



# City of Palo Alto

## City Council Staff Report

(ID # 11071)

---

**Report Type: Study Session**

**Meeting Date: 2/24/2020**

**Summary Title: Police Department Study Session with Council**

**Title: Study Session on Community Policing**

**From: City Manager**

**Lead Department: Police**

### **Recommendation**

This is a study session and no action is needed from Council.

### **Background**

The Police Department's longstanding mission statement is "to proudly serve and protect the public with respect and integrity." The Department's personnel value and expect teamwork, trust, integrity, accountability, a positive attitude, and the professional, impartial treatment of all. We strive to do our best work on a daily basis, and to continually learn as an organization and individuals. Chief Robert A. Jonsen expects all employees of the Police Department to be excellent in everything they do, proactively enforcing the law and serving the Palo Alto community with professionalism and respect. The Police Department works closely with other City departments, the business community, the faith-based community, neighborhood organizations, the Palo Alto Unified School District, and our regional public safety partners to provide the best possible service to everyone within Palo Alto.

In November 2019, City Manager directed staff to organize a study session on the current operations of the Police Department. At this study session, Chief Jonsen will inform the City Council of the current Department organizational structure, crime statistics, recent notable accomplishments, administrative oversight and accountability, recent legislative changes, and the evolution of the law enforcement labor force.

### **Discussion**

Much of the information in this staff report is contained in our recently-released 2019 Annual Report. This document, which is available online for viewing or download at [www.cityofpaloalto.org/papd2019](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/papd2019), is a comprehensive overview of the Police Department and its operations during 2019. The Annual Report includes information on each facet of the Department and showcases the full range of services that we offer to

the Palo Alto community.

