

# **Vergennes Police Department Staffing and Workload Report**

Prepared for the City of Vergennes

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the city officials, Vergennes community members, and the Vergennes Police Department staff who have assisted with this study and provided insights into the operation of the police department. Notwithstanding the findings of Vergennes' approach to policing and the culture it creates, we found many Vergennes police officers and other city employees to be dedicated public servants who strive each day to lawfully perform their duties with respect for all members of the community. The importance of their often-selfless work cannot be overstated.

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## Contents

<b>Acronyms</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
Summary of Key Findings .....	ii
Summary of Recommendations .....	iii
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Primary Data Sources and Methodology .....	1
<b>Section I. The Policing Environment</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1 City of Vergennes Overview and Service Population Demographics .....	3
1.2 Vergennes Police Department Overview.....	4
1.3 The City of Vergennes and Vergennes Police Department Historical Overview .....	6
<b>Section II. Calls for Service Overview</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Section III. Staffing and Deployment</b> .....	<b>14</b>
3.1 Overtime .....	15
3.2 Sworn Positions.....	16
3.3 Civilian/Administrative Positions .....	17
<b>Section IV. Expectations for the Delivery of Police Services</b> .....	<b>19</b>
4.1 Community-Police Engagement .....	19
4.2 How are Existing Resources being Utilized? .....	21
<b>Appendix A: Community Survey Results</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendix B: Additional Tables</b> .....	<b>44</b>

## Table of Tables

Table 1. Uniform Crime Reporting, Part I Known Offenses for 2017-2020	5
Table 2. 2015-2020 CFS by Category	10
Table 3. CFS by Category and by Year (2015-2020)	11
Table 5. Sworn Non-Patrol Schedules	14
Table 6. Patrol Shift Hours	14
Table 7. Patrol Personnel Allocations by Day of Week and Time of Day	15
Table 8. OT by Category (January 1, 2021 – March 13, 2022)	15
Table 9 . Total Reports by Category and Report Nature (2015-2020)	44

## Table of Figures

Figure 1. Vergennes Police Department Organizational Chart	4
Figure 2. Crimes Against Persons 2017-2020	5
Figure 3. Property Crimes 2017-2020	6
Figure 4 . CFS by Category over Time	11
Figure 5. Total CFS by Time and by Day of the Week (2015-2020)	12
Figure 6. Average CFS by Hour (2015-2020)	13
Figure 7. Vergennes and Out of Jurisdiction Total CFS (2015-2020) by Year	23
Figure 8. Vergennes and Out of Jurisdiction Average CFS by Month (2015-2020)	24

## Acronyms

CAD	Computer-Aided Dispatch
CFS	Calls for Service
CRBEC	Citizen Review Board Exploratory Committee
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OT	Overtime
VPD	Vergennes Police Department

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## Executive Summary

The City of Vergennes is facing a similar challenge that many smaller cities are facing across the United States – balancing public safety with the reality of budget constraints. More specifically, how do they ensure that the Vergennes Police Department is staffed appropriately while recognizing that the current department budget constituting a significant percentage of the City’s overall budget may no longer be feasible or desired by the Vergennes community.

In August 2021, the City of Vergennes contracted with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) to analyze department staffing of sworn and non-sworn staff and delivery of police services. While an analysis of the community-police relationship was conducted, it was within the confines of how the relationship impacts the expectations for the delivery of police services. A further examination beyond what is contained within this report would be outside the scope of this study.

### Summary of Key Findings

The Vergennes Police Department is a well-trained and well-organized department, and they generally enjoy a good relationship with the community. This was not always the case, but the department has put in considerable work to emerge from the troubles of the early 2000s. Understanding the history of the department, from where it was to where it is today, is important in putting the findings of this report into context.

Vergennes is a safe community with little serious crime, and the majority of calls for service are for quality-of-life issues and traffic incidents. Calls for service (CFS) related to crimes against person and property crimes constitute the smallest percentage of calls. While officer safety and availability remain serious concerns, the types of CFS and the reality of fiscal constraints also have to be considered, and the current fiscal status of the city and the level of activity do not solely support always having two officers on duty. However, there is an opportunity to reduce the administrative burden on sworn officers by hiring a civilian administrative position and making use of volunteers. This would free up some time for officers to focus more on core police functions, including engaging in community policing.

For any police agency, community expectations are as important as calls for service and other police operations when determining appropriate staffing levels. However, this question is challenging to answer. This is not an area that is well defined in Vergennes. One of the reoccurring themes from stakeholder interviews and focus groups was a lack of understanding of the department's scope. This lack of understanding has contributed to the debate about the

agency's size. To determine appropriate staffing levels, the expectations and scope of the agency will first need to be determined.

## Summary of Recommendations

Fifteen recommendations have been identified in this report. It is important to understand and recognize that the details concerning implementation may require modification or revision in order to meet departmental needs.

1. Adjust schedule to cover the most active times for police services.
2. Increase interagency cooperation and develop formal MOUs.
3. Require supervisor approval when dispatch location has a premise history.
4. Convert the vacant sworn position to an administrative one.
5. Implement a Volunteer Program.
6. Develop mission and vision statements.
7. Implement a Strategic Summary for the city of Vergennes.
8. Create a community advisory board.
9. Create and share a weekly police report.
10. Institutionalize Project Vision North by involving more officers.
11. Review how CFS are currently categorized and develop a patrol plan for the community.
12. Create compliment and complaint procedure cards for officers to disseminate during community contacts.
13. Collect and analyze more detailed information for out-of-jurisdiction CFS to better understand the nature of the calls.
14. Develop formal policies and directives on out-of-jurisdiction responses.
15. Make the Vergennes Police Department more accessible to the community.

## Introduction

In August 2021, the City of Vergennes contracted with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) to analyze department staffing of sworn and non-sworn staff and delivery of police services. The primary objective of this study is to analyze department staffing of sworn and non-sworn staff and the delivery of police services.

The analysis will provide data-based insight on

- how the existing resources are being utilized
- whether they can be redeployed to reach agency and community goals for officer availability and other needs
- efficacy of current practices
- efficacy and impact of current shifts and schedules

Through this assessment, the IACP collected qualitative and quantitative data through interviews and focus groups, surveys, department records, and direct observations.

## Primary Data Sources and Methodology

The study was conducted in four broad phases. Phase I kicked off the project with project organization through planning meetings, data request, and the development of surveys. Phase II was devoted to collecting information about the operations, procedures, culture, and climate of the Vergennes Police Department. Documentation that was gathered and reviewed included but was not limited to calls for service reports, policies and procedures, and other written documents related to organizational and governance structure, the policing environment in Vergennes, budget documents, staffing documentation, and community policing and community engagement.

Phase III concentrated on the analysis and evaluation of data, distribution, collection, and analysis of data from the community and workforce surveys, development of recommendations, and preparation of drafts of our report. The evaluation involved making recommendations on department staffing levels, the organizational structure of the department, and the department's responsiveness to and ability to effectively serve all community members with respect to police functions. This phase also entailed the collection of supplementary data and clarification and corroboration of information previously obtained.

Phase IV entailed the generation of preliminary findings. Reactions, comments, and suggestions that emerged were considered and, where appropriate, incorporated during the preparation of this final report. Phase V involved the final report preparation and presentation.

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## Section I. The Policing Environment

Examining the policing environment is an essential prerequisite to informed judgment regarding policing culture, practice, policy, and operations. The geography, service population, economic conditions, workload, and resources in the City of Vergennes are salient factors that define and condition the policing requirements and can affect policy and operations. These factors are examined in this section.

### 1.1 City of Vergennes Overview and Service Population Demographics

The City of Vergennes is 2.47 square miles and located in central-western Vermont, bordered by New York State to the west. The population from the 2020 census data was approximately 2,553, with a population per square mile of 1,033. Of that population, 31.3 percent possess a high school education, and 29.1 percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>1</sup> Slightly over half (51.9 percent) of the population are women. Nearly 91.5 percent of the community are white, followed by African American (1.18 percent), and other populations include Asian (0.59 percent), American Indian and Alaska Native (0.63 percent), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.04 percent), who constitute the balance of the population. Approximately 2.12 percent of the community identifies as Hispanic. The City of Vergennes' racial demographics aligns closely with the racial demographics of the state of Vermont. In Vermont, 89.8 percent of the population are white, followed by Asian (1.8 percent) and African American (1.4 percent); other populations include American Indian and Alaska Native (0.4 percent) and Native Hawaii and Pacific Islander (0.03). Approximately 2.41 percent of the population of Vermont identify as Hispanic.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 84.1 percent of residents are 18 years of age and older, 16.4 percent of residents are 65 years and over, 15.9 percent are under 18 years, and 2.9 percent are under five years of age. The median age in Vergennes is 44.4 years.<sup>3</sup>

The economic base of the town is rooted in manufacturing, health care, and social assistance.<sup>4</sup> The poverty rate reported is 9.5 percent, though poverty varies widely based on other demographic features such as race, ethnicity, and education. The unemployment rate is at the

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census, "2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates," <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=1600000US5074650>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Data USA, "Vergennes, VT," <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/vergenes-vt>

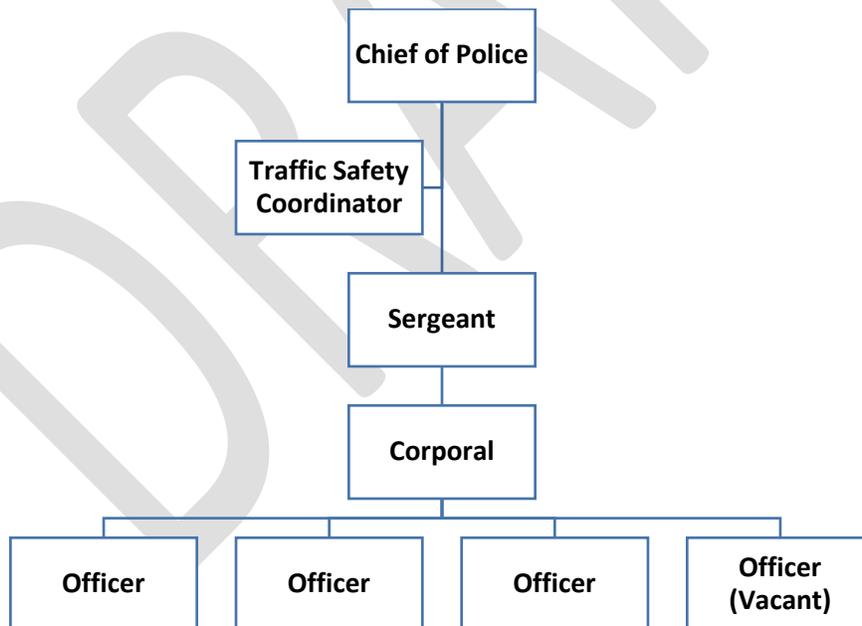
same rate as the State of Vermont, with Vergennes' and the State of Vermont's unemployment sitting at approximately 2.5 percent.<sup>5</sup>

There are approximately 1,131 households, 59.1 percent of which are owner-occupied. The average income is about \$64,000 a year, and there are about 1,475 businesses in Vergennes.<sup>6</sup> The school system in Vergennes includes the elementary grade school and the high school. The middle school and high school are unified schools serving surrounding communities, daily bringing additional people into the community.

