

An Analysis of the Organization and Ethics of the:



SPARKS POLICE

Sparks, Nevada

An Academic and Pro-Bono Project

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The Sparks Police Department (“SPD”) is in the city of Sparks, Nevada, located within Washoe County in the northern part of the State of Nevada. It borders the City of Reno and unincorporated areas of Washoe County and is 35.81 square miles (City of Sparks, 2021). The city, originally named Harriman, was founded as a railroad town by the Southern Pacific Railroad after workers were relocated there from another part of Nevada. The city was renamed Sparks after the governor of Nevada, John Sparks in 1904 (Chamber of Commerce Reno and Sparks, 2021).

As of 2019, the population of the City of Sparks was 105,006, comprised of 53.7% white, 34.7% Hispanic, 2.9% black, 1.1% Native American, 4.1% Asian, .8% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and 2.7% two or more races (Sparks Police Dept., 2020). The SPD, as of 2020, consisted of 112 sworn members—92.9% male and 7.1% female and a racial composition of 83% white, 7.1% Hispanic, 3.6% Asian, 1.8% black, 1.8% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 1.8% two or more races and .9% American Indian (Sparks Police Dept., 2020). In Sparks, the annual median household income was \$64,645 in 2019 (Census QuickFacts, 2019). 9.4% of the city’s population was living below the poverty line (Census QuickFacts, 2019) and 2.7% of the population consisted of female led households with no husband present with children under 18 years of age (Suburban Stats, 2019). As far as educational attainment, 27.65% of the population possessed a High School diploma or equivalent, 15.55 % had a bachelor’s degree, and 7.73% held a master’s degree (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

Major crime trends in Sparks, Nevada have changed. The department reported one murder in 2019, compared to four in 2018 with a 75% decrease of which there was a 2019 clearance at zero percent (Nevada Dept. of Public Safety, 2019). Aggravated Assaults were

reported at 297 in 2019 vs. 349 in 2018 showing a 15% decrease in the crime of which 50% were cleared in 2019 (Nevada Dept. of Public Safety, 2019). Rapes were up 12% in 2019 up to 76 from 68 reported in 2018 with a clearance rate of 15% as of 2019 (Nevada Dept. of Public Safety, 2019). Robbery was down 12% to 76 instances reported in 2019 down from 87 in 2018 with 40% cleared in 2019 (Nevada Dept. of Public Safety, 2019). Burglary reports were reported at 513 in 2019 down from 570 in 2018 showing a decline of 10% with 33% cleared in 2019 (Nevada Dept. of Public Safety, 2019). Larceny/theft was up <1% in 2019 to 1537 reported instances up from 1536 the year before with a listed 2019 clearance rate of 18% (Nevada Dept. of Public Safety, 2019). Auto thefts were up 13% in 2019 with 376 reports up from 334 in 2018 with the percentage of clearance at 11% in 2019 (Nevada Dept. of Public Safety, 2019).

I compared Sparks, Nevada to Chico, California, which is a city of equivalent size and demographics (Census QuickFacts, 2019). It is located 166 miles west of Sparks which is approximately three hours travel by car (Google, 2021). Although Sparks, Nevada has an additional seventeen police officers on staff (112 Sparks P.D vs 95 Chico P.D.), crime conditions seemed comparable. Violent crimes per 100,000 population in Chico for 2019 had a reported number of 444 (FBI, 2019) versus SPD's report of 480 instances (FBI, 2019). Regarding property crimes per 100,000 population, the Chico Police Department reported 2306 (FBI, 2019) versus SPD's report of 2440 (FBI, 2019).

Major crime trends in Chico, California have also changed. The department reported no murders in 2019, compared to two in 2018 with a 100% decrease of which there was a zero percent clearance in 2019 (FBI, 2019). Aggravated Assaults were reported at 353 in 2019 vs. 417 in 2018 showing a 15% decrease with 57% were cleared in 2019 (FBI, 2019). Rapes were up

16% in 2019 with 100 from a reported 86 in 2018 with a 2019 clearance rate of 9% (FBI, 2019). Robbery was down 2% to 104 instances reported in 2019 down from 106 in 2018 with 24% cleared in 2019 (FBI, 2019). Burglary reports were reported at 272 in 2019 down from 327 in 2018 showing a decline of 17% with 14% cleared in 2019 (FBI, 2019). Larceny/theft was down ½ % in 2019 at 1753 reported instances down from 1761 the year before with a listed 2019 clearance rate of 12% (FBI, 2019). Auto thefts were up 21% in 2019 with 381 reports - up from 315 in 2018 with the percentage of clearance at 9% in 2019 (FBI, 2019).