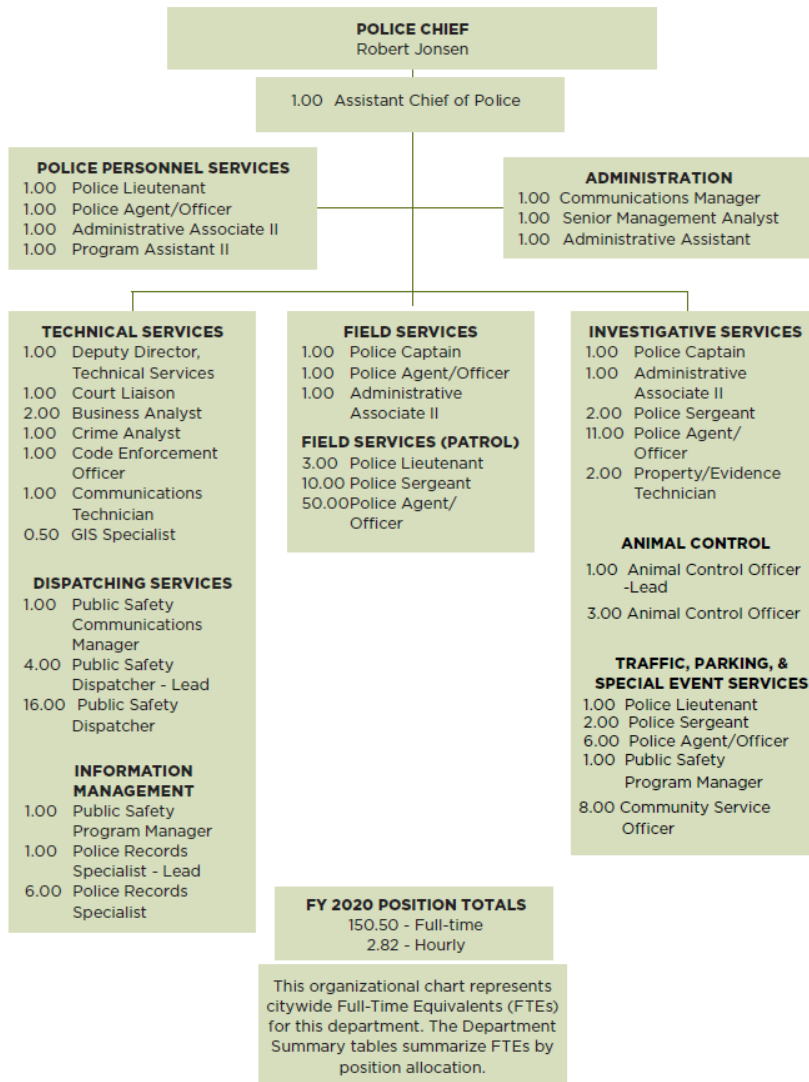
## **Organizational Structure**

For the Fiscal Year 2020, the Police Department was allocated 150.50 full-time positions and 2.82 hourly positions to serve the community. There are 92 sworn positions and approximately 58 non-sworn and professional staff positions. From the previous year, the Police Department eliminated several positions within the former Animal Services Division, after the City transitioned operations of the animal shelter to the non-profit organization Pets In Need.

The Police Department is comprised of four main divisions:

- The Field Services Division consists of our uniformed patrol personnel, the most visible representatives of the Department.
- The Investigative Services Division consists of the detective bureau, which investigates complex criminal cases; the Traffic Team, which conducts full-time traffic enforcement duties and serves as the liaison with the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) for school traffic safety; the Special Enforcement Team, which addresses current crime trends; and the property room.
- The Technical Services Division consists of the records unit, which operates the public lobby for police services; the 24-hour dispatch center, where Public Safety Dispatchers handle all emergency calls for multiple City disciplines and services; and personnel who work in technology, code enforcement, and other support services.
- The Administration Division consists of the Personnel and Training Unit, which handles all hiring and training for the Department; public affairs; budget; and other support services.

Below is the current organizational chart for the Police Department for Fiscal Year 2020.



## Crime Statistics

The Palo Alto Police Department’s 24-hour dispatch center receives a high volume of calls for service for a mid-sized police agency, spanning police, fire, and medical calls for both Palo Alto and the Stanford University campus, as well as calls for Palo Alto Utilities, Public Works, and Animal Control. Our 24-hour dispatch center is the third-busiest dispatch center in Santa Clara County, and handled 37,452 9-1-1 calls during 2019, 99.5% of which were answered within 15 seconds.

For 2019, Palo Alto Police Department officers made 2,185 arrests and issued 6,578 citations. Below are annual statistics of the number of calls for service, offense reports, and traffic collision reports handled by the Palo Alto Police Department dating back eleven years.

Year	Police Calls For Service	Offense Reports	Collision Reports
<b>2019</b>	<b>51,417</b>	<b>5,611</b>	<b>836</b>
2018	55,798	5,715	993
2017	54,926	5,938	952
2016	52,366	5,534	969
2015	58,243	6,729	1,025
2014	59,773	6,058	1,108
2013	65,861	5,764	1,173
2012	62,783	5,607	1,001
2011	59,815	4,921	1,096
2010	63,966	5,463	1,037
2009	63,950	6,171	1,011

The Palo Alto Police Department is responsible for annually reporting on Uniform Crime Report (UCR) statistics. Uniform Crime Reporting is a law enforcement program designed to provide a nationwide view of crime based on the submission of statistics by law enforcement agencies throughout the country. Each agency is required to report monthly crime statistics to the California Department of Justice, which in turn forwards the information to the FBI. The FBI then uses this information to publish its annual Uniform Crime Report.

For practical purposes, the reporting of known offenses is limited to the crime classifications listed in the Part I Crimes summary because they are crimes most likely to be reported and crimes that occur with sufficient frequency to provide an adequate basis for comparison across the United States.

The chart below shows the past seven years of Palo Alto’s UCR Part 1 crime statistics. While crime trends tend to be cyclical, overall, Palo Alto continues to have a very low rate of violent crime per capita. This past year, statistics showed a decrease in crime rates for the crimes of assault, residential/commercial burglaries, and arson.

<b>Crimes</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Homicide	0	1	1	1	0	0	1
Rape	4	4	13	10	11	6	10
Robbery <sup>1</sup>	30	26	26	28	39	30	46
Assault	21	24	27	35	40	38	29
Burglary <sup>2</sup>	242	273	212	221	215	234	179
Larceny-Theft <sup>3</sup>	1179	975	1407	1161	1477	1197	1724
Stolen Vehicle	69	68	87	65	92	83	83
Arson	10	3	5	8	6	9	8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1555</b>	<b>1374</b>	<b>1778</b>	<b>1529</b>	<b>1880</b>	<b>1597</b>	<b>2080</b>

<sup>1</sup> Robbery is defined as the felonious taking of personal property in the possession of another, from his person or immediate presence, and against his will, accomplished by means of force or fear.