## 1.2 Vergennes Police Department Overview

The Vergennes Police Department (VPD) provides primary police services for the City of Vergennes. The department has an authorized strength of seven sworn members, including the chief of police, a sergeant, a corporal, and four patrol officers, plus a grant-funded traffic safety coordinator (sworn).

Figure 1. Vergennes Police Department Organizational Chart



### Crime in Vergennes

Vergennes is, by and large, a vibrant and peaceful city. Part I for Uniform Crime Report (UCR) reporting purposes, statistics indicate that between 2019 and 2020, there was a significant

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<sup>5</sup> Vermont Department of Labor, "April 2022 Local Area Unemployment Statistics." <http://www.vtlmi.info/laus.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census, "QuickFacts."

increase in burglary, but all other serious known crimes remained relatively level. Larceny-theft dominates the profile numerically, accounting for 61 percent of property crimes of serious crimes overall for the same period of time.

**Table 1. Uniform Crime Reporting, Part I Known Offenses for 2017-2020**

CATEGORY	OFFENSE TYPE	2017	2018	2019	2020
Crimes Against Persons	Murder and non-negligent homicide	0	0	0	0
	Rape	0	1	1	1
	Robbery	0	0	0	1
	Aggravated Assault	4	1	4	0
Property Crimes	Burglary	3	2	3	41
	Larceny – Theft	26	34	24	30
	Motor Vehicle Theft	0	1	0	1
	Arson	0	0	0	0

**Figure 2. Crimes Against Persons 2017-2020**

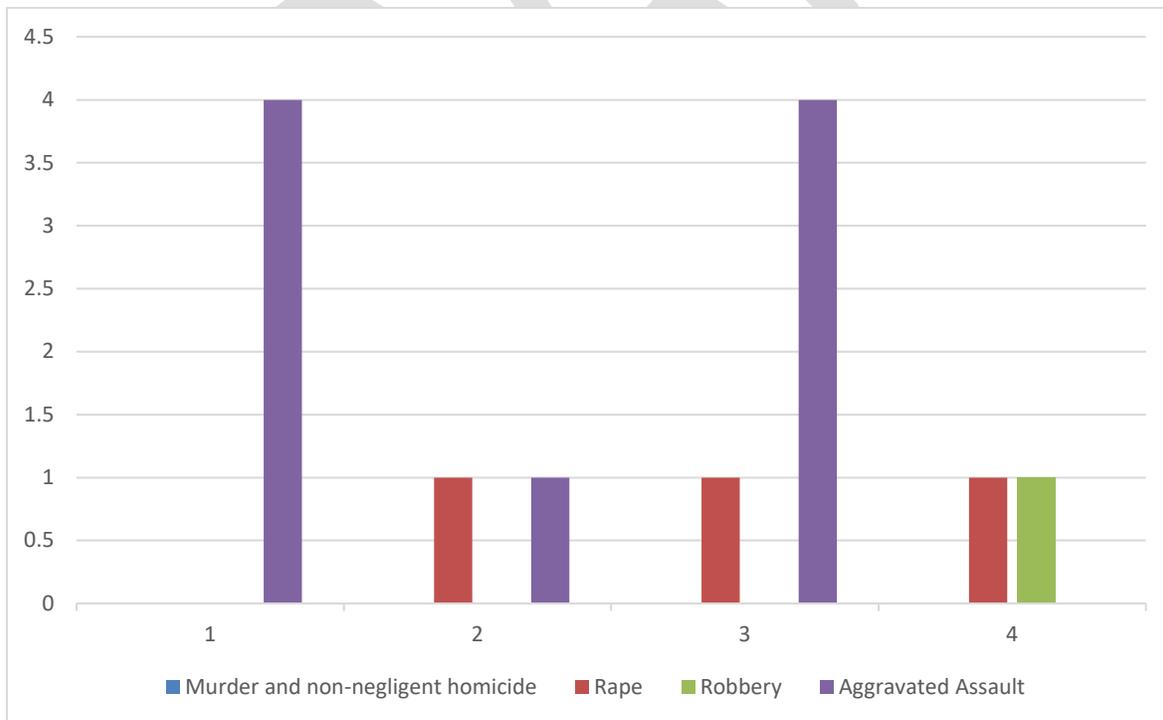
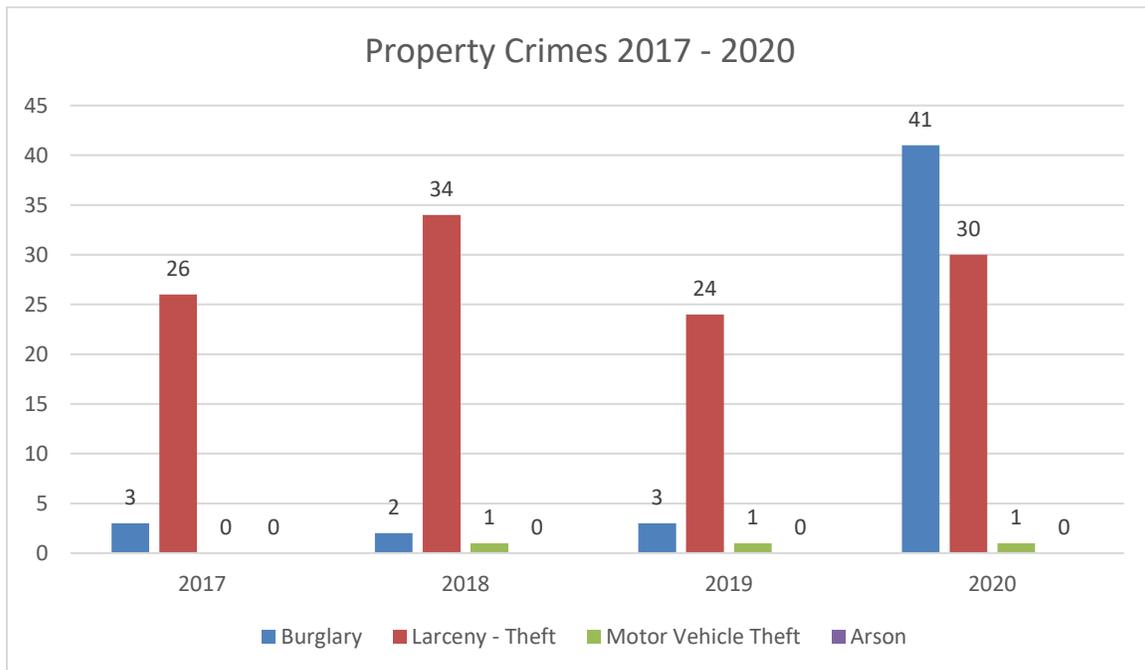


Figure 3. Property Crimes 2017-2020



### 1.3 The City of Vergennes and Vergennes Police Department Historical Overview

In order to put the findings of this report into context, it is important to understand the evolution of VPD into the well-trained, equipped, and professional department that the evaluation found. It is important to note that through much of the past twenty years, the growth and direction of the police department were not done in a vacuum but with the approval of city leaders. With one exception that has contributed to recent tensions, securing grants and expanding the scope of responsibilities, which led to an increase in staffing, was done with the approval of city officials. This accounting of history relies on the memories of those interviewed and key points of growth of the VPD.

In the early 1990s, the VPD was staffed by a full-time chief and four to six part-time officers. During this time period, many small communities in Vermont depended on the use of part-time officers. A 45-hour part-time certification process allowed communities to have police coverage at considerable savings since part-time officers were not provided with a benefits package. In Vermont, it was common practice to have officers work in several communities part-time or be full-time officers in a police department but then work part-time at another agency. Although an accepted practice, it was not ideal for the policing profession. Over time this practice came under scrutiny, including by the Vermont Legislature. The level of training between a full-time certified officer (16 weeks) and a part-time certified officer (45 hours) did not provide adequate

training for the ever-changing profession of policing. This adversely impacted VPD and started a movement to full-time certified officers, resulting in a significant addition to cost (salary and benefits package).

As the pressure to move away from part-time officers increased, the VPD began transitioning to full-time officers in the early 2000s to maintain the coverage that the previous four to six part-time officers provided. This increased cost began to increase the VPD budget. The City of Vergennes was an active town with several bars that led to outcomes such as DUI arrest, disorderly conduct, and other forms of social disorder. During this time frame, the city was served by three different chiefs of police.