I spoke with a Sparks police officer who, in the course of his duties, conducts applicant investigations. He informed me that the initial application for city employment, civil service or not, is handled by the City of Sparks Human Resources with the applicant background investigation conducted by a Sparks police officer. I was informed separately by the City of Sparks Human Resources that the SPD adheres to standards put forth by law, specifically the Nevada Revised States and Nevada Administrative Code along with the Nevada Peace Officers Standards (P.O.S.T.). Police officers who serve as applicant background investigators are trained by Nevada P.O.S.T., which publishes a background investigations manual. In comparison to the neighboring Reno Police Department (“RPD”) which added many more requirements, SPD adhered to what is outlined by law and statewide standards for the most part. SPD, however, has higher requirements for education, work experience or military experience. SPD requires a minimum of 24 college credits, active-duty military, or three years of employment in the last seven years in the fields of law enforcement/criminal justice/public safety, security, dispute resolution on a “direct and regular public/community contact,” work with community initiatives, working with children/adults with special needs, or closely related work (Sparks Police, 2021).

As listed on the SPD website at sparkspolice.com, the minimum requirements listed show that a candidate must be 21 years of age at the time of appointment, free from police record,¹ be a U.S. citizen, possess a high school diploma or equivalent, possession of a Nevada class C driver's license and "other requirements as outlined in regulations and law" specifically citing Nevada Administrative Code 289.110 and Nevada Revised Statute 289.510 (City of Sparks, 2021). As cited in the above statutes, a background check consisting of personal history, employment, DMV, military, financial and criminal history covers not only a check in Nevada but in other states that a candidate previously resided (Nevada Administrative Code, 2019). Additionally, it is codified in the statute that the applicant must be 21 years of age at the time of appointment, possess a high school diploma or G.E.D., pass a medical examination by a licensed physician "tailored to ability to function as a peace officer," and pass a drug, psychological and polygraph examination (Nevada Administrative Code, 2019). There is currently no maximum age precluding hiring. The potential barriers to employment with the Sparks Police Department include the use of marijuana, an applicant must be free of its use for eighteen months,² no hard drug use for the past five years, no felony convictions in Nevada or an convictions for an offense which would be a felony if committed in Nevada, no convictions for drug possession/sale nor for a crime of moral turpitude,³ no documented history of physical violence or "resignation in lieu of

¹ Despite this requirement, disqualifiers will be explained later in the paper which seemingly allow misdemeanor convictions.

² Although marijuana is now legal in Nevada with licensed marijuana dispensary businesses, it is the position of Nevada P.O.S.T. that marijuana use has no place in law enforcement. Additionally, the Sparks Police Department states that the agency is a recipient of federal grants and being that marijuana is still illegal at the federal level, the use of cannabis by its employees is prohibited.

³ There is currently no set policy or codified law explaining a crime involving moral turpitude in Nevada besides what the Nevada Department of Education has been seeking to clarify regarding employment in the education field. Although reserved for vile and depraved crimes, a loose interpretation in Nevada can consist of unpaid casino markers and unlicensed acts of prostitution, driving while intoxicated, etc.

termination or termination from any civil service employment for substantiated misconduct involving dishonesty which includes untruthfulness, deception, misrepresentation, falsification, and dishonesty by admission or omission” (Sparks Police, 2021). The SPD offers a lateral entry program for active in-state police officers with a Nevada category 1 P.O.S.T. certification or those who successfully passed a Nevada category 1 P.O.S.T. academy in the last 18 months, and out of state police officers who are certified in a jurisdiction that qualifies for reciprocity⁴ (Sparks Police, 2021). If no longer working for a qualified law enforcement agency, not more than five years must have passed since last employed (Nevada P.O.S.T, 2018). Additionally, an officer’s basic certification or license cannot have been previously suspended or revoked (Nevada P.O.S.T, 2018). The prospective lateral must take the state physical fitness exam (academy level exam not applicant exam) no later than sixteen weeks after hire and pass “online reciprocity training” and state certification exam (Nevada P.O.S.T, 2018). In essence, the prospective lateral must pass all pre-employment steps. The Nevada police academy training requirement, however, is waived.

I spoke with SPD Lieutenant John Patton of Internal Affairs, who offered a wealth of information to me that was greatly beneficial to my research. Besides informing me about the department’s internal investigation/discipline process, Lt. Patton was able to clarify how the police officer employment process works in the City of Sparks. He stated that the filing for police officer remains open indefinitely when an applicant fills out an online interest form which adds the applicant to a list with the city. When human resources schedules the test, the applicant is contacted by email and the written test and physical test are administered at SPD headquarters.