<sup>2</sup> This category includes commercial and residential burglaries, but not auto burglaries

<sup>3</sup> This category comprises thefts, which include auto burglaries

The notable increase in the “Larceny-Theft” category is due to the rise of auto burglaries, where suspects forcibly break into a locked car and steal property from inside. This rise in auto burglaries is not unique to Palo Alto; rather, it is a regional trend that is plaguing cities throughout the Bay Area and one that all law enforcement agencies are working together to address. Department detectives work with our Special Enforcement Team and Crime Analysis Unit to help direct marked and unmarked patrols to particularly hard-hit areas (almost always commercial areas like shopping centers, parking garages, restaurant parking lots, and other locations where large numbers of cars are left unattended for long periods of time) at specific times of day when burglaries were most likely to occur. The Department also continued its use of the “Lock It or Lose It” educational campaign, routinely urging community members to help us combat this crime trend by always locking their vehicles, and never leaving any valuables behind.

## **Recent Notable Accomplishments**

### **Body-Worn Camera Program**

The Police Department implemented the Body-Worn Camera (BWC) Program in the patrol division in September 2018, after extensive review and testing. The patrol division has five cameras in every marked vehicle and each patrol officer has a BWC on their person. The Palo Alto Police Department was the first and only agency in the county, followed solely by the Stanford Department of Public Safety, that has opted for the most complete package of video recording coverage of police interactions. This

system requires significant storage capacity, as the department created approximately 30,000 hours of video recordings in 2019. The benefit of this comprehensive video coverage is the ability to protect the officers, be accountable to the public in the course and scope of the officer's duties and create independent evidence of public interactions.

### **Traffic Team**

Through comprehensive outreach to the community, Chief Jonsen received the feedback that traffic enforcement was a significant priority to the residents of Palo Alto. As staffing permitted, the Department was able to bring back a two-officer dedicated Traffic Team in July 2018 and expanded the team to one sergeant and two officers in July 2019. The team focuses on persistent problems, which include commercial vehicle enforcement, truck route violations, school zone safety, bike routes, and speeding violations. The team also patrols city streets that have undergone recent engineering improvements meant to enhance roadway safety.

In 2019, the Traffic Team worked with the Chief's Advisory Group to focus on enforcement where it was needed most. They discussed community concerns, specific locations and the types of driving violations being observed. This collaboration allowed for direct community input to the team's enforcement locations. The Traffic Team provided feedback to the community on observations, challenges, and recommendations for each location. From August through December 2019, the Traffic Team visited six target locations 198 times and issued 651 citations.

### **Regional Task Force Partnerships**

The Police Department recognizes the value of contributing personnel to county-wide task forces, as these important positions help combat crime on a regional level that also affects crime in Palo Alto. In 2019, the Department contributed one sergeant to the Santa Clara County Specialized Enforcement Team (SCCSET) and one officer to the Regional Automotive Theft Task Force (RATTF). SCCSET specializes in investigations related to narcotics, organized crime, violent crimes, gangs, firearms, and other cases affecting public safety and quality of life throughout the county. RATTF specializes in combatting the crime of vehicle theft and related automotive crimes throughout the Bay Area. Both task force relationships have been instrumental in assisting the Police Department with significant criminal investigations within the city limits of Palo Alto.

### **New Positions to Enhance Customer Service**

Frequent public engagement is extremely important in maintaining a cooperative and transparent relationship with the community we serve. In 2018, the Department created a new Public Affairs Manager position to help communicate all of its activities and emergency messaging. In 2019, in an effort to better serve the community while managing staffing challenges, the City brought back a non-sworn Patrol Community Service Officer program for a one-year trial basis. The two patrol Community Service Officers have been an asset to the patrol division by responding to reports of non-injury collisions, automobile burglaries without suspect information, found and lost property,

and many other non-emergency calls. This program has been a huge success in helping the Department enhance community service and the Department is exploring expansion of this program in the future.