Around the same time the VPD was transitioning, an effort to reinvest and reinvent the City of Vergennes was ongoing. Private investors made a considerable investment to upgrade the core business district. The result was what the City of Vergennes is today – a destination for visitors with a healthy shopping district, an active restaurant scene, and a community attracting new residents. Many of those interviewed throughout the study drew a correlation between the focus on social disorder and the rebirth of Vergennes as an active community. Public safety can play a significant role in economic development. From approximately 2001 to 2009, the VPD was staffed by five full-time officers, including the chief of police. There was also still limited use of part-time officer(s). During this period, several incidents within the department brought negative news coverage both locally and regionally, leading to the perception of an unprofessional and undisciplined culture.

Following the incidents, a new chief was hired in 2010 who found a police department that was under-trained, poorly equipped, and operated with little plan or direction. The fleet of cruisers was in poor condition. The officers bought their own equipment, including uniforms, guns, radar units, etc. At the same time, the City of Vergennes was experiencing significant social disorder in the community; in 2010 alone, there were 64 DUI arrests. There was little trust in and outside of the community, including key partners.

With direction from the city manager, the chief engaged in a strategic process and set out to rebuild the VPD and move the agency as close to 24-hour coverage as possible. At that point, there were five full-time and several part-time officers. The part-time positions were eliminated in order to raise the professional standard of the VPD and to meet the pressure coming from the state on the use of part-time officers.

A sixth officer was eventually added after receiving a federal grant known as a COPS grant. The grant covered the cost for the officer for three years, after which the city had to pick up the cost of the position by adding it to the baseline budget. A seventh officer was added by

consolidating part-time officers' hours and creating a full-time position – a move that was reportedly budget neutral. An eighth officer was added by utilizing state funding for an Addison County Highway Safety Coordinator. This was a strategic move to create a position that could be available as backup and support to officers on duty at VPD.

Through interviews and community forums, a misunderstanding within the community about the Safety Coordinator position emerged. This position was implemented as part of the direction to the chief to move towards 24-hour coverage. What the position has done through scheduling is, in essence, put a second officer on shift at high volume times to offer support to VPD without impacting Vergennes taxpayers. The position does require the assigned officer to patrol other areas of Addison County. It generates VPD case numbers that are out of the city. Many individuals interviewed expressed concerns about VPD cruisers seen in other communities, leading to the belief that Vergennes taxpayers were underwriting coverage for other towns (a practice which is addressed later in the report). The sustainability of this position is a separate issue and will be addressed in the report.

Several goals were established to meet the direction to rebuild the VPD and to develop an organization that was well trained and equipped. The training allowed the VPD to be self-sufficient and handle most investigations. Additionally, by offering train-the-trainer opportunities, the cost could be better managed by keeping the training in-house. The chief wanted to create a culture of dedication, public service, and professionalism. For the most part, these goals have been accomplished. The VPD has evolved from a period of criminal corruption and lack of leadership to a well-run, organized, and professional public safety organization. This development of VPD coincided with the economic growth of the City of Vergennes. From interviews, there is a clear connection between the professionalizing of VPD, the increase in public safety, and the change in Vergennes's social and economic status.

Over the past decade, policing has changed significantly, not just at the local level but on the national level as well. In Vergennes, a renaissance has remade the downtown area and changed the reputation of the city. The application of harm reduction through the efforts of the VPD cannot be discounted. With that said, the city is at a crossroads in how public safety is delivered. The challenges from social issues such as opiate crisis, homelessness, and mental health issues require a different approach than the previous efforts. Collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders is a key component of safe communities. The current effort with Project VISION North is the next rendition in the evolution of the VPD. It is important that the effort be allowed to grow and mature. From observation, it would appear it is starting to have the intended impact of cutting down on calls for service for VPD. With the support and direction

required, this effort could move VPD to fewer calls for service and create an opportunity to rethink the deployment of sworn personnel.

The City of Vergennes and the Vergennes Police Department have done a significant amount of work to move beyond the past and rebuild public safety. Now that the rebuilding work is completed, there is a divide in the community regarding the size and scope of the police department. The community has not yet clearly identified a concise answer to their needs and expectations of the police department. In order to move forward with a defined scope and size of the police department, the community should come together to decide what the collective group needs and expects from their department. Only when a scope is defined can a determination be made about staffing and the future of VPD.

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## Section II. Calls for Service Overview

The total number of calls for service for 2015-2020 recorded in the computer aided dispatch (CAD) system was 11,458. However, this number also included administrative activities such as running backgrounds, court time, fingerprints, public speaking, social media, training, and VIN inspections. Tracking these categories is important for understanding the total workload, but they are administrative activities. The remaining number of incidents constitutes 9,848 calls for service (CFS).

The remaining CFS can be organized into six categories: crimes against persons, property crime, quality of life issues, traffic, agency assist, and other. Table 2 shows the number of reports per category. A full listing of reports by category and by report nature can be found in Appendix C.

**Table 2. 2015-2020 CFS by Category**

Category	Average No. of Reports Per Year	% of Total Reports
Crimes Against Persons	30	1.84%
Property Crime	81	4.90%
Quality of Life	685	41.71%
Traffic	475	28.92%
Agency Assist	204	12.42%
Other	168	10.21%

As shown in Table 2, for the reporting period of 2015-2020, the majority of CFS are calls associated with quality-of-life issues (41.71%), followed by traffic (28.92%), agency assist (12.42%), other (10.21%), property crime (4.90%), and crimes against persons (1.84%).

Table 3 shows the number of CFS by category by year.

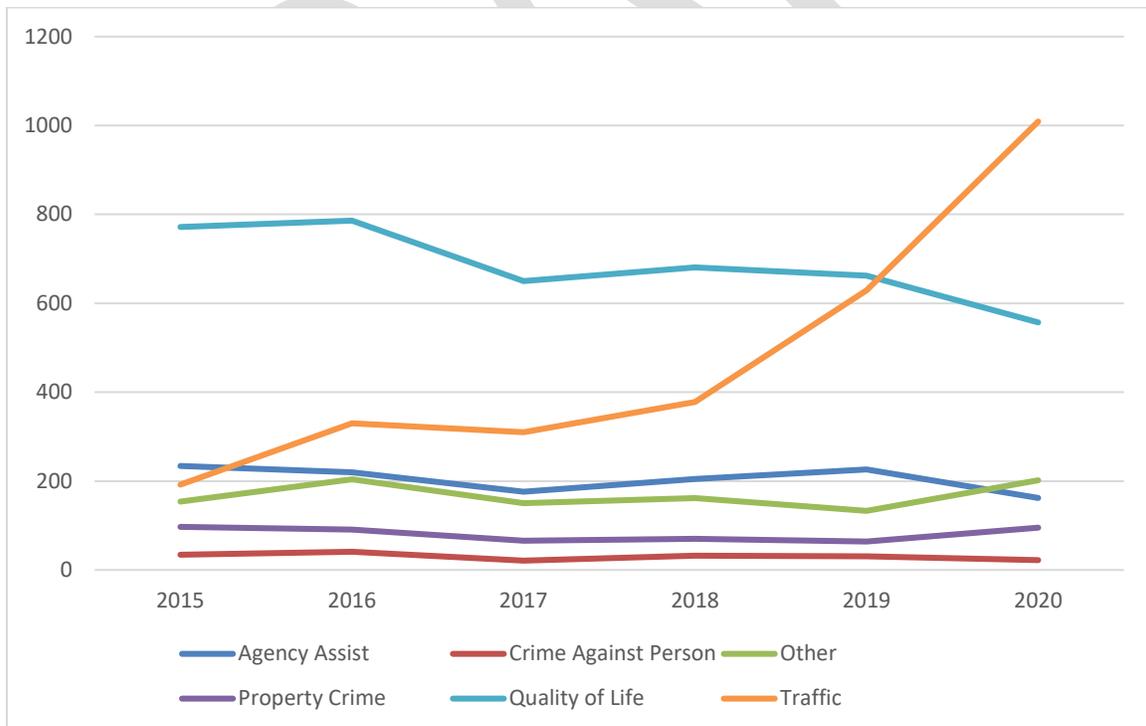
**Table 3. CFS by Category and by Year (2015-2020)**

Category	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Grand Total
Crime Against Person	34	41	21	32	31	22	181
Property Crime	97	91	66	70	64	95	483
Quality of Life	772	786	650	681	662	557	4108
Traffic	192	330	310	378	629	1009	2848
Agency Assist	234	220	176	205	226	162	1223
Other	154	204	150	162	133	202	1005
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,483</b>	<b>1,672</b>	<b>1,373</b>	<b>1,528</b>	<b>1,745</b>	<b>2,047</b>	<b>9,848</b>

Source: VPD CAD data

The number of CFS have remained relatively consistent for the agency assists, crime against persons, property crime, and other categories, while the number of quality-of-life CFS has decreased. The increase in the total number of CFS have been driven by traffic-related CFS.

**Figure 4 . CFS by Category over Time**



Source: VPD CAD data

Figure 5 shows the distribution of total CFS by day of week and by time between 2015 and 2020. The volume of CFS is represented by a color scale.