⁴ New York and New Jersey police officers qualify for reciprocity for lateral transfer employment.

Lt. Patton added that if a candidate is successful on that date, they are scheduled for an oral board panel interview consisting of a lieutenant, sergeant, three to four police officers, and two representatives from city human resources. The purpose of the interview is to measure resiliency with pointed questions about life struggles and how the candidate overcame them. According to Lt. Patton, the structure of the interview was recently modernized to detect qualities with less emphasis on shyness, nervousness, and presentation. Upon passing the panel interview, the applicant is given a background package, and an investigator is assigned. The investigator is a police officer in the Community Resources Unit. A preliminary background is conducted for automatic disqualifiers under state law, and the applicant is scheduled for a polygraph examination. Upon passing, the background check extends to verifying references, conducting interviews, financial checks, and education verification. If there are no issues discovered at this point, the results of the hiring process are submitted to the Sparks Police Chief for sign-off, and a conditional offer of employment is extended to the candidate. The candidate is then scheduled for a psychological test and medical exam. If both are passed, the applicant enters the academy. Upon graduation from the academy, the rookie peace officer starts a 16 week Field Training Officer program at SPD consisting of a three week mini-academy. It includes SPD policy training, tactics training, three phases on the street which are four weeks long, including a week with detectives, half with general crimes and half with the Crime Suppression Unit, and, finally, one day with their H.O.P.E. Unit, the department's version of homeless outreach.

An examination of the SPD website located at sparkspolice.com revealed a multi-tiered and crowded landing page. I would recommend that the information be condensed or separated from the landing page and placed on subsequent pages with a link posted on the landing page. In

my PowerPoint project, I had to take several screenshots of the landing page to post on a slide as the page consisted of the content equivalent to two website pages. Although there are several links/tabs that take you to other sections of the site, I found that the wealth of information made public can be more efficiently placed by condensing the graphics on the site. As such, the font on the lettering is rather small even while viewing the website at 100%. The website, however, does explain several aspects of the department, such as the different divisions (Operations, Investigation and Administrative⁵) along with various information and statistics encompassing crime reporting, staffing, and demographics. The website does have a “public stats & data” tab which brings up a page containing links to various spreadsheet tables containing data that the SPD makes public (Sparks Police, 2021). This area contains compiled data from use of force, officer involved shootings, historical statistics, city demographics, arrest data, internal affairs reports, policies, body work and fleet cameras policy, and a link to a study previously conducted on tri-agency community policing.

Public Stats and Data

See what's happening in our community

Please explore the data below to learn more about our community and the Sparks Police.

- [Community Policing in Northern Nevada](#)
- [Historical Statistics](#)
- [City Demographics](#)
- [Arrest Data](#)
- [Internal Affairs Reports](#)
- [Use of Force Data](#)
- [Officer Involved Shootings](#)
- [Body Worn and Fleet Cameras](#)
- [Policies](#)

⁵ According to the organizational chart, the Operations and Investigation Division are overseen by deputy chiefs where the Administrative division is slated to be overseen by an Administrative division Manager which is a civilian position.

(Sparks Police, 2021)

