

## PRODUCT FEATURE:

# PUBLIC SAFETY FACILITY DESIGN REQUIRES A CAREFUL BALANCE OF SECURITY AND HOSPITALITY

By Scott Harris, Freelance Writer

There might be no sector of government or business whose buildings serve such complex—and often competing—purposes as those of law enforcement.

First and foremost, the facility must be safe and secure, and this must be true for employees, visitors, and (where applicable) criminals alike. However, it cannot be too imposing because, as public servants, law enforcement facilities must welcome those who peacefully walk through their doors, from crime victims to schoolchildren.

This careful balance is the challenge every police agency faces when renovating, amending, or constructing a facility. It's a good thing, then, that a host of resources and firms are available to work closely with agencies to help turn a vision into reality.

"No two of them are alike," said Greg Read, a senior principal with Brinkley Sargent Wiginton Architects (BSW), a Dallas, Texas-based architectural firm focusing on

criminal justice and public safety facilities. "If you walk in, what is your lobby like? Do you want to welcome the public? How will you keep your staff safe? You want it to be secure, but you may want an open and inviting feel. Lots of these answers come from that particular department's philosophy and the demographics of that community."<sup>1</sup>

Security issues are top of mind, even for components as seemingly innocuous as parking areas. Should a parking lot be connected to the building or not? Should it have cameras? Should it be a covered lot or a garage? Should there be separate lots for visitors, professionals, and detainees? The permutations are almost endless.

"The planning is unique," said Brian Meade, associate principal and design director for Dewberry, a facilities design firm specializing in public safety buildings and headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia. "One of the main differences in planning is security.

You need proper setbacks. We have to think about the limit of unsecured access to the building, so it starts with site design."<sup>2</sup>

Another, perhaps less obvious security factor, is the fact that many buildings remain in use long after their intended life span. As a result, an IACP report states, "They often become seriously overcrowded, suffer from a lack of sufficient infrastructure (HVAC, electrical, data, telecommunication) and make do with outdated security and safety systems."<sup>3</sup>

In other words, police facilities that are intended to enhance safety end up potentially compromising it instead.

"Each [police agency] has, or will in the future need to plan, design and build a new headquarters, precinct or substation," states the *IACP Police Facility Planning Guidelines*, a document frequently used to help police leaders and designers navigate the building process. "Since the useful life of a police facility can range from 20 to over 50 years, a new facility project is typically a 'first-time' experience for most law enforcement executives."<sup>4</sup>

## Making a Plan

Good designs begin with a good plan, and a good plan begins with good communication between a law enforcement agency and the firm or firms it hires.

Everything from floors to doors receives special attention when designing a public safety facility. This is partly because of security demands, but it's also to create a facility that will be attractive to the public and civic leaders.

To make sure a project checks the right boxes and stays within—or at least close to—budget and time constraints, creating a blueprint for the entire process is an important first step.

Photo courtesy of Brinkley Sargent Wiginton Architects.



*Public safety buildings need to balance safety and security with an open and inviting feel that welcomes the public and those seeking law enforcement's help.*

A fairly standard starting point both for law enforcement leaders and architects is the *IACP Police Facility Planning Guidelines*. The document was produced in cooperation with chiefs of police, facilities managers, architects, engineers, and many other experts, and it aims to navigate both police and designers through what can be an extremely complex process.

To help agencies tackle knowledge gaps and time and budget constraints head-on, the IACP document establishes an 18-point framework for discussing, planning, and constructing a new police building (see sidebar). The intention is to optimize the final outcome while making the process itself as efficient and thoughtful as possible.<sup>5</sup>

Resources like this are helpful guideposts, but an expert design and architectural partner is still essential.

With this in mind, the Dewberry model is one of ease and efficiency. If the idea of a “one-stop shop” appeals to a given agency, Dewberry may be a good option. “We are definitely a true full services practice,” Meade said. “Besides planning and architecture for things like safe setbacks and barriers, we also have in-house security and technology. By having that in house, we save time and effort. It gets us through the process quicker.”<sup>6</sup>

That full services practice can also mean some budgetary advantages “A lot of public sector projects have a limited budget,” Meade acknowledged. “Security cameras, for example, can cost a lot of money. So we can work with our security team to figure out the right number of cameras, and find the spots where they are the most strategic.”<sup>7</sup>

Dewberry, a family-owned company, has been in existence since 1956. Since that date, the firm has worked on more than 100 law enforcement and public safety projects, with services ranging from needs assessments to renovations to additions to brand new facilities.

FGM Architects, a design firm based in Oakbrook, Illinois, is another firm with a lot of experience under one metaphorical roof.