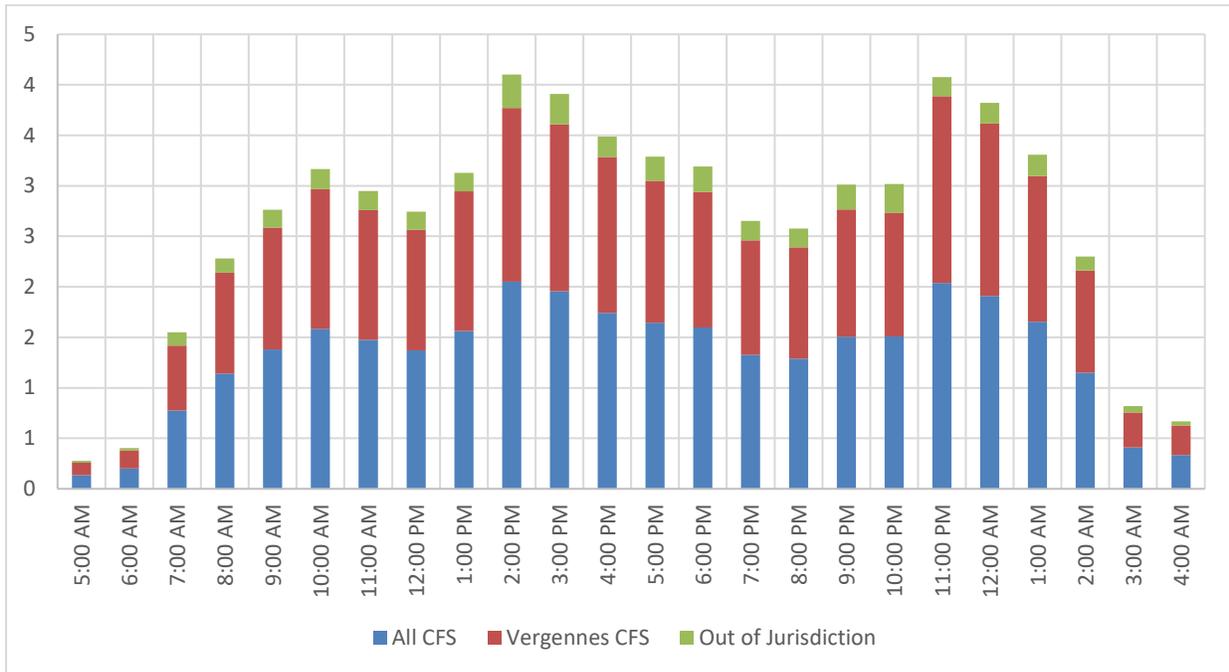
**Figure 5. Total CFS by Time and by Day of the Week (2015-2020)**

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
5 AM	3	3	6	7	7	9	7
6 AM	9	8	9	9	13	7	7
7 AM	18	41	32	39	50	32	26
8 AM	36	63	50	54	56	53	44
9 AM	56	59	70	61	72	59	50
10 AM	50	79	71	63	79	72	76
11 AM	63	66	61	60	59	66	81
12 PM	61	75	54	59	56	58	59
1 PM	58	65	66	76	69	84	65
2 PM	74	91	94	87	99	102	85
3 PM	80	93	78	95	81	102	74
4 PM	60	70	69	86	85	99	67
5 PM	51	103	79	86	71	64	58
6 PM	68	93	67	67	68	71	62
7 PM	49	60	55	57	56	82	55
8 PM	64	54	54	59	46	63	60
9 PM	43	73	65	67	69	72	81
10 PM	46	58	67	76	65	88	71
11 PM	59	79	86	111	85	103	113
12 AM	79	48	73	69	135	108	83
1 AM	70	47	72	72	87	65	103
2 AM	58	38	48	55	53	35	72
3 AM	25	4	28	8	22	19	22
4 AM	14	7	14	9	22	16	22

Source: VPD CAD data

Figure 6 shows the average number of CFS by hour, including those within and out of the jurisdiction.

Figure 6. Average CFS by Hour (2015-2020)



Source: VPD CAD data

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## Section III. Staffing and Deployment

The Vergennes Police department currently operates with a total authorized strength of seven, including a chief of police, detective sergeant, corporal, and four patrol officers. Additionally, the department includes an Addison County Traffic Safety Coordinator – a grant-funded position specifically focused on traffic enforcement – bringing the total sworn count to eight.

Table 5 shows the non-patrol schedules.

**Table 4. Sworn Non-Patrol Schedules**

Position	Start	End	Hours	Days of Week
Chief of Police	0900	1700	8	Monday-Friday
Detective Sergeant	0700	1700	10	Monday-Thursday or Tuesday-Friday

Vergennes patrol officers currently work a 4/10 schedule with two shifts each day. Table 6 shows the staggered start and finish times for day and night shifts.

**Table 5. Patrol Shift Hours**

Shift	Begins	Ends	Hours
Day	0700	1700	10
Night*	1600	0200	10

*\*Periodically, one night shift is scheduled for 1700-0300 during varying days of the week.*

There are important items to note about the schedule. First, the 10-hour shifts have been structured to provide overlaps between shifts. The second is, given the size of the department, the night shift schedule days are further broken down as follows:

- Monday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
- Monday-Thursday
- Tuesday-Friday
- Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday

**Table 6. Patrol Personnel Allocations by Day of Week and Time of Day**

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
<b>0700-1700</b>	1	1				1	1
<b>1600-0200</b>	1	2	2	2	2	2	1

The Addison County Traffic Safety Coordinator operates on a varying shift schedule:

- Wednesday-Saturday: 0700-1700
- Thursday-Sunday: 0700-1700
- Sunday-Wednesday: 0700-1700
- Thursday-Sunday: 1400-2400

The VPD uses a strategic approach to utilize the time of officers on the overlap days; however, there are other schedule structures that the VPD could use, which would distribute the workdays more effectively.

### 3.1 Overtime

In March 2022, an internal review of overtime (OT) between January 1, 2021, and March 13, 2022, was conducted. The analysis looked at all overtime (excluding holiday OT funding) by reviewing weekly time sheets for each officer as well as the Governor’s Highway Safety Program (GHSP) grant funding usage forms. Table 8 shows the findings of that review.

**Table 7. OT by Category (January 1, 2021 – March 13, 2022)**

OT Category	Hours (Annually)
Agency Assists	36.0
Criminal Investigations	212
Shift Fills	593
Intelligence meetings attendance	12
Traffic Court Hearings	34.5
Training (attendance)	177.5
GHSP	165
Call-out	77.5
Medical Comp Time	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>1318.5</b>

According to the internal data, *shift fills* (coverage for others on annual leave, personal leave, sick leave, attending training, or other reasons) are the leading contributor to overtime usage. Supplementing VPD with one officer will not remedy overtime usage. A new hire of professional staff (administrative) will not decrease overtime usage either. Some strategies that could be used include:

- Hiring an outside agency to train all officers at the police station
- Negotiating terms of court appearances
- Shift fills: determine if one officer will work a shift

However, the analysis was over a limited time period. Further analysis of OT should be conducted that looks at OT over a period of years to identify trends more accurately.

## 3.2 Sworn Positions

### Single vs. Two Officer Shifts

One of the questions asked of this study was to look at single versus two officer shifts. This is a challenging question for all small agencies because while officer safety and availability remain serious concerns, the types of CFS and the reality of fiscal constraints also have to be considered.

Vergennes is no different in this respect. As already noted, Vergennes is a safe community with little serious crime. The current fiscal status of the city and the level of activity do not support having two officers on duty for all shifts.

#### **Recommendation 1. Adjust schedule to cover the most active times for police services.**

Currently, it appears that the schedule has been developed more on what might happen than what the data on CFS show. VPD should staff according to CFS and have an active memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place to provide backup for two-office CFS when only one VPD officer is on duty.

#### **Recommendation 2. Increase interagency cooperation and develop formal MOUs**

The informal interagency cooperation with local agencies, including the Addison County Sheriff's Office and the Vermont State Police, should be formalized through written Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). Discussions and decisions regarding MOUs should involve the City and the department.

**Recommendation 3. Require supervisor approval when dispatch location has a premise history.**

That said, dynamic calls (domestic or mental disturbances) do occur, and it is not ideal for an officer to respond to dynamic calls alone. While fiscal constraints may preclude having two officers on patrol during all shifts, officer safety should be considered. For dispatch locations with a premise history—that is, locations officers are dispatched to regularly on dynamic calls should require supervisor (sergeant or corporal) approval would be needed for an officer to respond to the location alone and a backup officer from another jurisdiction is not immediately available..

### **3.3 Civilian/Administrative Positions**

VPD officers are tasked with several administrative duties, including but are not limited to:

- Payroll and budget
- Training
- Case Review (arrests)
- Grant applications and management
- Vehicle maintenance
- Crash Review
- VIN verification
- Body Worn Camera Review

Administrative activities can present officers with the challenge of balancing completing those tasks with community engagement and proactive activity. Some administrative tasks, such as report writing, require a sworn officer to complete; however, several administrative activities could be reassigned to a civilian administrative position or volunteer and free up time for sworn officers to respond to calls or engage with the community.

**Recommendation 4. Convert the vacant sworn position to an administrative one.**

VPD has an authorized strength of seven, with one position currently vacant. The use of the Traffic Safety Coordinator to offer backup is strategic and well thought out, but the position is funded by a NHTSA grant and is not sustainable for the long term.

The vacant position should be converted to a civilian and the job description closely defined so that many administrative duties can be reassigned from the sworn members and redirected to this new administrative position. This new position could also meet the daily requirements of non-police community services at the police station. Examples could include licensing, VIN

verification checks, and other informational services. Additionally, this position could handle community complaints in consultation with the city manager. Converting the vacant sworn positions to a civilian one would also provide cost savings to the City.

It is important to note that while the civilian position can provide cost savings, the decision to create the position should not be based on fiscal reasons alone. The position should be developed through a thoughtful, strategic, and informed process. The chief and officers should be consulted on the tasks and responsibilities that can be reassigned to a civilian position and if any certifications or other requirements must be factored into the position. The impact of the change on other areas of operation, reporting structure, etc., should also be considered.

**Recommendation 5. Implement a Volunteer Program.**

A community volunteer program should be designed to support the VPD by empowering community members to engage by volunteering their time and expertise to reduce crime. The mission of these programs is to enhance the delivery of police services to the community through various volunteer services that will engage the community, reduce crime, and support all efforts associated with public safety within the City of Vergennes. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) can be issued by the authority of the police chief and disseminated to each volunteer.

