

Revamp of Community Policing Under Way

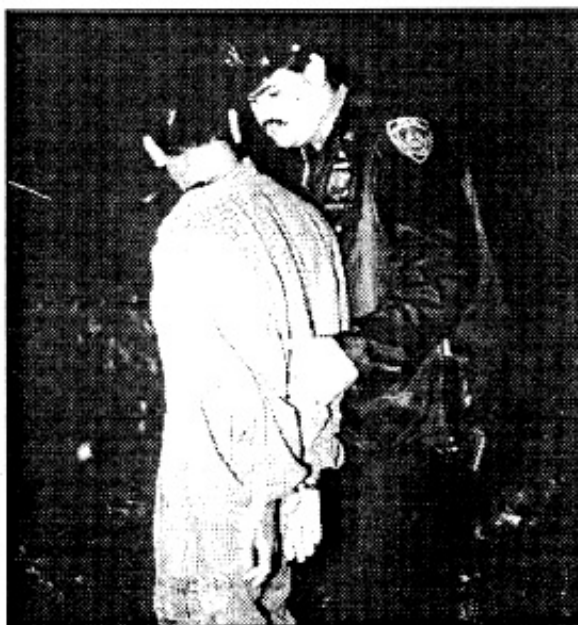
BY CRAIG MCGUIRE

Police Commissioner William Bratton plans to restructure the police department, decentralize authority and implement measures aimed at improving community policing, he said in a *Tribune* interview. Bratton is taking these steps in response to criticism of the police department's "community policing" program; introduced under previous commissioner, Lee Brown.

At the end of July, Queens Councilman Sheldon Leffler released a report that reviewed problems with community policing identified in 1993 hearings before the Council's Committee on Public Safety, which Leffler chairs. According to the results of a study, many Queens residents feel that while community policing has potential, it has not been effectively implemented.

The report featured the testimony of community board managers, many of whom felt that the department and police officers had not fully committed themselves to com-

munity policing, said Leffler. "I suspect that for many officers, a lack of training in the fundamentals of community policing and problem solving is leading them to believe that they should work as they see fit without working in partnership



Community Police Officer James Moran escorts a man to 112th Precinct after he was caught for driving with a suspended license.

with the communities they patrol," said Leffler.

But in a *Tribune* interview, Police Commissioner William Bratton said the problem is that

community policing promised too much.

"In 1991 when the program 'The Beat Cop is Back' was initiated, it was oversold," explained Bratton. "Oversold in terms of its ability to deliver and the person who was expected to deliver was inexperienced."

According to Bratton, the key to improving the effectiveness of community policing will be the decentralization of authority to precinct commanders.

Kathleen Reilly from Community Board 6, which includes Rego Park and Forest Hills, was one of the six Queens district managers that testified at the hearings.

"One size does not fit all," said Reilly. "The commanding officer should have more flexibility in solving problems." Reilly is not alone in her criticism.

"I don't feel community policing is working here," said Rose Rothschild, district manager for Community Board 4, which covers Elmhurst and Corona. "There needs to be higher vis-

ibility of these officers in the community."

In 1985, a Community Policing Officer on Patrol (CPOP) pilot program was operated out of the 110th precinct in CB 4.

"That program worked, because there was more permanency," said Rothschild. "What's happening now is that the officers come out of the academy into community policing patrols for a short time, and are then transferred."

Among the impending changes, Bratton plans to invest a wealth of experience into the leadership of community policing patrols throughout the city.

"I am going to assign superstars," explained Bratton. "These 75 of the best commanders will be reassigned and given the resources and authority to deal with problems in their precincts."

Discontent with community policing, some district managers offered suggestions of their own.

"More community policing should be done at night," said Jonathan Gaska, district manager for Community Board 14 in southern Queens. "Beats should also be smaller so the officer can not only focus on a smaller area, but be more visible to the residents."

Bratton plans to reveal specifics of the plan in either late September, or early October.