### **Community Engagement**

The Department has focused on increasing community engagement since 2018 in several ways. In August 2018, Chief Jonsen created the Chief's Advisory Group, comprised of one representative from each of the residential neighborhoods within Palo Alto. This group meets every other month to discuss topics important to the residents in our community. Some current topics of group discussion are important locations for traffic enforcement, collaboration with the school community on safety topics, crime trends, police policies and procedures, and innovative ideas on recruiting a diverse workforce (though the Department already employs 32 persons who speak a variety of languages including Spanish, German, Korean, Russian, Mandarin, Urdu, Tagalog, Portuguese, Cantonese, Vietnamese, and Farsi).

In August 2018, the Department renewed its participation in National Night Out, a nationwide community-building campaign that promotes police-community partnerships and neighborhood camaraderie through police visits to block parties around the City. The Department continued participation in National Night Out in 2019 and plans to take part in it annually moving forward.

The Police Department also continues to offer the very popular Basic Citizens Police Academy (CPA). The CPA is an 8-week course meeting once per week that focuses on educating members of the public about the work of policing. Since revamping the program in 2016, 165 community members have attended the Basic CPA program and 145 members have graduated. The Department also recently brought back the Advanced Citizens Police Academy sessions for graduates of the basic curriculum. The advanced sessions are one-night classes that focus on a single area of police operations and provide detailed information about it.

Community members regularly request special interaction and instruction from the Police Department staff. These requests take the form of presentations to school children, talking to senior groups about general safety precautions, bicycle "rodeos" teaching children to ride safely, and station tours to community groups, to name a few. In 2019, Department employees handled 35 formal requests for police-community interactions and dozens of informal interaction requests, all towards the goal of building a strong relationship with the community.

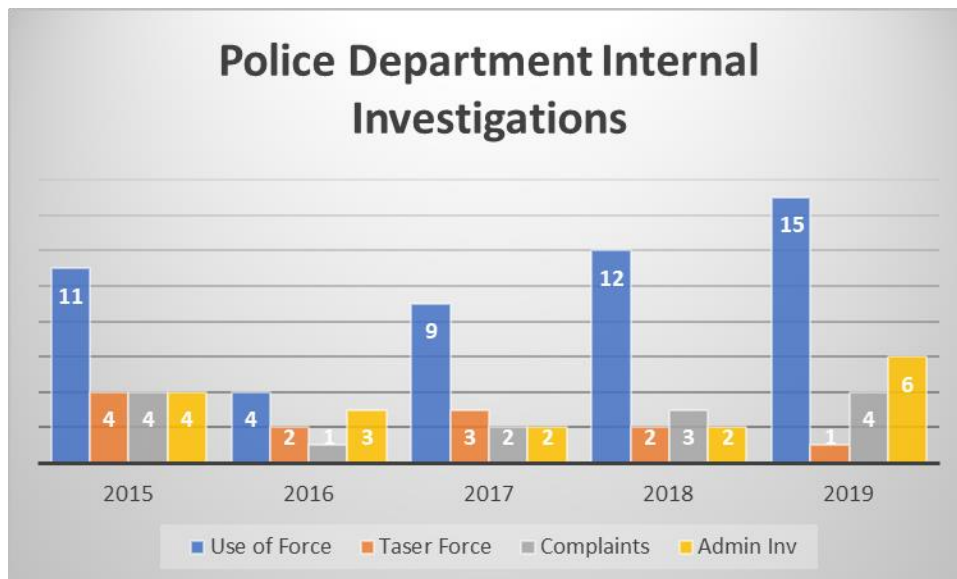
### **Technology Enhancements**

Two significant technical projects were completed in 2019. The Technical Services Division completed the transition of all City of Palo Alto and Stanford Department of Public Safety radio users to the digital Silicon Valley Regional Communications System (SVRCS). This was the culmination of a nine-year effort to improve radio

communications in Santa Clara County and provide interoperability between first responders from all agencies. Another important technical upgrade was the replacement of the mobile data computers (MDCs) in the police patrol vehicles.