Sparks Police Department Officer Involved Shootings													
2000-2020													
YEAR	Type of Incident	Investigating Agency Case #	Action Taken Against Officer	Subject Age	Subject Gender	Subject Race	Subject Armed	Subject Weapon	# of SPD Officers	Officer's Race	Subject Struck	Subject Injuries	
2000	Wanted Subject	RPD 00-236154	BDW	46	M	W	Yes	Handgun	1	White	Yes	Non Fatal	
2002	Wanted Subject	RPD 02-2220	ADW	29	M	W	Unknown	Vehicle	1	White	Unknown	Non Fatal	
2003	Traffic Stop	SPD 03-12116	BDW	16	M	H	No	Vehicle	1	White	No	None	
2003	Wanted Subject	RPD 03-47722	ADW	23	M	W	No	Vehicle	1	White	Yes	Fatal	
2005	Eluding/Warrant	SPD 05-14577	ADW	36	M	W	No	Vehicle	1	White	No	None	
2009	Welfare Check	RPD 09-3426	Att. Homicide	60	F	W	Yes	Handgun	2	1-White 1-Hispanic	Yes	Fatal	
2013	Suicidal/Homicidal Subject	WCSO 13-4213	ADW	27	M	B	Yes	Shotgun	4	4-White	Yes	Fatal	
2013	Child Pornography	SPD 13-9951	ADW	23	M	W	Yes	Rifle	1	White	No	None	
2013	Suicidal Subject	RPD 13-20296	None ADW	24 44	F F	W W	No Yes	None Handgun	1 2	1-White 2- White	Yes	Non-Fatal Fatal	
2014	Armed Subject	SPD 14-7693	ADW	25	M	H	Yes	Rifle	1	White	No	None	
2014	Armed Wanted Subject	RPD 14-16926	ADW	32	M	W	Yes	Handgun	1	White	Yes	Fatal	
2014	Shots Fired	SPD 14-10791	ADW	33	M	B	Unknown	Vehicle	1	White	No	None	
2015	Felony Warrant	RPD 15-19757	None	30	M	B	No	None	1	White	Yes	Non Fatal	
2016	Suicidal-Homicidal Subject	RPD 16-4340	ADW	22	M	B	Yes	Air Rifle	1	White	Yes	Fatal	
2016	DUI-Traffic Stop	WCSO 16-4254	ADW	41	M	H	Yes	Handgun	2	2- White	Yes	Fatal	
2017	Domestic Battery	WCSO 17-5772	ADW	43	M	AI	Yes	Shotgun	3	2-White 1-Hispanic	Yes	Fatal	
2018	Traffic Stop	RPD 18-1822	BDW	27	M	H	Yes	Handgun	2	2-White	Yes	Fatal	
2018	Domestic Battery	RPD 18-14523	ADW	57	M	H	Yes	Handgun	2	1-Pac. Isl. 1-White	Yes	Fatal	
2018	Sexual Assault of Child	RPD 18-16286	ADW	40	M	W	Yes	Knife	1	1-Hispanic	Yes	Fatal	
2019	Domestic Battery	WCSO 19-2254	ADW	47	M	H	Yes	Rifle	3	3-White	Yes	Fatal	
2020	Suicidal Subject	RPD 20-338	ADW	18	M	B	Yes	Handgun	2	2-White	Yes	Fatal	
2020	Domestic Disturbance	WCSO 20-756	ADW	39	M	H	Yes	Handgun	2	2-White	Yes	Fatal	
2020	Shoplifting	WCSO 20-1879	ADW	38	M	NA	No	Vehicle	5	4 - White 1- Hispanic	Yes	Non-Fatal	
2020	Assault w/Deadly Weapon	RPD 20-7637	ADW	36	M	H	Yes	Vehicle	2	1 - Hispanic 1- White	Yes	Fatal	
2020	Suspicious Circumstances	RPD 20-21671	ADW	47	F	W	Yes	Air-Rifle	2	1-Asian 1-White	Yes	Non-Fatal	

Officer Involved Shooting Review								
2000-2020								
	Number	%	Type of Weapon (Suspect)	Number	%	Officer Race	Number	%
Number of Incidents	25	100.0%	Handgun	9	45.0%	Hispanic	4	8.7%
Number of Actions	25	100.0%	None	2	10.0%	White	40	87.0%
Number of Subjects Struck	22	88.0%	Rifle/Air Rifle	5	25.0%	Pac. Islander	1	2.17%
Number of Fatal Injuries	14	56.0%	Vehicle	7	35.0%	Asian	1	2.17%
Subject Gender	26	100.0%	Shotgun	2	10.0%			
Male	22	84.6%	Knife	1	5.0%			
Female	4	15.4%	Armed w/ weapon	18	90.0%			
Subject Race	19	100.0%	Yes	18	100.0%			
African American	5	26.3%	No	6	33.3%			
Hispanic	8	42.1%	Unknown	2	11.1%			
White	11	57.9%						
Native American	2	10.5%						

(Sparks Police, 2021)

An analysis of the above data shows that despite being an overwhelmingly white department, minorities and female civilians were not disproportionately shot by the SPD. Nevada is an open carry state but requires a concealed carry permit for the concealed carry of handguns. Due to the culture of the region and state, handguns are plentiful and are often encountered by law enforcement.

The SPD offers many avenues for complaint intake. According to the SPD website, complaints can be taken online through a dedicated page on the website or by phone at two telephone numbers—either through the main switchboard or to the Watch Commander, a position that in most police departments is the rank of lieutenant (Sparks Police, 2021). According to the SPD Internal Affairs policy, which is also readily accessible on the website, complainants are encouraged to put their complaint in writing, as that would become the instrument for the complaint (Sparks Police, 2021). Nevertheless, the department would proceed with merely verbal allegations. Lt. Patton informed me that the SPD accepts complaints in several ways—by U.S. Mail, on a walk-in basis at the stationhouse, by phone where the complaint is taken by a supervisor, generally a lieutenant if available, through the website, by email, or anonymously. Upon receipt of a complaint, the allegation and details are input into “Blue Team” which is a vendor-based case management/tracking software the department uses as its integrity compliance system. The software is multi-faceted and serves as their risk management/early intervention system. According to the Lt. Patton, all supervisors have access to the system for purposes of inputting information, especially if they observed actions relating to the complaint or handled an aspect of the investigation either by response to the scene or speaking with the complainant. The subject officer’s immediate or responding supervisor can

