we ended up back in February. We held two community meetings and we presented the goals, the basically the pillars, if you will, that we'd identified that were our main areas of focus.

[00:06:48] Captain Chris Smyrnos

But we asked the community members that came, this is what we've identified, but we need to know from you. Where are we at? Are these important to you? Are we? Maybe they are. Maybe we're on on the right path or what are we missing? And then we asked for. So we asked for that feedback within the are we in the on the right track with the goals and objectives that we have. And then within these goals and objectives like what are what are your what are the priorities for the for our community members? And then the way we the way that we ran the community meetings was we had a subject matter expert from the department within each of the areas attend the meeting, and they got to do a presentation as to, hey, this is why traffic enforcement is important. These are some of the stats that go along with that. And we presented that to our community members and then received feedback on, hey, that this is great. But then did you think about this, did you consider this factor over here? And so in those meetings that helped us really refine the primary goals that we set and make sure that we were on the right path. And I think by and large, we were. But we did receive really good feedback from our community members in those meetings that helped us refine those goals and even think of things that we hadn't thought of ourselves, which was the main reason we wanted to have those meeting.

[00:08:00] Captain Chris Smyrnos

From there, we took all that information and then we sent it out to our. We had our leadership team review the community feedback. And then we sent it out to our department, said, hey, police department like our internal employees. Like this is what we've come up with based on the leadership team in the community. What do you guys think? We wanted their feedback and we got really good feedback from our internal staff. As far as the where the goals were and the individual items within those goals that helped us refine the plan even further. We had a our First Citizen Academy as we held that recently, and we presented an advanced copy of the strategic plan to the members of our Citizen Academy and allowed them to weigh in on and provide their input. And then it went to our city leadership as well, where we got additional input. So there's been a lot of hands have been involved in the process. Like I said, we started just with the kind of the super basic what we felt was important, but through the community department leaders within our community and then other leaders within the city, we really refined the plan to what it is today.

[00:09:01] Steve

Maybe now's a good time to go ahead and dive into the plan itself. There's six key goals within the strategic plan. The first one would be an organizational wellness. Maybe we could talk a little bit about within organizational wellness, what specific wellness programs or resources are being introduced to support.

[00:09:15] Captain Chris Smyrnos

The.

[00:09:16] Steve

Officer's mental health and overall well-being?

[00:09:18] Captain Chris Smyrnos

Yeah. And I want to note that it's actually we identified and made this our first goal intentionally, and that was based on feedback that we received from our staff. The job of policing is more difficult than I'm able to explain in a conversation like this. And it's one of those things where until you actually sit in the car or sit in the chair and go do it, it's hard to explain to somebody what it's like. We police officers are exposed repeatedly to trauma almost on a daily basis, and have to find positive ways and outlets to process that trauma with changes in the retirement system that were made about ten, ten, 11 years ago. Many people have to work until if they want the full benefit of retirement, they have to work until they're 57 years old, when some people start in their early 20s. So you're talking a 35 plus year career of not only we focus so much on, like officer safety and tactics and firearm proficiency and defensive tactics with handcuffing and all those other things. But what tools and resources are giving our officers to survive mentally over that long of a time span, when they're exposed to everything that the police and police officers are exposed to on a daily basis? And so organizational wellness for us really has become a part of our culture.

[00:10:34] Captain Chris Smyrnos

We have a very involved peer support team that is they're very active as far as just being a resource for our people when they have when they're struggling with different issues, because police officers are human beings and we go through the same things everybody else does. Officers go through financial difficulties or losses within families or divorces or other. And just again, it's just it's life that happens. And we want to make sure that we're providing resources for people to deal with these things that come up in a positive way. And so the peer support program is a really big part of that. Basically, we have trained officers that are able to be mentors and peer support resources. If somebody is struggling with something in their personal life, we can assign them to a peer support resource, and that person is just their liaison and helps them get connected with services and things that can be helpful for them. If confidential, they don't report back to leadership. As far as this person, they this is what's going on in their personal life. We just want we just want these resources to be available to our our staff so they know that they aren't alone. And it's okay to seek help when they need to. Another big thing that we're doing is we have implemented mandatory mental health evaluations with a therapist for all of our sworn staff.