## Section IV. Expectations for the Delivery of Police Services

One of the primary questions this study attempted to answer was, “What are the community’s expectations for the delivery of police services?” For any police agency, community expectations are as important as calls for service and other police operations when determining appropriate staffing levels. However, this question is challenging to answer. This is not an area that is well defined in Vergennes. One of the reoccurring themes from stakeholder interviews and focus groups was a lack of understanding of the department's scope. Stakeholders were reluctant to state exactly what they expected or even wanted from the department. This lack of understanding has contributed to the debate about the agency's size. To determine appropriate staffing levels, the expectations and scope of the agency will first need to be determined.

### **Recommendation 6. Develop mission and vision statements.**

In collaboration with community stakeholders, VPD should develop statements that clearly articulate the mission and vision of the department. A mission statement would clearly define the intent and willingness to work with the community at all levels. Moreover, it would provide officers with a clear direction of the agency’s expectations.

### **Recommendation 7. Implement a Strategic Summary for the city of Vergennes.**

A strategic summary with actionable items and scope of services should be developed for the police department. This should be developed through a strategic planning process that includes the department, city officials, and members of the community. The documentation should include areas the police department should patrol and attend community events.

## 4.1 Community-Police Engagement

By and large, the relationship between the Vergennes Police Department and the community appears to be good. As part of this study, the community was surveyed to learn more about the relationship between the department and the community. The summary of the results can be found in Appendix A.

The VPD is a professional, well-trained, and well-run organization that provides quality public safety for the community. But as previously noted, over the past decade, policing has changed significantly. The VPD must shift its focus to a total community policing model. The department does engage in community events such as holding Police Community Forums one to two times a year, presenting at local service organizations, and Bixby Library Reading with the Chief. But community policing and community engagement go beyond the activities, behavior, and tactics

of police and focus on systematic engagement in partnerships and problem-solving techniques. A total community policing model incorporates these aspects into an agency's operations, policies, and actions.

However, there is a breakdown in trust and a lack of mutual respect between some members of the community, city officials, and the department that must be addressed. Some examples learned through surveys, interviews, and focus groups have been included below. It is important to note that each of these examples is likely far more nuanced than can be addressed in this report and that perception of an issue can matter just as much as facts.

- The officers feel like they have been singled out and not heard. Contributing to this feeling was the decision to lay off two officers in 2019 without input from the department and contract negotiations.
- Some of the work the department is doing is not a community policing strategy but a one-off.
- The militaristic appearance of the officers and operations is not appropriate at all times.
- Communications from the department are, at times, perceived as sensational or fearmongering.
- Policing that is not reflective of current community policing practices

This split is part of what stands in the way of a dialogue on the scope and size of the department. While VPD engages in many community service activities, it became clear that community service was not reflective of the level of community involvement and engagement. The City Manager and the community members should be more involved in the direction of the police department. Community members should feel they have a genuine say in the services the police department delivers and how those services are delivered. One way this can be accomplished is by establishing a community advisory board. A community advisory board is not an oversight board but a mechanism to help find common ground in the community and offers suggestions to enhance or improve the relations between the department and the community. In addition, it can increase the public understanding of the nature of police work and promote the goals of community policing.

In January 2022, the Citizen Review Board Exploratory Committee (CRBEC) answered the primary question they were tasked to review, "Is a Citizen Review Board necessary in Vergennes, and, if so, why?" The CRBEC found that some form of a community review board is necessary and warranted.<sup>7</sup> The City of Vergennes and the VPD would benefit from a community

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<sup>7</sup> City of Vergennes, VT, "Report on and Proposal for a Community Review Board in Vergennes, Vermont," <https://cms8.revize.com/revize/vergennes//CRBEC%2001-11-22%20Final%20Report.pdf>

advisory board that would allow representative members of the community to provide advice and input on a myriad of situations. A board may be consulted to generate new ideas or solutions, provide informed recommendations on public policies and practices, and be a liaison between the police department and the community.<sup>8</sup> A community advisory board can be brought into the fold of the police department and gain a deeper understanding of how and why the police department operates the way it does. A community advisory board is different from an oversight board tasked with holding the department accountable through policy and incident reviews. The Albany Community Police Advisory Committee<sup>9</sup> in Albany, New York, appointed 18 members of the community to their committee and charged them with reviewing and addressing items that would potentially reinvigorate the relationship between the residents of the community and the department. A similar group or committee in Vergennes could potentially help start a more consistent dialogue between all community members and the police department to find common ground.

**Recommendation 8. Create a community advisory board.**

A number for the appointees should be established, and the selection of appointees should include those from various areas of the community. The role of the Board should be defined, anticipated outcomes discussed, and a mission statement created.

**Recommendation 9. Create and share a weekly police report.**

A weekly report should be drafted by the chief or designee and submitted to the city manager. At the city manager's discretion, success stories (community engagement) should be posted on social media outlets.

## 4.2 How are Existing Resources being Utilized?

By and large, the existing resources are being used wisely under the current structure. Some areas could be covered by non-sworn personnel to find savings in the budget (this is discussed further in section 2.2 Staffing and Deployment).

### Project Vision North

VPD's participation in Project Vision North has been a catalyst for applying resources and services to several social programs and should be recognized as a best practice. Project Vision

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<sup>8</sup> John G. Reece and Judy Macy, "Citizen Advisory Boards in Contemporary Practice: A Practical Approach in Policing," *The Police Chief* 82 (October 2015): web-only. <https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/citizen-advisory-boards-in-contemporary-practice-a-practical-approach-in-policing/>

<sup>9</sup> Albany Community Police Advisory Committee, "*Albany Community Police Advisory Committee*," <https://www.albanyny.gov/870/Albany-Community-Police-Advisory-Committ>

North is a valuable program that addresses various social issues such as mental health, domestic violence, and drug rehabilitation programs and is an emerging answer to the social issues that the VPD is called to respond to. Primary involvement in Project Vision North is through the chief. By utilizing this additional resource, over time, VPD should be able to eventually reduce calls for service related to non-core police functions and free up officer availability.

**Recommendation 10. Institutionalize Project Vision North by involving more officers**

Officers could spend valuable time networking with social service programs and staff. This collaboration would reflect community interest and the department making a statement that they are a resource that ultimately desires community investment.

**Patrol Resources**

**Recommendation 11. Review how CFS are currently categorized and develop a patrol plan for the community**

A review of the CAD data found many of the calls were the type of police activity that did not warrant a call for service. Some were administrative duties such as VIN verification, while others, like providing directions or conversing with the community, although important, are part of an officer's routine duties.

Additionally, as part of the patrol plan, VPD should also consider buildings that have a large number of people during hours of operation. A Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis should be conducted at each facility. Examples include:

- Northlands Job Corps<sup>10</sup>
- Regional High School
- Elementary school
- Christian school
- Collins Arrow Space
- Valley Vista Treatment Facility

VPD should have access cards to all schools in the city.

***Traffic Enforcement***

Several stakeholders and focus groups conveyed that excessive speeding along Route 22A has been a major problem. Traffic enforcement has been impacted by a previous study that

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<sup>10</sup> Historically, this location has been an area of concern for VPD with 37 incidents, six arrests, and one Diversion

examined potential racial bias in traffic stops. Following the release of the report, traffic enforcement has declined due to accusations of biased traffic stops and minorities. Although further analysis into traffic stops conducted by VPD officers revealed that VPD was not targeting minority drivers.

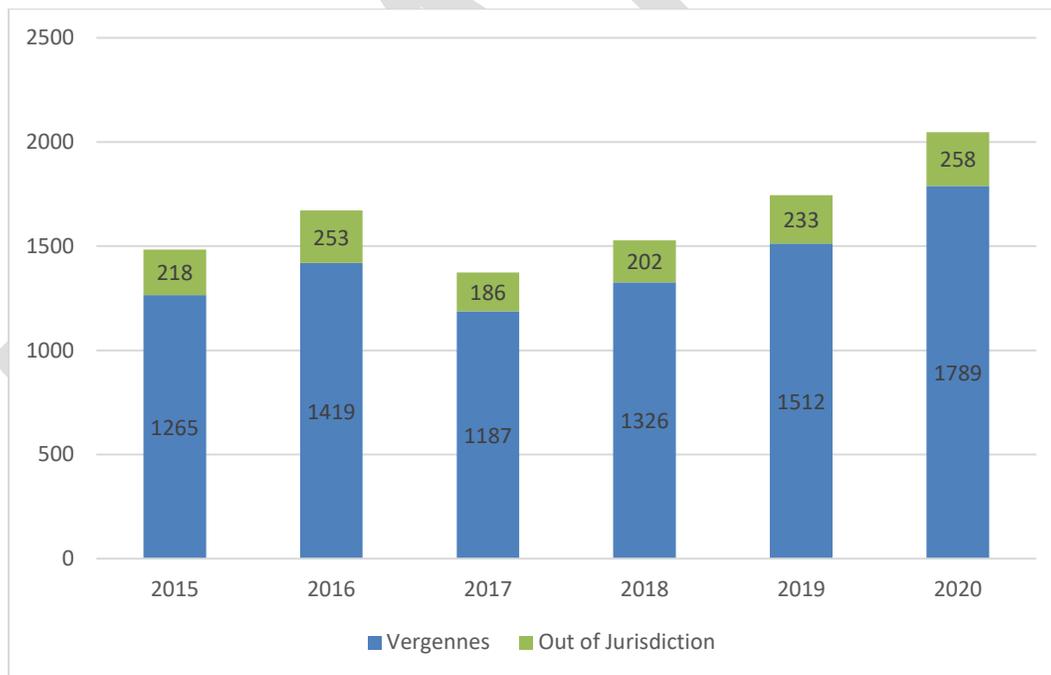
**Recommendation 12. Create compliment and complaint procedure cards for officers to disseminate during community contacts**

The cards should list a telephone and email directed to city hall. The city manager should conduct a cursory review of the complaint.