### Administrative Oversight and Accountability

In 2019, police officers responded to 51,417 calls for service. During those calls, officers only had to use force to arrest or detain a person in 1 out of every 2,857 contacts. During those same 51,417 calls, officers received a citizen complaint in only 1 out of every 12,854 calls. Below is a chart outlining the numbers of administrative investigations completed at the direction of Police Department command staff. Investigations may be conducted by police sergeants, police managers, or contracted investigators, depending on the circumstance. Command staff reviews all investigations and sends specified investigations to the Independent Police Auditor as directed.



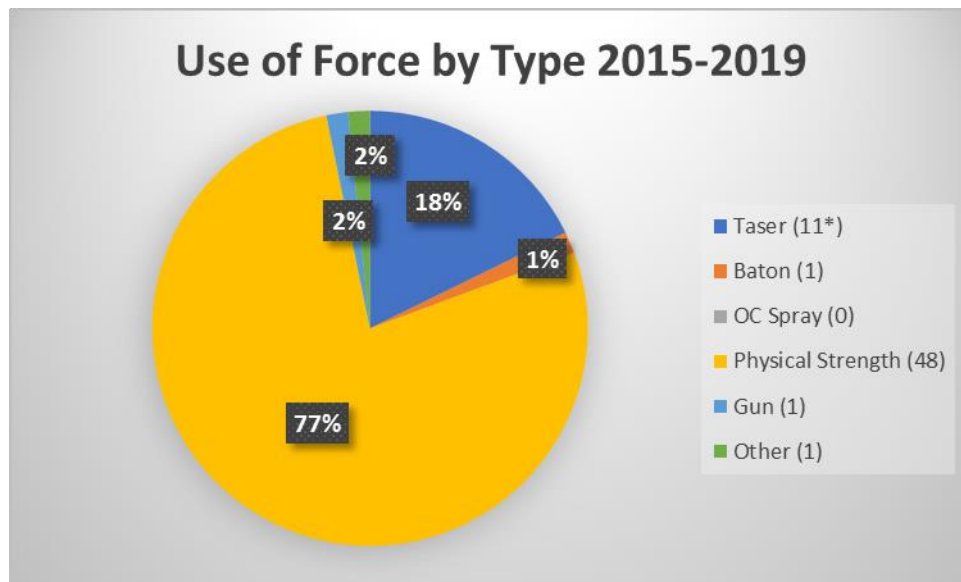
The City of Palo Alto retained an Independent Police Auditor (IPA) in 2006 to ensure accountability with Police Department internal investigations. The IPA’s role is to receive public-generated complaints; review Police Department complaint investigations, TASER use of force investigations, and administrative investigations conducted by internal Department staff members; and make recommendations on those investigations and their findings. Prior to 2019, the Palo Alto Police Department and San Jose Police Department had been the only two agencies in Santa Clara County with police auditors. The IPA and the Police Department have maintained a collaborative working relationship through regular conferences about investigations under their purview. Over the past 14 years, the IPA has provided thoughtful considerations for operational and policy modifications. All of the reports generated by



the IPA are viewable on the Department website at [www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pol/auditor.asp](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pol/auditor.asp). Members of the public can go online to file a commendation for a Department employee (see [www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pol/report/employee\\_commendation.asp](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pol/report/employee_commendation.asp)) or to file a complaint on a Department employee (see [www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pol/report/employee\\_complaint.asp](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pol/report/employee_complaint.asp)).

The Police Department recognizes and respects the value of all human life and dignity without prejudice to anyone. Vesting officers with the authority to use reasonable force and to protect the public welfare requires monitoring, evaluation, training, and a careful balancing of all interests. When personnel are forced to take a violent criminal offender into custody, officers utilize sound defensive tactics techniques and/or tools to do this as safely as possible, with the goal being a minimum of injury to all involved. The safety of the public, officers, and criminal suspects arrested are our highest priorities. Although rare in frequency, the Department has a strict policy in the reporting of the use of force and orders a comprehensive, thorough review of each incident. The Department employs a high standard for that review, even to include any time a person has a complaint of pain despite the lack of a visible injury.

Below is a chart showing the breakdown of the categories of force Department personnel used over the past five years. During that time, there were a total of 62 uses of force cases investigated by the Police Department.



\* One of the 11 TASER applications also included an officer using a carotid restraint. This was the only use of a carotid restraint by a Department member between 2015 and 2019.

