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## **Neighborhood-Driven Policing (NDP): Some Thoughts**

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My few remarks will confine themselves to the degree to which NDP comports to my vision(s) of the future.

### **Networking**

Building on Garreau (1999), NDP may offer the potential for physical and virtual networking on a scale not currently seen in policing. One could reasonably conclude that Levin and Meyers feel that neighborhoods possess their own "personalities." Depending upon one's definition, a neighborhood will likely possess greater homogeneity (socially, culturally, ethnically) than a "jurisdiction" or even a "community." Neighborhoods in one jurisdiction may or may not reflect the character of other locations within that same jurisdiction. Put another way, it is quite likely that there are neighborhoods in New York that have more in common with similar neighborhoods in Chicago than they do with others in New York. Would it not make sense for such entities to form problem-solving consortiums to deal with like issues, the solution to which may more easily generalize from neighborhood to neighborhood rather than from agency to agency? Information age technologies make such virtual networking not only possible, but well within the financial and technical reach of even small departments. Should NDP evolve in this manner, it will likely be the first significant step toward virtual community policing.

## **Problem Solving**

The rate of technological change is accelerating (Kurzweil, 1999). At least one futurist predicts that by the year 2020, the amount of information in the world will double every 73 days (Schwartz, 1999). In such an evolving world, where drastic change is the norm, how long will we in policing continue to delude ourselves into thinking that we, and only we, possess all the solutions to maintaining peace and stability in our communities? NDP is radical in this sense: it forces the police to adopt community members as peers in solving problems. And like it or not, some rather novel and even good solutions may emerge from folks who are not blinded by parochialism. Consider one field experiencing exponential change: in the artificial intelligence world, teams comprised of engineers, programmers, psychologists, linguists, and others work side-by-side. In the marketplace of ideas, diversity is thought to be a strength, not a liability.

Of course, novel and diverse solutions can also lead to truly bad outcomes; what looks good on paper may not translate well into practice. Therefore, it will be incumbent on the NDP chief of police/sheriff to be well-informed, persuasive, and, to borrow a phrase from a former co-worker, a true "coalition builder" (Monroe, 1998) to guide his/her community through the minefield of seemingly good but impractical, illegal, or just plain dumb ideas.

### **Will the Future Really Be All that Different from the Past?**

Smart (2003) opines that technological change continues to accelerate while social change has stagnated. To that end, should we reasonably expect public acceptance of and support for NDP to be much different than current police-

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community initiatives? If so, current research does not bode well for NDP success, especially where it would be expected to do the most good. For example, consistent evidence from such community-based programs as neighborhood watch suggest an inverse relationship between levels of crime and community involvement to address that crime (Skogan, 1990).

As well, community involvement in most social endeavors generally has declined in recent years (Putnam, 2000). A fair question to ask, then, is this: do we have any reason to believe that community members will have the time and interest to invest in NDP in the future? Not likely, at least if we expect individuals to attend regularly scheduled meetings at the local police substation. One possible solution would be to conduct NDP business virtually. Galston (undated) notes that virtual groups are increasingly replacing physical ones; with their low entry and exit requirements, emphasis on mutual interest and convenience, they offer an attractive alternative to face-to-face meetings. However, these same attributes may also lay the foundation for group irrelevance: easy ingress and egress may encourage abandonment rather than discourse; as well, it may not foster mutual obligation and sacrifice, two cornerstones of any generally accepted concept of "community" (Putnam, 2000).

And yet, NDP may offer the next logical step in policing as well as the proper milieu in which to meld the virtual with the physical: while offering the convenience of electronic discussions, the membership is still organized around the physical neighborhood, an interest that extends beyond the virtual. In addition, the neighborhood provides a much more understandable and directly relevant physical boundary than does "community," "jurisdiction" or "agency."

## The Next Step

Levin and Myers claim that their model is "descriptive rather than prescriptive" (Levin & Myers, 2004). They nevertheless quite convincingly argue for a concept that may well yield the next breakthrough in community-driven governance.

The authors, or those inspired by their vision, should give serious consideration to formalizing and testing their model in the "real world." There are undoubtedly many jurisdictions that possess neighborhoods appropriate for this purpose (whether there are a plethora of police chiefs willing to allow such a test in their jurisdiction is open to debate). In any case, the next steps to NDP appear to be: a) develop the model to the point that it can be tested; b) secure funding to carry out research; and c) locate an appropriate test bed. Levin and Myers are to be saluted for their insight and future(s) orientation: now it's time to get to work.

## Endnotes

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