***Out of Jurisdiction Response***

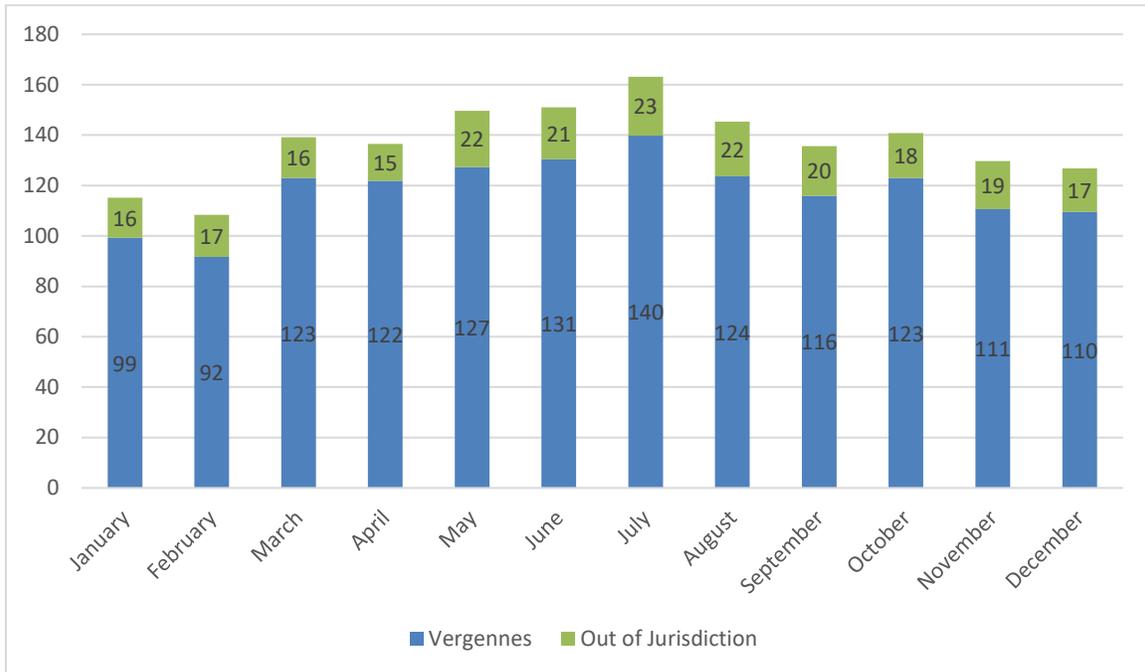
Additionally, the department provides agency assistance to other jurisdictions. Between 2015 and 2020, agency assistance and response to calls outside Vergennes represented an average of 13.76% of the total CFS.

**Figure 7. Vergennes and Out of Jurisdiction Total CFS (2015-2020) by Year**



Source: VPD CAD data

**Figure 8. Vergennes and Out of Jurisdiction Average CFS by Month (2015-2020)**



Providing free police services for neighboring towns is a major concern to residents. Further, the practice is not defined and has no policies or procedures to direct the responses. Resources associated with out-of-jurisdiction responses could be better utilized in Vergennes, especially since the mutual aid role lacks formal agreements or memorandums of understanding. While the legal jurisdictional questions are answered by state law, several remaining questions and concerns could result in liability against the VPD.

**Recommendation 13. Collect and analyze more detailed information for out-of-jurisdiction CFS to better understand the nature of the calls.**

Specific data such as time on call and the nature of the call were not available from the VPD computer aided dispatch (CAD) system to further analyze out-of-beat responses. A regular audit of the out-of-jurisdiction responses should be conducted and made readily available at the request of the city manager.

**Recommendation 14. Develop formal policies and directives on out-of-jurisdiction responses.**

Absent an emergency, officers should remain within city limits and available to answer calls for service in Vergennes. A policy should be implemented to ensure officers are adhering to the directive.

### **Operating Hours of the Police Facility**

A review of nearby agencies' operating hours and other smaller agencies found that the most common operating hours fall within the range of 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

However, one common theme from interviews and focus groups with the community and other stakeholders was the hyper-security of the building and lack of access to community members. While there needs to be a balance between security and accessibility, the facility needs to be more welcoming and accessible to the public.

Increasing accessibility can be accomplished in various ways, including creating community meeting space and modifying access to the vestibule. This can be accomplished by expanding the hours of a new full-time administrative position and utilizing a Volunteers in Policing (VIP) program instead of sworn officers.

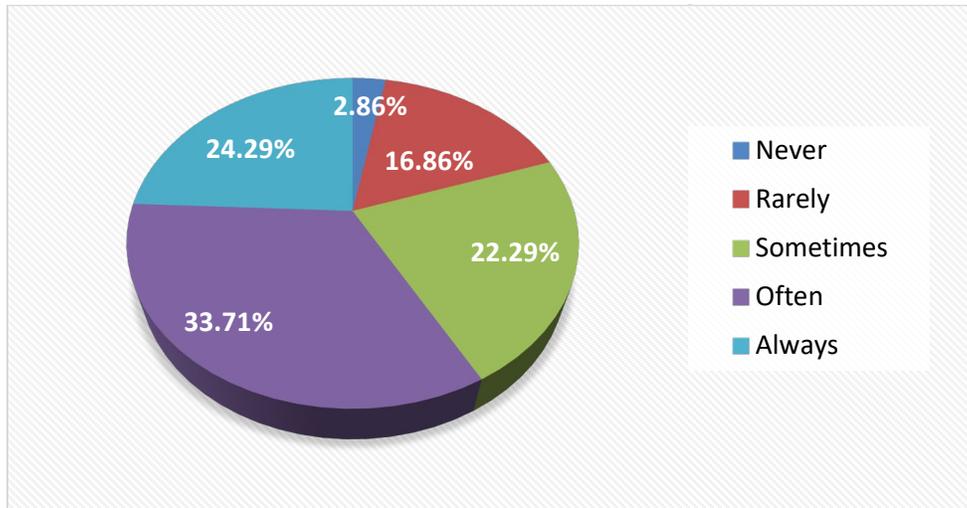
**Recommendation 15. Make the Vergennes Police Department more accessible to the community**

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## Appendix A: Community Survey Results

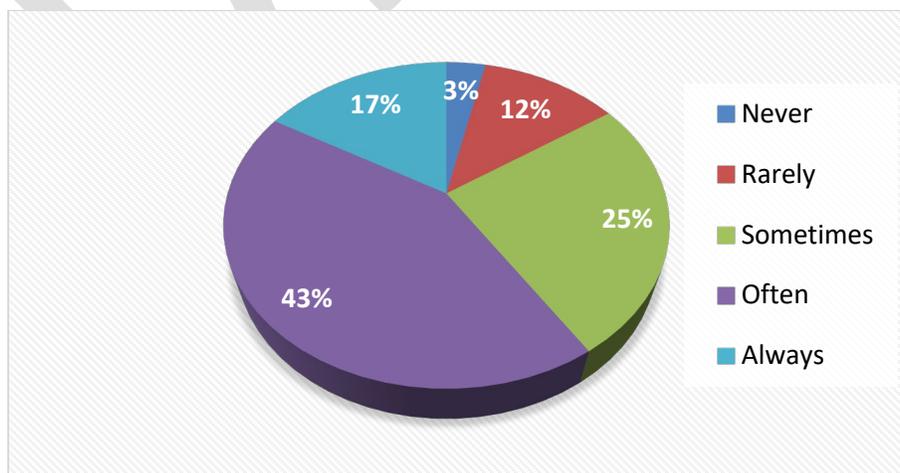
**Question #1: To what extent does the Vergennes Police Department develop a relationship with the community?**

Answered: 350 Skipped: 0



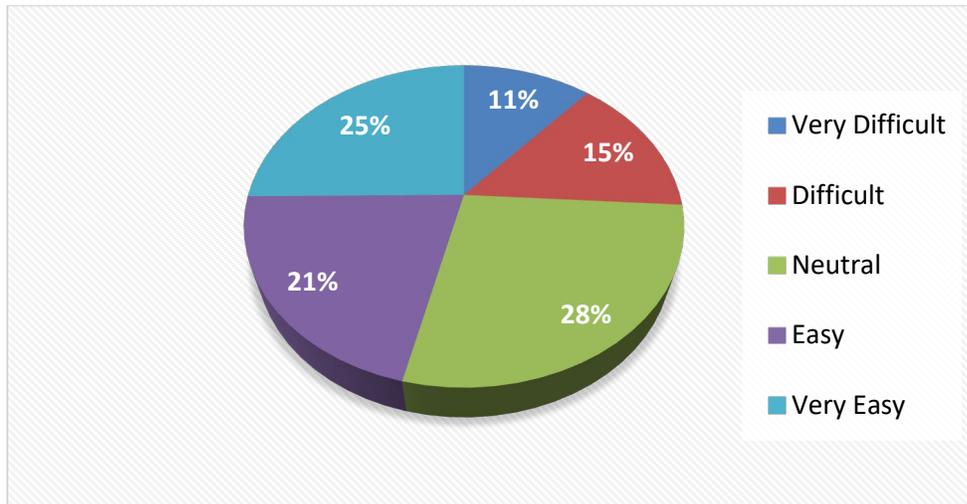
**Question #2: To what extent does the Vergennes Police Department regularly communicate with community members (e.g., websites, email, or public meetings)?**