[00:11:47] Captain Chris Smyrnos

And that's really important because number one, we make it mandatory. So all our staff has to go, which also I think helps to reduce the stigma of if I need to go seek, you know, therapy, then I'm not tough. Or there's there's often a stigma that's associated with seeking mental health related treatment. And so by making it mandatory, all our staff has to go. And we actually the way we started it was all of our leadership went first. So the chiefs, the captains, lieutenants and sergeants like we we went first and we we showed hopefully showed our staff that, hey, this is important. It's so important that we're going to do it as well. This is not something that we're just telling all of our folks that they need to do. This is something that we all need to do, and I think it's been a fantastic resource. And again, it helps to remove some of the stigma of seeking mental health treatment. It is okay to not be okay. And that wellness component again in in helping our officers have the resources and tools they need to deal with the trauma, the difficult things that are exposed to all the time, I think is so incredibly critical for our staff.

[00:12:45] Captain Chris Smyrnos

And again, that's why we made this our number one goal within the strategic plan. And so there's other things that we've done. There's a mobile app that we now provide that has a significant amount of resources for all sorts of things that come up in your life and financial diet, health, exercise. This also is available to spouses of officers, and it's also available to our retired officers. It's a program that we signed up for. And again, I think just from a cultural perspective, we really emphasize wellness and making sure that our officers are taken care of and treated well. If you have officers that are mentally healthy, they're going to make better decisions in the field. They're going to have less likelihood of injury. Both mental health related injuries and physical injuries. You're going to have officers that want to be more involved and engaged within their assignments and within the community, and by really pushing this and having it be built into our culture, it really benefits the department as a whole and also benefits the community. So that's what we mean at Golden number one. And that's why it as important and that we as an agency field, just so critical to make sure that we're doing this.

[00:13:51] Steve

When Captain Smith's, you touched on my next question that I was curious about with regard to the stigma around mental health that seems to be changing over the last five plus years at this point. But I would imagine historically, prior to departments and agencies, others really prioritized mental health. Like you mentioned, it's happening now. I imagine historically that was not always the case. Maybe mental health wasn't taken as seriously as it should have been or as it is now. How has that changed? Maybe looking at past strategic plans to this one?

[00:14:17] Captain Chris Smyrnos

When I started, it was a much different culture. It was you suck it up, you deal with. Yeah, there's a lot of nasty stuff that you see, but you just have to be able to be tough and deal with it. And hopefully you find a positive outlet that's not substance abuse or other other kind of negative things that can be detrimental to your long term health. For me personally, I always found that exercise and having friends and connections outside of law enforcement were really critical to help keep you grounded. But this really with the emphasis that we're putting on it now, it really does normalize. I think, again, that the mental health aspect and ensuring that, like I said, our officers receive a high level of care so they can go out there and be effective when you're out at work in the street and you're handling calls and doing your thing, if you have all these other things kicking around in your head that are bugging you, it's going to be it's going to be harder to be effective when you're out there. And so really treating that and ensuring, like I said, that our officers have the tools and resources they need to address those mental health concerns really is important for the overall health of the department and and for our standing within the community.

[00:15:21] Speaker4

Let's dive into goal number two, which is illegal encampment and transient related crime. Maybe you can walk us through that goal. How are you addressing that in the community?

[00:15:31] Captain Chris Smyrnos

Yeah, and I think that's a really big one, because when we had our community meetings from our community members, that was far and away the most significant area of focus that our community members felt was important on both sides. Obviously, we have people that are affected by transit related issues with our within our business community, within our folks that are shopping in grocery stores and seeing all the different impacts that that can have. We had people that in our community meetings that showed up. There was one one individual whose daughter is homeless and who suffers from, I believe, either drug or mental health issues. And so there's definitely stakeholders on both sides of that issue. So and it's really complex it the police department has a role to play, but we are definitely not the only stakeholder that's involved in dealing with illegal encampment and transient related issues. For us, our approach as outlined in the strategic plan, really deals with not I mean, enforcement is one aspect of what we do, but really working with the community, working with our community members and our the other, the resources that are out there, we have a lot of resources that we've dedicated to dealing with this issue and things that are that are somewhat related. For example, we have our crisis intervention response team, where they will respond if somebody is suffering from a like a mental health related issue, but they also do outreach and they go into camps and try to connect people with housing and with services and trying to get people, especially people that suffer from mental health condition, because somebody that suffers from a mental health condition, they know they may self-medicate with drugs or alcohol.