The Palo Alto Police Department Policy Manual appears online here:  
[www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?t=73481.02&BlobID=74121](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?t=73481.02&BlobID=74121).  
The Department's Use of Force policy appears in its entirety in that manual.

## **Recent Legislative Changes**

2019 was a significant year of legislative changes at the state level to enhance the transparency of law enforcement agencies throughout California.

Senate Bill 1421, effective January 1, 2019, changed the ability of the public and the press to obtain previously confidential police personnel records. This bill amended Penal Code section 832.7 to allow the release of records for an officer discharging a firearm at a person, an officer using force that resulted in great bodily injury, a sustained finding that an officer was engaged in the sexual assault of a person, and a sustained finding regarding an officer committing acts of dishonesty. Previously, such records were only available through a *Pitchess* motion.

Assembly Bill 748, effective July 1, 2019, contains new disclosure provisions, broadly allowing audio and video recordings of "critical incidents" to be released to the public. Critical incidents are defined as either a discharge of a firearm by an officer or the use of any type of force that results in death or great bodily injury.

Senate Bill 978, effective January 1, 2020, requires all police departments to publish their policies, practices, operational procedures, and training materials for public viewing, with adherence to the California Public Records Act exemptions. In January 2020, the Police Department published a new "Public Information Portal" on the Department's website to highlight the legislated police operations and training document releases. That portal is viewable here:  
[https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pol/public\\_information\\_portal .asp](https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/pol/public_information_portal.asp).

In response to these legislative changes, the Police Department has redirected staff resources and has anticipated the need for investment in technology to meet the required mandates. Government Code 6253.1 requires public agencies to respond with a focused effort to persons requesting to inspect public records or obtain copies of public records. The release of police documents and associated items requires careful statute analysis, confidential information redaction, video image redaction, video editing, secure digital storage, digital media duplication equipment, and legal review prior to disclosure. In 2019, the Police Department's records unit processed over 2,600 California Public Records Acts requests.

## **Evolution of the Law Enforcement Labor Force**

Regionally, there has been a significant decrease in the number of qualified applicants

for police officer positions for more than five years. The Police Department has an allocation of 92 sworn police officer positions and 58 non-sworn professional staff. Recent professional staff vacancies have yielded a solid number of applicants for each position, but the number of qualified applicants for both police officer and public safety dispatcher positions have remained low from previous decades. For the past several years, the Department has had a standing sworn officer vacancy rate of about 10 to 17 positions. These staffing shortages, along with the impact of personal illness leave, injury leave, significant staff time off with the City's new paid family leave, and approved FMLA leaves make maintaining minimum staffing ratios a challenge.

The Department has made significant time investments in recruiting and hiring efforts, to include attending a wide variety of career fairs, visiting colleges, academies, and military bases, and streamlining the complex testing process to move qualified applicants along at a rapid pace, instead of the six months or more the process traditionally required. The Personnel & Training Unit currently prioritizes near-immediate processing of applicants in an effort to hire the best candidates in a highly competitive environment. All of this effort has paid off and the Department currently has only eight sworn vacancies.

The Police Department is an evolving organization, with pending eligible retirements annually and the average tenure of officers on patrol currently is eight years of service. The Department recognizes the need for continued thoughtful succession planning, high-quality training, sustained recruitment efforts, and ongoing personnel retention strategies.

## **Looking Forward**

The government of the City of Palo Alto is dedicated to being responsive to the community and innovative in-service offerings and the Police Department is an active partner in meeting those goals. For 2020, Chief Jonsen will be focusing on several key initiatives to better serve the community. The employees of the Palo Alto Police Department can give their best when they are healthy in mind, body, and spirit. The Department will continue to offer and find new ways to enhance "resiliency training" for all employees to achieve Chief Jonsen's motto of, "Be Fit, Be Well, Be More." To better serve the community's need for traffic enforcement, as soon as staffing permits, the Department plans to expand the size of the Traffic Team. To address the recent rise in auto burglaries, the Department will continue to dedicate personnel to focus on those specific criminal investigations. The Department also will continue exploring and developing innovative approaches to service delivery to combat crime. Through the commitment to excellent service by all employees, the Palo Alto Police Department will continue to do our best work in making this city as safe as possible.