Answered: 350 Skipped: 0



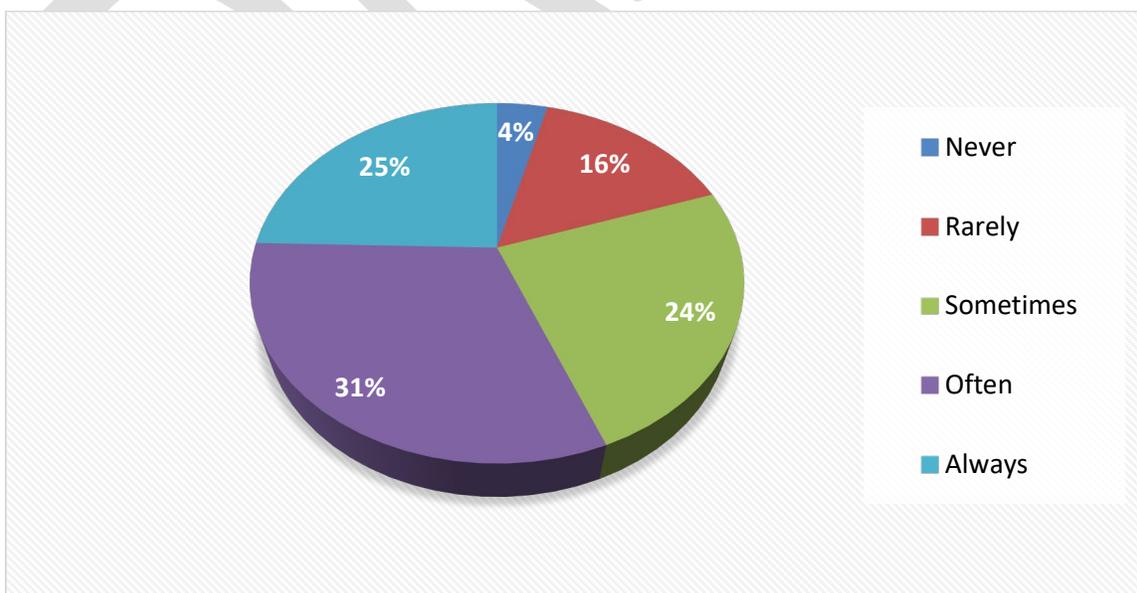
**Question #3: To what extent does the Vergennes Police Department make it easy for community members to provide input (e.g., comments, suggestions, concerns)?**

Answered: 350 Skipped: 0



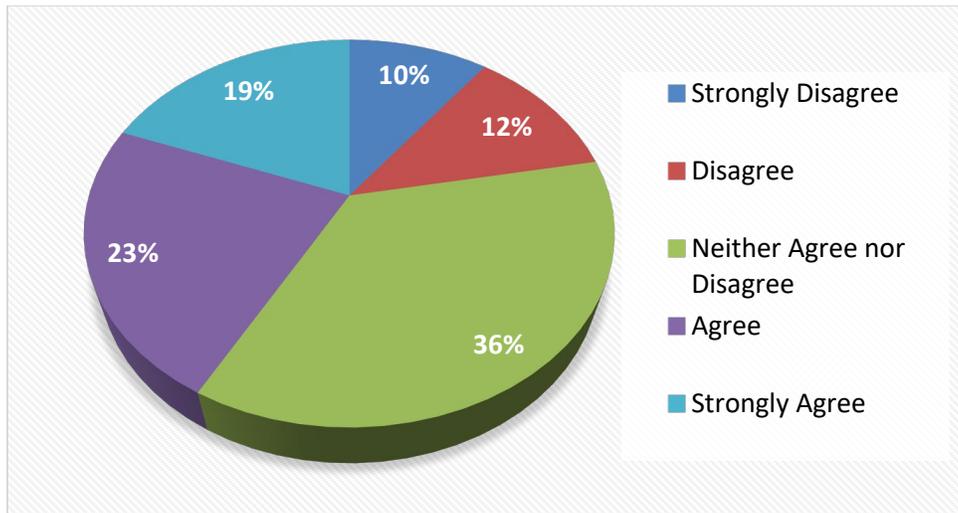
**Question #4: To what extent does the Vergennes Police Department work together with community members to solve problems?**

Answered: 350 Skipped: 0



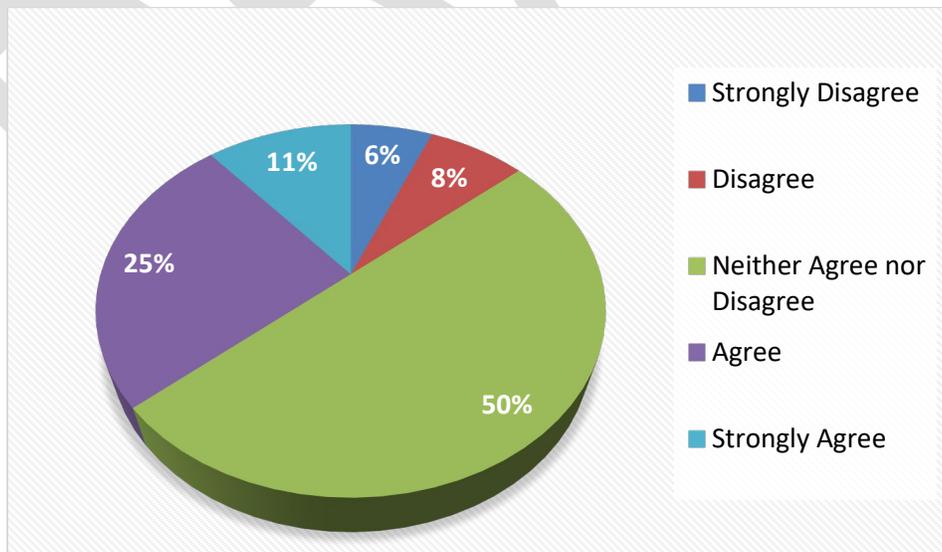
**Question #5: I would like to see a more frequent presence of Vergennes Police Department officers in my neighborhood**

Answered: 350 Skipped: 0



**Question #6: I would like to see Vergennes Police Department more frequently at community meetings and city council meetings.**

Answered: 350 Skipped: 0

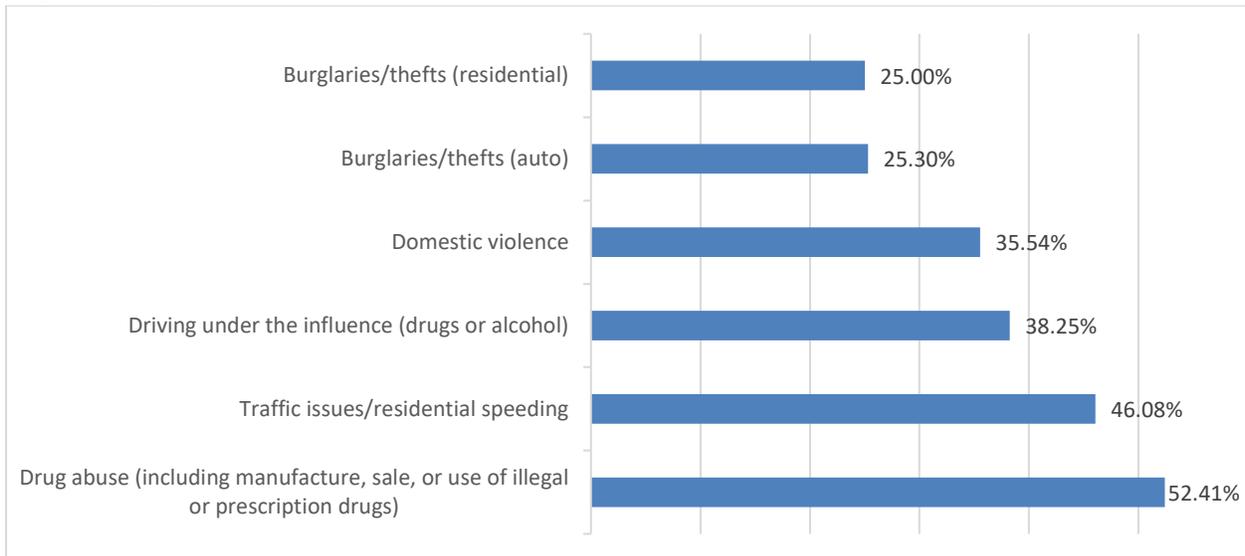


**Question #7: Please select the three (3) issues from this list that you think are the greatest problems in your community:**