[00:17:09] Captain Chris Smyrnos

And then so how do you break that cycle? And how do you get people into services, into a point where they can follow, follow through with the care that they need to really get them into a better place and have a more positive outcome? And so we have our park rangers, they work in the parks, and they also deal with a lot of that population that may camp in the park or may set up shop in the park. And so they also try to connect people with resources. Same with our downtown bike team and our neighborhood policing it and all these different units that we have. Our focus really is on trying to get people connected to resources and services and get them out of the situation that they're in. However, if people refuse to take the services or refuse to to try to better themselves and get out of the spot that they're in, then enforcement is an option and is something that we do prioritize here at the department because we want to give. We don't want to be so heavy handed that we just walk in there and all of a sudden, it's okay, we're signing, you get out of here and not trying to help people get where they need to be.

[00:18:07] Captain Chris Smyrnos

But for people that have chosen to not take advantage of the services that are being offered, then we will enforce the laws and the tools that we have to alleviate the issue, because nobody wants to show up to their business with human waste on their front doorstep. Nobody wants to be accosted in a grocery store when they're trying to shop with their kids by, you know, somebody that's, you know, stealing or fighting or doing other things. And it really does affect a lot of different areas of our city. But I think that and if you look through the strategic plan, we really do focus on leveraging partnerships with other community resources and service organizations for the purposes of outreach and trying to trying to, like I said, get get people that are suffering from homelessness, get them help, get them off the street, get them into housing, get them mental health resources, drug counseling, resources. There's resources for veterans that are available. But at the end of the day, that's really it comes down to a personal choice. And if somebody chooses not to take advantage of that, then the next tool that we have in our belt is enforcement. And so we really, in this strategic plan, wanted to outline our emphasis on the community engagement piece of it, but also know that enforcement is a is a facet of what we do.

[00:19:18] Speaker4

And this one maybe more than the other goals, it feels like one that's harder to quantify. Like, how do you, as a department, plan to follow up on this goal specifically and say, yeah, we're hitting our metrics here, or we made progress here because much like California at large is seeing this problem in cities all over the West Coast. Really, how do you plan on measuring the success of this goal specifically?

[00:19:42] Captain Chris Smyrnos

Yeah, it is very it can be very difficult to quantify our care CIA teams and our teams that are out there. They do keep some statistics of the contacts that they make and the context in which they make those contacts, like the number of camps they post and those sorts of things. But really, this one's going to be much more probably as we receive feedback from the community and perceptions on the community, from the community. I think that's how we're going to have to gauge this one moving forward. I think this one is not as easy for us to say. Our traffic enforcement goal. We say, hey, we have a goal to reduce traffic collisions by a certain percent, or DUI drivers by a certain percent. Those are much easier to measure. This one is much harder because we can do like a point in time survey that counts. We try to figure out how many people, the homeless people we have in our community, but those are that's only good for that point in time, and that can change drastically depending on the weather and the seasons and the availability of services. And there's so many different facets to it that it really can be hard to measure. I think for us, this particular goal is going to be one that we're always working on. What I will in my role in field operations, since I oversee the special services unit in which most of those folks work in, like neighborhood police unit and CERT and everything else, really, the emphasis to them is going to be you need to make sure that we are leveraging our community resources, make sure we're out there when we're going to these camps, that we're providing outreach assistance or providing resources.

