



Published August 3rd, 2022

Lafayette crime rates hold steady in first half of year

By Lou Fancher

Lafayette Police Chief Ben Alldritt at the July 25 city council meeting presented January to June 2022 data demonstrating primarily small increases or steady states in criminal action compared to reports from 2021. With the exception of 2020, when statistics dropped for a year due to more people staying at home during the pandemic, crime rates in 2019 and earlier years were generally higher when compared to crime rates in the first half of 2022.

Council Member Susan Candell thanked the department for increasing the number of citations on traffic stops that appears to be making a difference in reducing traffic incident rates.

The Emergency Preparedness Commission has continued to upgrade and bolster Lafayette's emergency plans and preparedness communication systems, Alldritt said. Programs such as the Community Warning System, ALERTWildfire, Zonehaven and the city's AM1670 radio station enhance the safety for residents and visitors alike.

New equipment and technology in 2022 includes a Mobile Communications/Drone Command truck. It is capable of performing off-road operations and can serve as a command post and communication hub when traditional systems (cellular/radio) are not available. Alldritt said the truck uses four separate radio systems, provides internet to locations nearby and can be used as a radio repeater for communication between agencies.

The truck's ability to provide backup internet coverage is crucial. High speed internet can be "beamed down" from wildfire cameras and support triage services with other departments during emergencies, Alldritt said. Also, a new Shared Microwave Internet system that operates in combination with wildfire cameras provides a redundant microwave communication system at antenna towers surrounding the Lamorinda area.

With the beginning of school fast approaching, school safety was an important element in the presentation and drew the most questions from the council. Lafayette has dedicated resources to providing improved school safety with the primary focus on communications and training.

Alldritt said the police department would be hosting active shooter safety training for teachers this fall and mobile radios have been added at each school in Lafayette. All school offices have radios that utilize the same multi-county radio network as the police and fire department. There is also access to a shared mobile communications radio channel on First Student school buses. The radios connect bus drivers to first responders during emergencies. Beginning in August, police officers will be working with staff at each school to coordinate a weekly radio "Net."

Council Member Gina Dawson asked if basic department-led earthquake and fire safety drills will continue. Alldritt said these drills are put on by school officials. "On the fire and earthquake emergencies, the radios were the big push over the last year," he said. "The drills fall to the schools and will be supported by the police department as needed or requested."

Felony Person crimes are one of the department's highest priorities as they have the largest impact on the victims. Between January and June, the city had three robberies (1 armed/2 strong-armed), one rape, and four incidents of domestic violence with none of the latter involving the sexual assault of a child.

Alldritt said the city's one reported rape case is undergoing an active investigation and he expects a positive outcome soon, with a suspect held responsible. He offered no additional details at this time to protect the privacy of the victim and ensure the investigation continues without interruption. Domestic violence, he noted, had increased, possibly due to more people being confined at home and isolated. He said it is a disturbing statistic he hopes will soon go down to zero.

The one armed robbery during the month of June, Alldritt said, involved a person who was robbed of a watch at gunpoint. The Lafayette police department is working with allied agencies in Contra Costa County to discern if the robbery is linked to other, similar crimes in nearby cities. Two strong arm robberies in which employees trying to stop the suspects were assaulted took place at a pharmacy and at a liquor store.

Council Member Wei-Tai Kwok asked if shoplifting is classified as commercial burglary and if there are increasing trends in that area. Alldritt explained that commercial burglaries are more often someone breaking in at night, while shoplifting falls under a different data category. He said multiple reports are called in every week and the department has a high recovery rate compared to other cities. Lafayette businesses are in a relatively enclosed area, egress and ingress are limited, and officers know the strategies for catching the criminals, such as covering back entrances and BART stations quickly.

As for auto burglaries, Alldritt said residents needed to remember that these burglaries often happen in neighborhoods, not just in the downtown core. He warned everyone to remove visible items of value in cars parked in driveways or on residential streets.

The chief's full report can be viewed online as part of the July 25 council meeting on the city's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpRFR3rWwTw&t=12s>

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[back](#)

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