

# Cop station losses may turn to gains

By Sharman Stein

The seven communities destined to lose their local police stations as part of a restructuring of the Chicago Police Department may be chosen as prototype districts for community policing, police sources said Tuesday.

Community policing, which will provide resources, personnel and attention to the neighborhoods, could appease residents who are upset over the department's plans to eliminate some district headquarters.

The city recently announced it would close seven police stations, most likely the oldest ones, to save money and consolidate personnel. The stations have not yet been officially named, but police sources have said they will be Town Hall, Albany Park, Morgan Park, Austin, Wood, Dering and Foster.

Under the plan, officers would no longer be based at the stations, but the buildings would remain open for general police services.

Community policing puts officers in closer contact with residents to pro-actively solve crimes, rather than devoting the majority of police resources to responding to emergencies. The program is slated to begin in Chicago in five or six prototype districts, which have not yet been named. Residents in some districts already are lobbying heavily to be among the prototypes.

Supt. Matt Rodriguez said Tuesday that he will endorse the opening of the prototype districts in the areas with closed station houses if the communities support it. A community forum will be held Wednesday night at Kennedy-King College, 6800 S. Wentworth Ave. Registration for those wishing to speak will begin at 6:30 p.m. Eight other forums are scheduled later.

"All I ask is that people be open-minded," Rodriguez said following his remarks at a forum on community policing Tuesday.

Warren Friedman, executive director of the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety, which has long encouraged community policing, said exchanging the stations for community policing would be "manipulative."

However, Friedman said the pro-

totypes could be successful in those communities as long as they are racially mixed and have strong community organizations capable of working with police, among other things.

"I'm just concerned that it be a good test, or at least a situation where we can learn from the failures," Friedman said. "It's important that it not seem like a political thing."

Friedman said he was disturbed that the recommendation by the Booz, Allen & Hamilton consulting firm to close the stations could poison people's attitudes toward community policing.

"There's so much general distrust of government, it seems to be a mistake to ask people to give something up, even if it is unimportant, for the promise of better policing. Part of the effect has been to divide the community," Friedman said.

He said the city should gain 789 officers through streamlining moves, and therefore will not need the additional officers to be accrued by closing stations in order to begin community policing.

In his remarks at UIC on Tuesday, Rodriguez stressed his intentions to adopt community policing while remaining well-equipped to react to violent crime and maintain standard police services.

Community policing will work best in the city, Rodriguez said, if it is tailored to Chicago's unique needs and if the department listens to communities about their priorities.

The superintendent said he considers communities' avid interest in community policing to be very positive.

"It indicates a healthy recognition that the status quo is not acceptable," he said. "The community has a desire to have a one-on-one relationship with police."

Dennis Nowicki, executive director of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and former police chief of Joliet, told the group that many doubts will surround community policing.

He said that new measures must be used to gauge its success, such as looking at changes in the school dropout rate, teenage pregnancy rates and other lifestyle issues.