[00:21:03] Captain Chris Smyrnos

And so I think that it's really ensuring that they continue to emphasize those, those parts of their job when they're out there in the field. But as far as measuring it, it is going to be difficult. But we will through the statistics that we gather through conversations with the community, through meetings with the stakeholders themselves and these other community groups. Hopefully we can gauge our progress. And again, if we do need to pivot and change our strategy with these different things, then we certainly will. There's a recent Supreme Court decision that dealt with municipal laws as they relate to enforcing quality of life issues, if you will, and so that may change as cities and jurisdictions look to adopt different regulations that may change some of the things that we do. So it really is this is probably the biggest part of our strategic plan that's going to be very fluid as we look over the next three years. If that answers your question.

[00:21:55] Speaker4

Yeah. It does. Thank you.

[00:21:56] Steve

Let's move on to goal number three, which is traffic enforcement. I know it includes some things around reducing DUI collisions and pedestrian and cyclist collisions, things of that nature. Maybe just talk us through some of the specifics of that and that one, and why the traffic enforcement piece is an important part of the strategic plan.

[00:22:12] Captain Chris Smyrnos

Sure. I know several years ago I worked full time DUI enforcement as part of our traffic unit. And actually, for me, what got me passionate about DUI was for a traffic collision years and years ago where an innocent person was killed by a DUI driver. And as a young policeman, that was the first time that I realized how impactful DUI could be on a community and on a family and on the all the people that were involved in that. And so traffic enforcement is important because in Redding, I think we were obviously not a perfect community, but the chances of getting randomly, you know, physically assaulted when you're walking down the street are not really high. But we do. You're more likely to be involved in something traffic related where you're injured or a collision where you're seriously injured or bad things happen. And so I think traffic enforcement is one of the things that really can impact people across our entire community. And so for us, emphasizing traffic enforcement as a goal in our strategic plan was important because of that, because it is something that really are it can impact not just the people. That might be the the quote unquote criminal element, but this is everybody that's out there using our roadways can be impacted by traffic related issues. So that's why we wanted to emphasize and focus on it in our plan.

[00:23:23] Speaker4

Yeah, I would say that's something that impacts everybody multiple times a day. Okay. Let's move to goal four which is Department technology. Redding Police Department has recently implemented some pretty big new technological pieces like the Body-worn cameras. Walk us through this goal. What have you already done and what are you planning to do to embrace technology and move that as a goal to your department?

[00:23:48] Captain Chris Smyrnos

Sure. One of the big things that is part of this goal, so we use there's a whole market out there for what's called CAD, which stands for Computer Aided Dispatch and Records Management System, a type of software. It really is the backbone of what runs like when you call 911. It's the system the dispatcher inputs the information into. When an officer shows up on scene, they gather information and they write a police report. The records management and CAD systems are the software products that run all those different things. It's the the system that we input all that data into, prints out our reports, sends things to the district attorney's office and gives us our statistics and so forth. And so we've had the product that we currently use and the vendor that we have, we've had some pretty significant difficulties with it, just getting it to work properly and also in a way that works for our staff. So one of the big goals with our strategic plan is to have an outside consultant evaluate our systems, which we actually recently had. An outside consultant came in and they said, yes, the CAD piece is working, is working for you the where it needs to be. But the records part, there's still a lot of work that needs to be done to get that where it needs to be.

[00:24:55] Captain Chris Smyrnos

And so really, it's making sure that we continue to focus our resources to work with the vendor to fix the issues that the product has, and to make sure that our staff has proper training in the system. If this means evaluating new systems in the future, that's definitely a part of this. So really making sure that our officers have we talk about the like in the mental health and the officer wellness goal. We talk about our officers having the tools to properly deal with their mental health and so forth. This is the actual tools they use to do their jobs. We want to make sure their officers have the right tools so they can go out there and be effective in doing their jobs. We don't want the technology. Technology is great when it works. It's great when it helps to increase efficiency and make things easier to do. But technology should not make your job harder to do. And some of the software products that we have make officers jobs more complicated in a difficult specifically on the reporting side of things. And so really ensuring that we as an agency are continuing to look at the options that are available to us to make sure that our officers have the right tools, the best tools, and no system is perfect.