close out complaint based upon their findings, particularly in instances of exoneration, however, the case is still reviewed and signed off by the IAB lieutenant as a final step, especially if there is video surveillance footage. Complaints are then initially classified based upon origination, external or internal, and then triaged from there. Civilian complaints and complaints originating from outside agencies are normally classified as an “E” complaint serialized by preceding with two-digit year and succeeded by serial number in order of occurrence. Internal complaints are serialized in the same manner with the exception is classified as an “I” complaint which are reserved for policy infractions either observed or discovered by supervision. According to Lt. Patton, the complaint classifications can be redundant but additional classifications are added to a case where the complaints allege crimes, corruption, or serious misconduct. Additionally, complaints can be classified or re-classified as “divisional inquiries.” This classification is reserved for complaints that cannot be quickly closed out by immediate supervision or Internal Affairs, such as where evidence of misconduct may exist. The facts of the case are escalated to a Division Chief who confers with the investigating supervisor and decides if the case will be re-classified to become a “divisional inquiry” and determine if the matter will be investigated as a “formal I.A.” or remain a standard internal/external complaint. If downgraded, the case investigation continues with the subject officer’s lieutenant (low-level complaint such as courtesy). If the complaint is upgraded to a Divisional Inquiry, the complaint receives additional scrutiny with another review with the investigation reporting to the Deputy Chief. The SPD Police Chief has final say regarding the investigation. Complaint dispositions range from exonerated, unfounded, sustained, to not sustained. If a complaint is sustained, the subject officer receives notice of such and has a pre-disciplinary hearing with the Police Chief where they can plead their case or for leniency or on the grounds of justification. In the event of a complaint

substantiation, the totality of circumstances is considered along with matching the conduct with the Sparks Police Department Rules of Conduct. According to Lt. Patton, a disciplinary matrix model exists in the organization and infractions are classified on a scale of A to F with F being the most serious. Penalties as severe as termination can result depending on timeframe of infractions, re-occurrences, and gravity of the conduct. For instance, a verbal or written reprimand would usually result in a first-time infraction of category A but could also result in unpaid days off for categories B to D. Further infractions of category A, taking into account the totality of the circumstances, can result in the offending officer being placed on a performance plan which would increase supervision and scrutiny. If the terms of the performance plan fail to correct the behavior or deficiencies, then termination process would commence where the Police Chief would confer with the City Manager and City Attorneys. Lt. Patton further added that second offenses of categories B to D would result in a suspension—categories B would be one to five days, C three to fifteen days, D five to thirty. Categories E and F are much more serious with F usually resulting in immediate start of the termination process. He added that if a complaint is determined to involve overt criminality or in the event of an officer involved shooting (O.I.S.) where the perpetrator sustained gunshot wounds, the case is assigned to a regional task force consisting of not only the SPD but also the RPD and the Washoe County Sheriff's Office ("WCSO"). Where a Sparks police officer is involved, one of the other two agencies would be assigned. Additionally, external complaints against lieutenants and above involving administrative violations would stay in-house but ultimately that decision would be up to the

Police Chief⁶ who serves at the pleasure of the City Manager. In complaints involving criminality, complaints against lieutenants and above would go to another agency to investigate, either RPD or WCSO. When asked to clarify how police unions/associations exist in Nevada despite being a “right to work” state, Lt. Patton stated that although Nevada is a “right to work state,” it is not an “at will” employment state. He added that there is a “police officer’s bill of rights” codified in the Nevada Revised Statutes Section 289. As such, law enforcement is permitted to be unionized. Lt. Patton expressed that the department prides itself on being the most transparent and ethical department in Nevada and hopes that SPD will attract the best law enforcement candidates to come work for them. He further stated that while they do address complaints seriously and diligently, expecting ethical behavior of their sworn officers and staff, they are fair in applying discipline.