In this case, the company’s expertise is centered specifically in public safety facilities. In 2012, FGM acquired SRBL Architects, a company with a deep background in police projects. As a result, FGM claims to “understand the intricacies of evidence processing, holding cell regulations, ergonomics and stress reduction for emergency dispatchers and the safety of officers during prisoner transfer,” which ultimately translates into better facility designs.<sup>8</sup>

### Collaboration Is Key

BSW, like Dewberry, has worked on more than 100 police facilities, Read estimates.

“Police is a whole different world from anything else. There are so many different functions that have to occur,” said Read.<sup>9</sup>

With the needs of each department and facility—not to mention the community it serves—varying widely, no two projects will be alike. That’s why BSW values constant communication and cooperation with its law enforcement agency clients.

“I think what sets us apart is how collaborative we are,” Read said. “We have a lot of meetings, and we don’t force answers. We look at how things can be.”<sup>10</sup>

Architects Design Group (ADG), a firm based in Orlando, Florida, with public safety

## FACILITY PLANNING MODEL\*

### Phase I: Project Initiation

This phase of the planning model contains seven project start-up steps:

1. Identify and document facility problems
2. Build police internal planning team
3. Build political support
4. Identify and secure planning funds
5. Document policing philosophy
6. Establish project pre-design team
7. Establish community support for the project

### Phase II: Project Planning & Pre-Design

This phase includes three steps focusing on pre-design planning issues:

8. Conduct space needs analysis
9. Evaluate facility options
10. Conduct site evaluation

### Phase III: Budgeting & Funding

This phase outlines three steps of the model that must be taken to assess and secure the necessary funds to complete the facility project:

11. Develop preliminary project design/construction costs
12. Obtain project funding
13. Secure and purchase site

### Phase IV: Design & Delivery Phase

The last five steps of the model identify all necessary actions to design, construct, and occupy the facility:

14. Deliver design and construction services
15. Select an architect
16. Design the facility
17. Build the facility
18. Develop occupancy strategy

#### Note:

\*International Association of Chiefs of Police, *IACP Police Facility Planning Guidelines*, <http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/pdfs/publications/acf2f3d.pdf>.



*These photos courtesy of Dewberry Architects*



**Top:** The interior of public safety facilities need to be functional and secure, while also providing employee-friendly spaces to work, collaborate, and gather. **Bottom:** Public safety agencies are often the most visible “face” of local government, and their buildings should reflect that public-facing role.

are key to create the specialized facilities that meet the complex needs of public safety agencies and their communities. ❖

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>Greg Read (senior principal, Brinkley Sargent Wiginton Architects), telephone interview, May 16, 2017.

<sup>2</sup>Brian Meade (associate principal and design director, Dewberry Architects), telephone interview, May 16, 2017.

<sup>3</sup>International Association of Chiefs of Police, *IACP Police Facility Planning Guidelines: Desk Reference for Law Enforcement Executives* (Alexandria, VA: IACP, March 2002), v, <http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/pdfs/publications/acf2f3d.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Meade, telephone interview, May 16, 2017.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>FGM Architects, “Public Safety Expertise: Overview,” <https://fgmarchitects.com/expertise/public-safety/public-safety-expertise>.

<sup>9</sup>Read, telephone interview, May 16, 2017.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>ADG USA, “Strategic Teaming Opportunities,” <http://adgusa.org/strategic-teaming>.

**PRODUCT FEATURE:**

**FACILITY DESIGN PROVIDERS**

For contact information, please visit [www.policechiefmagazine.org](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org).

Architects Design Group

Brinkley Sargent Wiginton Architects

Dewberry Architects, Inc.

FGM Architects

McClaren, Wilson & Lawrie, Inc.

Redstone Architects, Inc.

experience, also puts collaboration at the heart of its business model.

In a process known as “strategic teaming,” ADG makes a point to reach out to local architects to jointly tackle big projects, feasibility studies, needs assessments, or any other factors of the planning and design process.

“ADG has associated with local architects across the United States for more than 25 years,” ADG’s website states. “This relationship has been successful for our clients

as it establishes a national resource for public safety design providing programming, space needs assessment, master planning, and design that is readily available to the local architect and the client. Our teaming approach has been implemented successfully on over 40 projects.”<sup>11</sup>

Whether an agency is looking to revamp or rebuild its public safety facility, all of the professionals seems to agree that collaboration, communication, and careful planning



Learn more about the important considerations for public safety facilities in the article “Psychology of Space: Enhancing Legitimacy through Open, Transparent, and Inclusive Facilities for Police and the Public” at [www.policechiefmagazine.org/psychology-space-enhancing-legitimacy](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/psychology-space-enhancing-legitimacy).