[00:26:00] Captain Chris Smyrnos

Taking a police report in 2024 is much more complicated than it was 20 years ago. Just because the amount of data we're required to capture and report to the state, it is significantly more detailed than it was, like I said in the past. And so the software products that are out there, there's no I haven't come across any solution that is is perfect. And knowing that we are continuing to look at our options, knowing that we're continuing to look for do we need more, like I said, more training for our staff. Do we need to look at different vendors? Are there ways the vendor can improve the existing product that we have, and really focusing on that to ensure that our officers have the right tools. And then the second part of that, of this goal is to look at emerging, emerging technologies that can make our jobs better and reduce liability and increase officer safety, like body worn cameras. When I started weren't a thing, we had video cameras in our cars and my old agency, but it was there was a VHS recorder in the trunk that you literally had to go swap out a VHS tape for.

[00:26:59] Captain Chris Smyrnos

And so for officers to have a body worn camera that can clip to their shirt, that can store how many hours of high definition video and so forth. That's the technology has come so far. And the body worn cameras have there's several incidents where we've received complaints from our citizens of misconduct or inappropriate behavior, and we look at the body worn camera and it completely exonerates the officers. And they did everything by the book or they did everything right. And so it really has been helpful for us as a department to from a liability perspective, but also if we do see on those videos that officers are not doing what they're supposed to do, it gives us another tool to help hold people accountable so we can correct that behavior and make sure that our officers are upholding the standards that we expect. There's a lot of technology that's out there and ensuring that we, as an agency, prioritize continuing to evaluate and see what other tools and resources are out there to help us be more effective, to help us be more efficient, and to make it to give our officers additional tools and resources so that they can provide better service to our community. That's really the crux of this goal.

[00:27:59] Steve

Got it. And I'm just visualizing a VHS recorder in the trunk of a of a squad car. That sounds amazing. Yeah.

[00:28:05] Captain Chris Smyrnos

But that what was that was the state of the art back in 2002. Yeah.

[00:28:10] Steve

Crazy how far we've come for sure, I guess. And I know we'll talk about recruitment here in a second as part of goal five. But have you found with regard to the technology piece, is recruiting more effective for the department when you have more of this kind of state of the art technology that prospective law enforcement officers see and recognize as advantageous to their effort? I think so.

[00:28:30] Captain Chris Smyrnos

To a certain extent. I think that with the the generation that we have today, people were born almost with iPads and phones in their hands. And so we have a very a very tech savvy patrol staff. That's where usually when our officers are first hired, they go to patrol. So for I remember when I started in Redding, I was given a pager and it clipped onto my it clipped onto my lapel of my uniform. And if somebody needed to get Ahold of me, they would send me a page. And if it was important, they would put 911 in that, Even in 2003 when I started, that was old technology. And are we? A lot of the tools that we have nowadays are available on we issue each officer gets issued a department cell phone and now we can take when they're taking the evidence photographs, they can take evidence photographs using their cell phones. They can dictate police reports into their cell phones and have we have a transcription service that will send them a Microsoft word version of their report with usually within, you know, 15, 20, 30 minutes. And so we've just come a long way from the days of film camera, the days of we had microcassette recorders that we would actually dictate our reports into, and you would physically take the cassette tape and put it in a plastic bag and walk that over to somebody who would transcribe it.

[00:29:38] Captain Chris Smyrnos

And like, we've really come a long ways. And I think that with our younger, tech savvy workforce, they expect these tools to they expect that we do have technology and things that tools that are efficient again, that help them get their jobs done. From a recruiting perspective, I don't know if that would be a really big, a big thing. But if somebody came to a police agency in 2024 and they didn't have computers in their cars and they didn't have, they were still writing things by hand, that would probably be a turnoff, I would think, to to folks that are trying to get in law enforcement now, but most departments, at least in our area, are, um, definitely more invested in tech than they were in the past. But yeah, I think that with the generation we have, I think they expect to have modern tools and technologies to be able to do their jobs.