The Sparks Police Department was very forthcoming regarding a public record request I made prior to making contacts in the department, requesting their organizational chart. A review of the “table of organization” ascertained that the Internal Affairs Lieutenant is positioned in the Investigations Division, reporting directly to the division’s deputy chief who reports directly to the Police Chief. The organizational chart also delineates the placement of other divisions using the information stated in the above chart. The Operations Division is also overseen by a deputy chief with the Administrative Division overseen or slated to be overseen by an Administrative Division Manager, whose counterpart in the New York Police Department (“NYPD”) on a

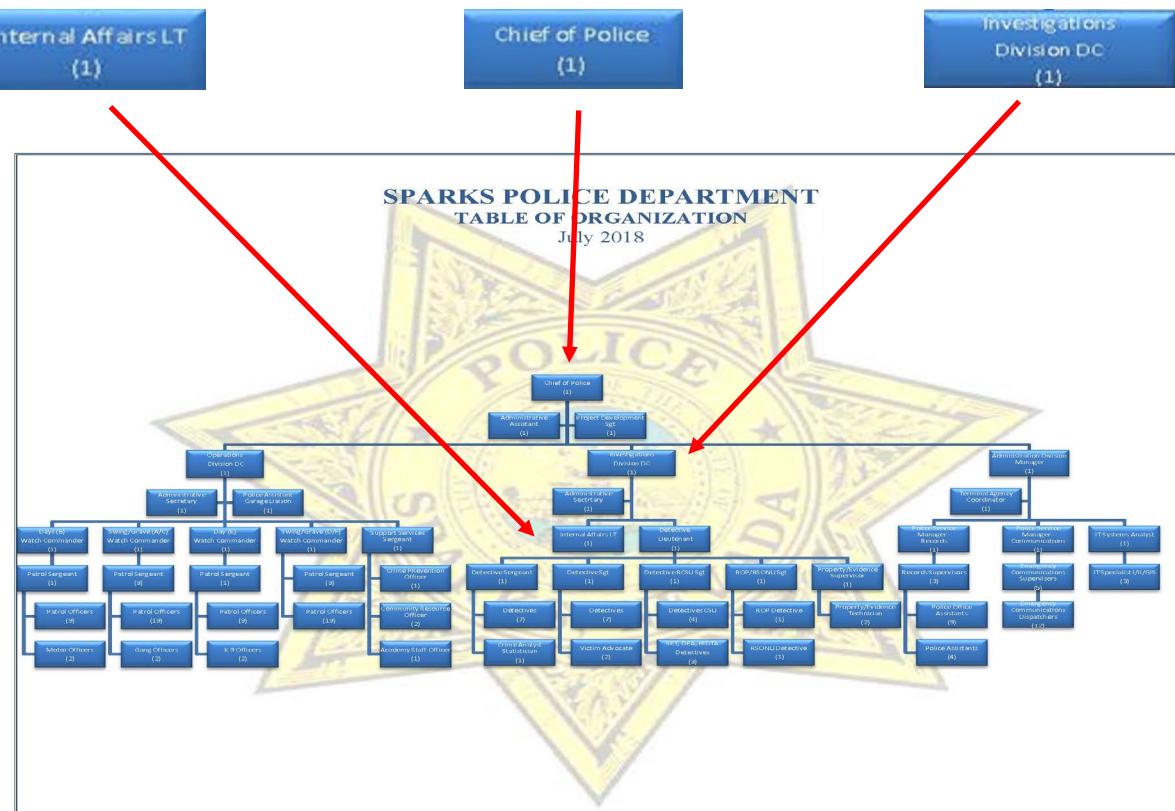
⁶ According to Lt. Patton, those who are appointed Police Chiefs now have a provision in their contracts that would credit them up to the age of retirement in the Nevada Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) in the event they are relieved of command. This was done to keep interest in the ranks of the department.

precinct level would be a Principal Administrative Aide or a Civilian Director on the Headquarters level.

I took a tour of the SPD stationhouse in March 2021. I found it to be a rather new building, similar to a modern NYPD precinct stationhouse, and laid out accordingly between several offices for both sworn members and non-sworn support personnel. The department also covers the area similar in size to an NYPD precinct at 35.81 square miles or 8 ¼ miles long and 5 ½ miles wide. Additionally, the SPD is the only agency that has its own police dispatchers and 911 system serving the City of Sparks which is housed inside of the facility. The RPD and the WCSO use a regional public safety center for its 911 and dispatch facility. Although there can be advantages to this set-up, the transferring of 911 calls between agencies can cause crucial moments to be lost in the processing of emergency calls. The order of rank in the agency is Police Officer/Detective, Sergeant, Lieutenant, Deputy Chief and Police Chief. The rank of Captain is not currently in use. The organization chart along with an addendum highlighting individual positions are illustrated below. Furthermore, the Administrative Division, as previously discussed, is slated for a civilian manager position and does not have uniformed oversight. In my experience, this can be beneficial as the department can hire an outsider with a business/organizational background instead of promoting a supervisor from within who may not possess the knowledge of efficiently running an administrative division. Conversely, an outsider otherwise may be well-qualified but may lack a working knowledge of a governmental agency, particularly a police department. An outsider may have to adapt to the agencies organizational culture, policies and chain of command whereas an insider being promoted from within, either civilian or “sworn” are already acquainted with the department’s idiosyncrasies, culture and