[00:30:22] Speaker4

Okay. So then on that note, let's dive right into police staffing and recruitment, which is goal number five. What are your goals for police staffing in the new strategic plan, and how do you plan to meet those metrics?

[00:30:34] Captain Chris Smyrnos

We are very fortunate in the sense that we are a fully staffed police department right now. That is not common in the state of California. Anecdotally, I've talked to people in these classes that I go to and I want to say within the Bay area, they're telling me that they're about average staffing levels, about 70% of full staffing. Like I said, I don't have any hard numbers on that. That's just what I've been told in conversations. But even so, that's pretty significant. For us to be fully staffed is really a testament to the investment that our community has placed in the department. We have a lot of special assignments, like we talked about before, with our neighborhood police unit and our city and our park rangers in the downtown bike team. We have the ability to go out there and be proactive and address problems when they're small, before they become bigger problems, and a lot of agencies don't have that. And so really, our goal with recruiting and retention is to really make sure that we keep our staffing levels where they are. It took a lot of work. There was a really big hiring push over the last 3 to 4 years to get us fully staffed, and we really don't want to. We don't want to back off from that and lose that. And so ensuring that we're staying up on our staffing as we have vacancies that we can fill, we have make sure the process is streamlined.

[00:31:44] Captain Chris Smyrnos

We market our positions on social media. We market it through the city communications team. We market our positions to personnel making, excuse me, making sure that we are getting the word out when we are hiring, that we have these openings and highlighting some of the benefits of working for our agency. The other big piece of this is succession planning and making sure that we develop the future leaders of our department. We I look at our new patrol officers that are here and 15, 20, 25 years from now, they are going to be the command staff. They're going to be our sergeants and our lieutenants and our captains and our chief that are going to be responsible for running this agency, in this department, within this community. And I live here, and I have no plans on leaving Redding when I retire. And so I, I want to know that when I leave that the department's going to be a good hands. And so ensuring that we provide leadership opportunities. There's some specific trainings that we mentioned that we as a department feel are very important. And so we want to emphasize our staff putting in for those schools and sending them to these different training programs, and really focusing on the coaching and mentoring aspect. The last thing you want is to how you have a bunch of people retire, and you don't have people that are ready and willing to take their place when they go.

[00:32:56] Captain Chris Smyrnos

And so the staffing is definitely an important piece, but also that retention of our staff. And I think if you give if people know that they have opportunities for advancement, they know that the department is invested in them. They're less likely to want to leave, to go work somewhere else. And so really focusing on our staff and ensuring that that kind of comes back to goal number one with organizational wellness, knowing that they're taken care of, that they're cared about, knowing that their their opinion is important. And we value what they have to say. All those different things from a cultural perspective really help out with the retention. One of the other things that is important, I think, that we do is we also ensure that we are, uh, as we are recruiting, that we are making sure that our applicants and our the people that we hire reflect the diversity in our community. And that was something that was actually brought up in one of the community meetings. And so we actually implemented that in our strategic plan. But it's important it's important for our community to attract high quality candidates, but also represent the diversity that we do have here, Redding, so that we can really provide the best level of service to our citizens.

[00:33:55] Steve

As a fully staffed department, I'm assuming the community holds you to a higher standard because you are fully staffed. So if they experience crime or Steve Blight or whatnot, their expectation of the department, I think is probably higher because you're fully staffed. What do you say to community members who might feel that they're experiencing or seeing these things and feel like at certain times that the department isn't doing enough. Even though you are fully staffed, how do you address that? I think it's.

[00:34:17] Captain Chris Smyrnos

Important to make sure people know that it's important to report crime to us. I think sometimes, especially the I worked here in the with the Great Recession back in 0809 era, and our resources were very thin. We didn't have community service officers, we didn't have the same level of specialty units that we have. And so it could take a lot longer for somebody to respond to your call for service. And I think people, to a certain extent became apathetic. And so something that happened, they say, I'm just not going to report this, nothing's going to get done. And then we never found out about it. So we if we don't know about things, we can't direct the right resources to go address those issues for longer term, like neighborhood problems we have. You can certainly call in, you know, talk to dispatch and they can get you connected with the neighborhood police unit or if it's something immediate, obviously a patrol officer would respond out and handle that issue. But we also have ways to report things via our website. You can report longer term issues via our website to our neighborhood policing it, to our graffiti eradication teams. So we try to be as open as we can to receiving that. We need to know what's going on in our community. The expectation that we give our officers, like, I've sat in the chief's interview when he's when we're looking to hire new officers and we tell every single person that sits in those interviews, the expectation when you come to work for Redding PD is that you are proactive and that you go out there and work.