internal/external politics. Alternatively, adding the position of Captain in all three divisions can add an additional layer of filtering and reporting but also add an additional layer of supervision in not only the Operations Division but in the Investigations Division regarding the handling of civilian complaints and internal affairs issues. This will be discussed again in the possible overall recommendations in how ethics can be enhanced in the agency. Perhaps this recommendation will be more feasible as the population of the City of Sparks continues to grow. Lastly, adding a Captain to the Administrative Division could add to integrity in record keeping. I conducted a follow-up with Lt. Patton about this, and he added that the rank of Commander once existed in the SPD and was in between the ranks of Lieutenant and Deputy Chief on the hierarchy. He added that there has been recent consideration to reinstate the rank as it would alleviate the workload placed on the deputy chief and add another level of oversight in the department. He further added that the population of Sparks would have to keep growing to promulgate the change.

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(*Sparks Police, 2021*) 1

Compliment (Full Time):	
112 Sworn Authorized	
51 Civilian Authorized	
Total 163 Authorized	
Civilian Staffing (Authorized 51)	
Administration Division	
1 Administration Division Manager (Frozen)	
Communications Section	
1 Police Service Manager - Communications	
5 Emergency Communications Supervisors	
12 Emergency Communications Dispatchers	
Records Section	
1 Police Service Manager - Records	
3 Records Section Supervisors	
1 Terminal Agency Coordinator	
1 IT Systems Analyst	
2 IT Specialist I/II	
1 IT Specialist GIS (E911 Funded)	
4 Police Assistants	
9 Police Office Assistants	
Office of the Chief	
1 Administrative Assistant	
Patrol Section	
1 Administrative Secretary	
1 Police Assistant (Garage Liaison)	
Detective Section	
1 Administrative Secretary	
1 Crime Analyst/Statistician	
2 Victim Advocates (1 VOWA Grant Funded)	
1 Property/Evidence Supervisor	
2 Property/Evidence Technicians	
Sworn Staffing (Authorized 112)	
Office of the Chief	
1 Chief of Police	
1 Police Sergeant: Project Development	
Operations Division	
1 Deputy Chief	
Patrol Section	
4 Lieutenants	
8 Sergeants	
62 Officers	
Support Services Section	
1 Sergeant	
1 Police Officer: Crime Prevention	
2 Police Officers: Community Resource	
1 Police Officer: Academy Staff	
Investigation Division	
1 Deputy Chief	
Internal Affairs Section	
1 Lieutenant: Internal Affairs Section	
Detective Section	
1 Lieutenant	
4 Sergeants	
23 Detectives (Including CSU and Regional)	

In my conversations with Sparks Internal Affairs Lt. Patton, he informed me that there have not been any scandals, corruption, or serious misconduct by members of the Sparks Police Department in the last twenty years or more. I corroborated that statement with an internet search engine check of the local news media. The search solely revealed an incident where a Sparks police officer made controversial comments about the protests and protestors on social media in response to the officer involved shooting of an 18-year-old Sparks resident in January 2020. The shooting was later deemed justified by the Washoe County District Attorney's Office but despite that determination, protests erupted in Reno and Sparks beforehand and in the aftermath of the decision. It was an especially controversial time regarding use of force by the police and the announcement was made a month after the highly publicized Floyd death in Minneapolis. The comments drew public outrage amongst the local denizens, in support of and against the officer, to the extent that hearings were held by the Sparks City Council. The facts and circumstances surrounding the internet postings were investigated by Sparks Internal Affairs and executives resulting in disciplinary action with two out of eight departmental charges were sustained—conduct unbecoming and violation of city social media policy.

Table 1

20-E-03	Social Networks/Speech and Expression	X	X	Not Sustained
	Social Networks/Speech and Expression	X	X	Not Sustained
	Conduct Unbecoming a member of Dept.	X	X	Sustained
	Discrimination Prohibited	X	X	Not Sustained
	Improper Associations	X	X	Not Sustained
	Neglect of Duty	X	X	Not Sustained
	Subversive Acts Against the Department	X	X	Not Sustained
	City Administrative Rules/Social Media	X	X	Sustained

(Sparks Police, 2021)