[00:35:36] Captain Chris Smyrnos

We don't want to be a department where we just are reactive and wait for things to happen. We are. We're well funded by our city council, we're well supported by our community, and there is an expectation that goes along with that that we address problems. We provide a high level of customer service and we ensure that we are meeting those expectations of our community. And if we're not, then we need to know about it. Sometimes that may necessitate a call to a supervisor to discuss concerns about a call for service or something along those lines, and if that's what it needs to be, then that's totally fine. And we're willing to have those conversations to make sure that we can explain things. And if there's things that we need to adjust or things that we need to fix, then we're certainly open to doing that. But at the end of the day, we need to know what's occurring so we can properly address it. But we do have a lot of resources that are available for that. And so we want to make sure we're using them to really meet those needs and expectations of our community.

[00:36:26] Speaker4

And that feels like the perfect segue into goal six, which is property crime investigation and enforcement. And so I guess, why was that goal number six, out of all the other quality of life issues that a community may experience, why it was property crime investigation and enforcement goal number six in the strategic plan.

[00:36:46] Captain Chris Smyrnos

And I don't like from a numbering perspective, I think it was there was a little bit of difficulty. Like I said, we knew that we wanted organizational wellness to be number one. And then the, you know, transient related issues to be the second because I was a priority for the community. The other goals, it was a little there's a little less, I think, intentionality with how they were numbered. That being said, property crime enforcement was definitely something that was addressed through the community meetings. And a lot of that comes down to almost more the perception of crime than what's actually occurring, as if, for example, if your next door neighbor has their car broken into and the whole neighborhood talks about it, then, hey, cars are getting broken into our neighborhood. I don't feel safe anymore. Even if that didn't impact you directly, the perception is that in the feeling is that these things are occurring close to my home. These are things that I'm worried about, and property crime is another one of those things that really can impact a lot of people that might not otherwise be involved in the criminal justice world. And so I think that really with property crime, a lot of it comes down to education and making sure that our community members have the tools and resources so they don't become victims. There's a lot of simple things that you can do. Ensuring that you have really good lighting around your business or your home. Making sure that you don't.

[00:37:59] Captain Chris Smyrnos

Some people believe that Redding is a type of town where you can just leave your car unlocked and your front door open all day, and unfortunately, we just don't live in that world anymore. So ensuring that we are helping to provide information to our community members through our social media channels, through the contacts that we have, through calls for service. But if you can mitigate as much as you can, the being an attractive victim, if you will, then I think that can certainly help deter crime. The other piece of this I think that's important is also retail theft has been a pretty big hot topic over the last several years, more often in areas like the Bay Area and Sacramento. But even up here, it definitely has affected us as well. And so as a department focusing on conducting retail operations, but also across our divisions. So we want to have our field operations, will work with our detectives to set up sting operations within these businesses. And typically the people that are connected to retail theft are also the people that are out there breaking into cars and doing other things that affect our individuals in our community. So I think if you address that and you hold people accountable as best as we can with the tools that we have, I think those are all things that can really reduce, reduce property crime. And really one of the one of the things that I was just looking at is providing drug and drug behavior training to loss prevention staff, because oftentimes people that are, you know, using drugs are supporting their habit by stealing things.

[00:39:18] Captain Chris Smyrnos

And so if they can recognize those people ahead of time, they can kick them out of their stores or whatever they're going to do with them before they have an opportunity to take things. Obviously, our hands are somewhat tied with some of the law changes with propositions several years ago and so forth. And I will go down the rabbit hole of those issues here. But we have to be able to utilize the tools that we have to be able to combat this. But I think really that educating our community, really we want to get back to Neighborhood Watch. I think that took a little bit of a nosedive with Covid. And so really getting back into Neighborhood Watch, and these are working with our community to have these conduits to provide information, crime prevention tips and resources that these folks are community members can call, and also using our crime analysts to give us data on where these things are occurring so we can deploy our resources appropriately. So even though it's our last goal in the strategic plan is still definitely important, it is still definitely something that could impact our citizens on a daily basis. And so we just we wanted to focus on the education piece of it as much as we do the enforcement side of things with this one.

[00:40:21] Steve

It's great to hear. I think it sounds like the strategic plan as a whole is quite robust and impactful, and really sets the department up for the course of action over the next few years. And I think to what you said earlier, with it being a living, breathing document, I think that's really important. It's not just a token piece of paper or booklet that the department can check that box and say, yep, we've done our strategic plan, but really these are reportable, trackable goals and metrics that you can then adjust as needed and really show that there's positive things happening within the community. I wonder what ways do you hope the strategic plan specifically will help shape the future of the department?

[00:40:54] Captain Chris Smyrnos

So I think our when our when Chief Barner came in, he had a big focus on addressing the the transient related homeless related issues. I know the buzzword was quality of life, but I think that that was the initial focus was, let's see, what can we do over the next, you know, six months to try to mitigate these, because every meeting we go to would be complaints about this specific issue, this specific location or so forth. So what can we do to address that? And I think the strategic plan is an evolution of that process. It this is what we focus our efforts on. There's a big push to to work on that and address that issue. I think we've made notable gains in that. I think we've reached a lot of positive feedback from our community, and the plan is really okay. What is what is what else is there that we as a department want to be focusing on over the next three years? What, because we get asked all the time. Like what? What are the problems that our community faces? What are the priorities for the department? And this gives a simple, like I said, easy to digest, um, document that anybody, any police officer should be able to go to a meeting or a call for service and talk about the things from the strategic plan.

[00:42:01] Captain Chris Smyrnos

If somebody asked them, hey, what are you guys focusing on? They should be able to recite this information and say, these are the things that we're working on. This is why it's important, and this is how we're going to get to where we want to be. And so really, it's just having this as a really a focal point to guide our efforts over the next three years was really what we wanted to. But again, we wanted to do it in such a way that it was easy to read. Um, there wasn't a lot of big words and language and unattainable things that were in it. We wanted this to be something that these are attainable goals. These are the things that we can work toward. And really, like I mentioned before, this was a collaboration between our command staff, our community, city leaders, our department members. And so really, we wanted everybody to by creating this document. But something that everybody can be has some skin in the game as far as the visas, our goal and objective.

[00:42:50] Speaker4

As a wrap up, if if you can look into the future, it's 2027 and you're reflecting on this strategic plan, what does 2027 look like because of this plan.

[00:43:03] Captain Chris Smyrnos

Locally, by 2027, we can look at this plan and we can say, these are the goals that we've met. And these are or even within these goal categories like organizational wellness. That's something that we're always going to be working on. I don't think that's ever not going to be a goal and a priority for our law enforcement agency. So we can look at the the goal and say within the objectives and strategies, hey, we did these mental health treatments and they worked well. We want to continue to do those, but maybe we look at, hey, we launched this app, or maybe that did not get the traction that we were expecting. So we need to pivot that goal and maybe use the funding for that. We use for that, for something that is that would be a better fit for our department. And so really, hopefully looking back at these goals, we can say these are the things that worked. These are the things that didn't and which the things that we need to adjust. And these are the things that we're still working on. And really, I hope that when we do the 2027 to 2030 or whatever the next strategic plan is, we can really build upon this document and have even more of a focus. And who knows, the priorities could drastically shift, and the things that are important to our community could be much different three five years from now. And again, this was designed to be a living document that can be modified and changed as we need. But I really hope that this this gives our community a really deep dive into what we as a department are focusing on and what we believe is important and how we're going to get there at the end of the day and provide the highest level of service to our community as we can.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