The complaint number, as denoted, stayed as an “E” complaint signifying that it remained an “external complaint” and did not rise to the level of a “divisional inquiry.” I compared and contrasted Internal Affairs data from both 2018 and 2019 (Sparks Police, 2019) and ascertained that complaints that were classified “DI” (“Divisional Inquiry”) usually involved misconduct such as insubordination, violation of pursuit policies, lack of care when restraining suspects, unauthorized compliance techniques, mobile computer misuse, courtesy, neglect of duty and lack of respect for fellow employees. The SPD clearly puts an emphasis on ethical human interaction, whether internal or external. The case was handled effectively and fairly in that the officer kept his job and was not subjected to overly harsh penalties. This is in stark contrast to some major city police departments in which disciplinary adjudication most likely would have been harsher in addressing the matter, particularly since the subject officer is a senior member of the department. I think another avenue the department could take regarding matters involving conduct are clearly defining policies and restructuring/clarifying their general orders, especially in the scope of conduct, and periodically reminding their members of policies which may not be overtly obvious. This may also avert some personnel matters rising to the level of discipline such as failing to collect/preserve evidence or submitting reports. As seen in my time with the NYPD and as learned in my academic/vocational studies, policies can be implemented by an agency, but employees should be consistently reminded of the details of the policies and the disciplinary action that can transpire for failing to abide by the policy.

During my study of the SPD, I would recommend some changes to the agency for the good order and efficiency of the agency. The first change would be, as mentioned earlier, re-engineering the department website to be clear, concise and more ergonomic. The department

puts forth a lot of internal information in the obvious show of transparency. Unfortunately, the design of the site can be hard to read and navigate with overwhelming graphics and the lack of clearly marked hyperlinks. This may discourage the average user and prevent further browsing. As such, I recommend seeking for an outside web designer as there seems to be business seems plentiful in that field in the Reno/Sparks area. I also recommend that a subsection be added under the Internal Affairs section of the site explaining how the internal complaint process works— perhaps also illustrated in a flowchart along with the publishing of the department's disciplinary matrix.

I also recommend clarifying/streamlining an explanation of their hiring standards on their website and written literature as there are some redundancies/contradictions⁷ which can also insinuate “catch-alls” among prospective applicants and candidates. This may curtail the filing of potential unnecessary litigation or discrimination complaints.

Additionally, I recommend a more exacting complaint classification process and eliminating the “divisional inquiry” aspect. Complaints can be designated internal or external upon inception, but I also recommend a designation be added to denote the underlying facts in the case, such as force/discourtesy/abuse of authority, etc. The departments General Rules – Rules of Conduct should be modernized or restructured since some infractions are classified as relatively minor. For example, the revealing of the identity of a confidential informant is classified as a “B” level penalty. As an investigator for several years, I handled confidential informants on a long-term basis on a variety of cases, some of which were serious and, in the

⁷ This can be due to the redundant, anachronistic and often vague wording of both the Nevada Administrative Code and the Nevada Revised Statutes.

informants' own neighborhoods. A leak of the informant's identity would have created a serious risk of serious injury or death to the informant.

As stated earlier, I also would recommend, as I would with any organization that did not already have it in place, mandatory ethics training on a routine basis. Some policies may be obvious, but some are not so obvious, such as the extent of not only the department's social media policy but the city's social media policy as well.

As discussed earlier, SPD should reinstate the rank of Captain/Commander for all three divisions and consider adding an Internal Affairs Sergeant position. The Internal Affairs Sergeant position would work a schedule opposite of the Internal Affairs Lieutenant and further enhance the complaint intake and handling of complaints. Additionally, the Internal Affairs Sergeant or Lieutenant should have the ability to clandestinely patrol the jurisdiction, in a rental vehicle on various tours, especially outside of their scheduled tours of duty. This would add an additional level of supervision whether by perception or experience.

Upon conferral with outside agencies who conduct business with the Sparks Police on a regular basis, another recommendation would be the creation of a "Nightwatch" detective unit to cover incidents that transpire on the graveyard shift along with a trained evidence collection technician either scheduled on every tour or on a "on-call" basis as other specialized assignments are in the department. There have been serious cases where the inexperienced handling, packaging and transmitting of evidence which had resulted in loss of evidentiary value. This was due, in part, to inexperienced junior patrol officers not being able to confer with specialized units during off-hours.

In conclusion, based upon my research and conversations with SPD sworn members, I find their agency to be an ethical organization. They have a balanced approach to internal investigations of allegations and rule infractions. As an agency, they do not seem to bend to “mob rule” when a controversial matter occurs but instead fully investigate the matter without dispensing prejudicial forms of punishment as many agencies do, namely the NYPD. They seemingly want to not only attract the best candidates but train and retain their sworn officers by affording them a fair and balanced work environment, excluding draconian discipline and recognizing their employees by name and not just a number.

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