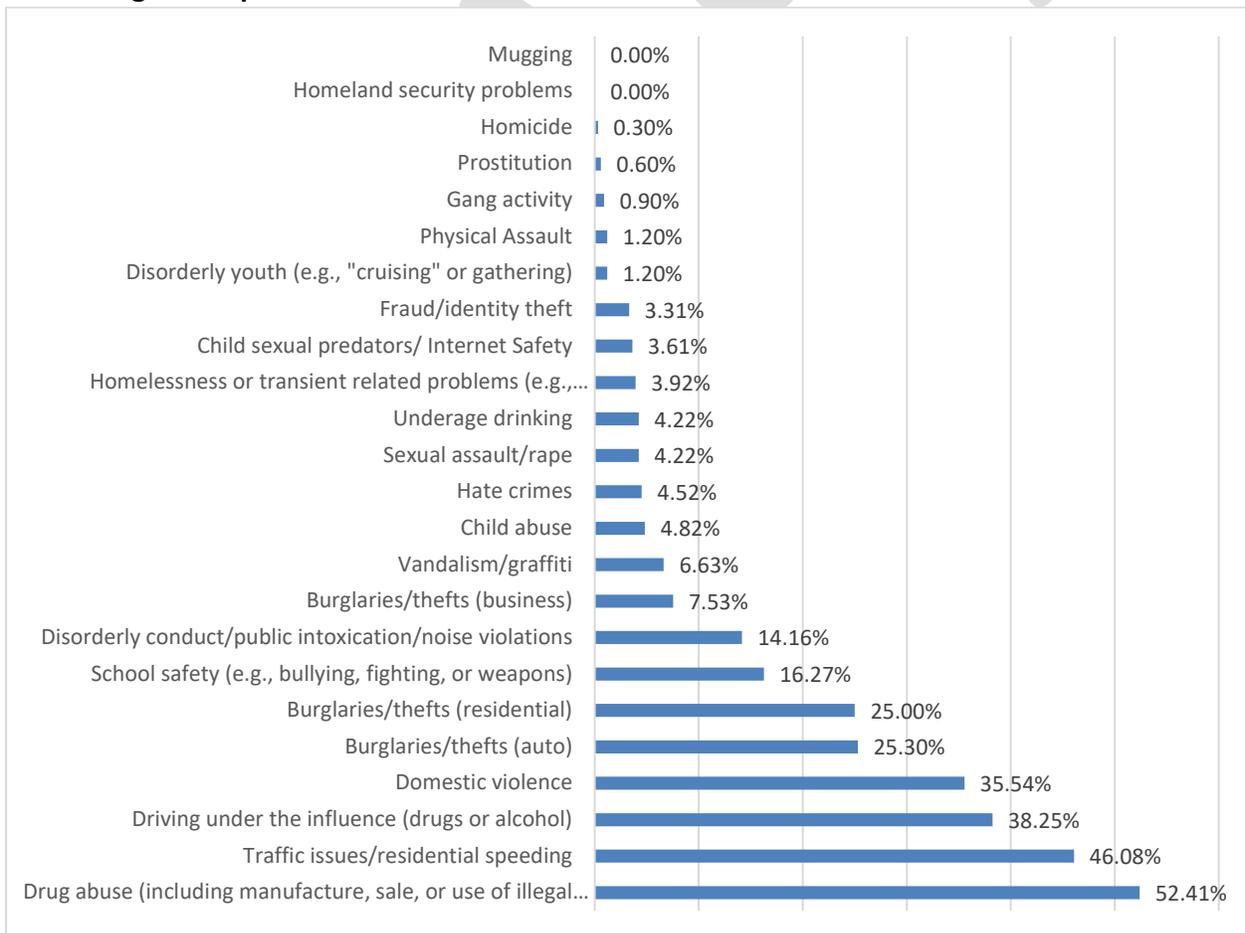
Answered: 332 Skipped: 18

- Burglaries/thefts (auto)
- Burglaries/thefts (residential)
- Burglaries/thefts (business)
- Child abuse
- Child sexual predators/ Internet Safety
- Disorderly conduct/public intoxication/noise violations
- Disorderly youth (e.g., "cruising" or gathering)
- Domestic violence
- Driving under the influence (drugs or alcohol)
- Drug abuse (including manufacture, sale, or use of illegal or prescription drugs)
- Fraud/identity theft
- Gang activity
- Hate crimes
- Homeland security problems
- Homelessness or transient related problems (e.g., panhandling)
- Homicide
- Mugging
- Physical Assault
- Prostitution
- School safety (e.g., bullying, fighting, or weapons)
- Sexual assault/rape
- Traffic issues/residential speeding
- Underage drinking
- Vandalism/graffiti

### Top Six Responses

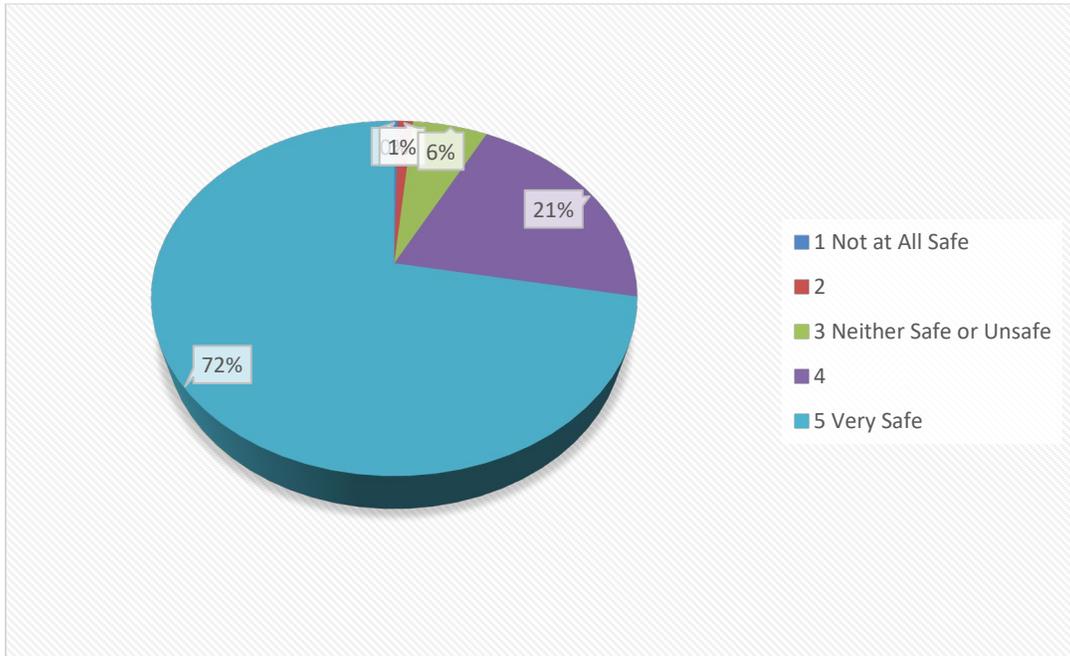


### Remaining 24 Responses



**Question #8: To what extent do you feel safe in your community when you are outside alone during the day?**

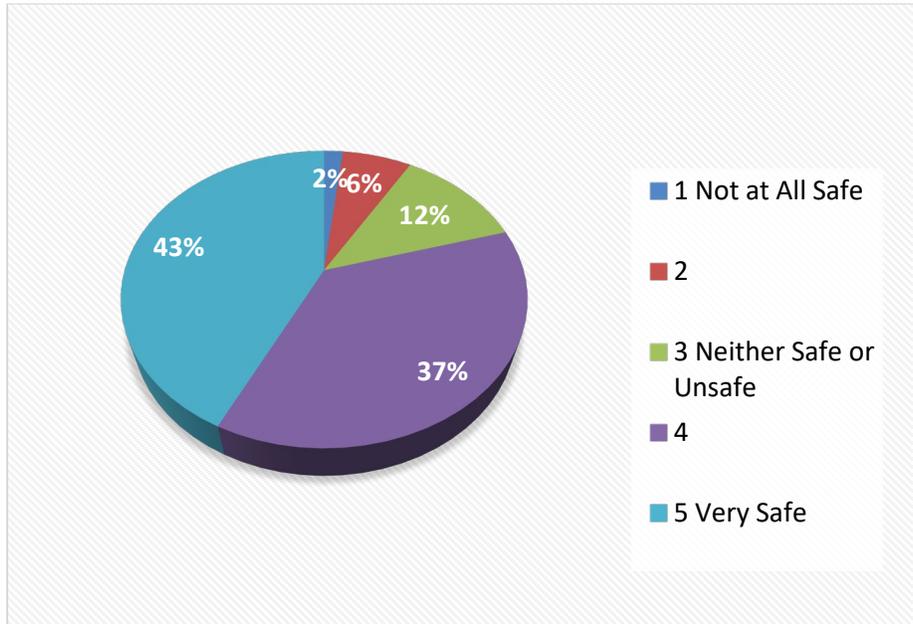
Answered: 332 Skipped: 18



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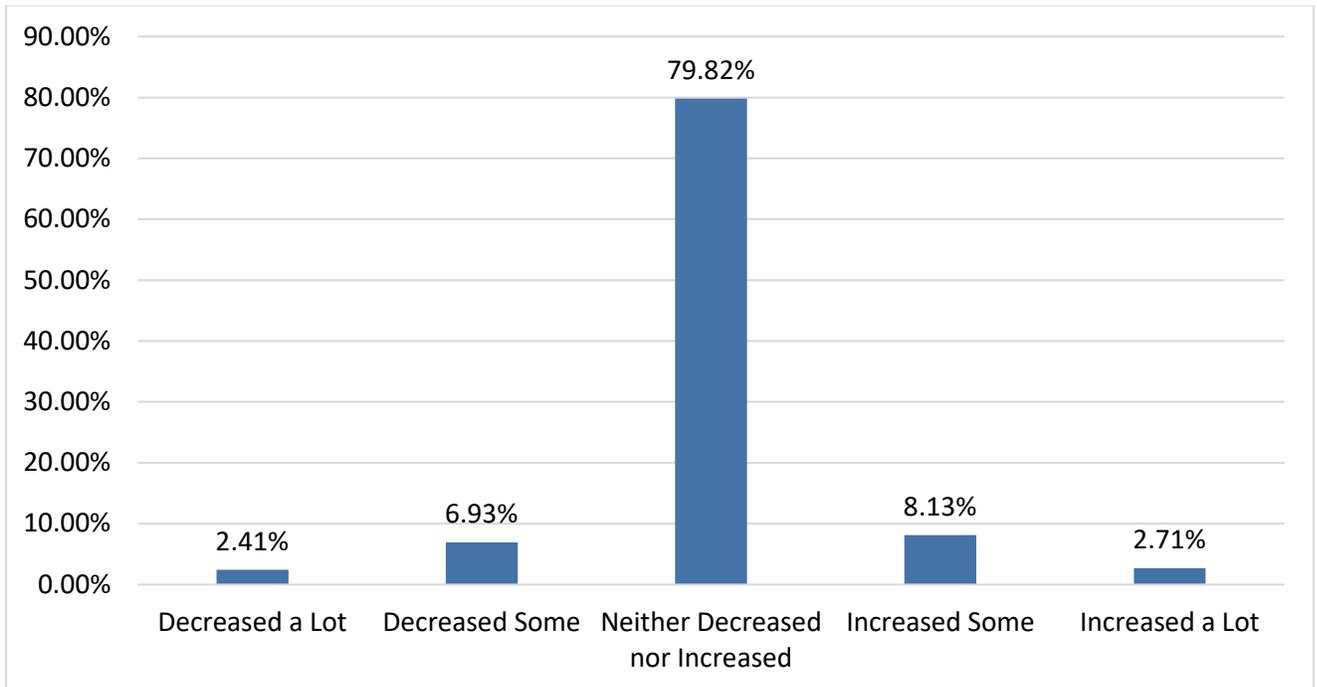
**Question #9: To what extent do you feel safe in your community when you are outside alone at night?**

Answered: 332 Skipped: 18



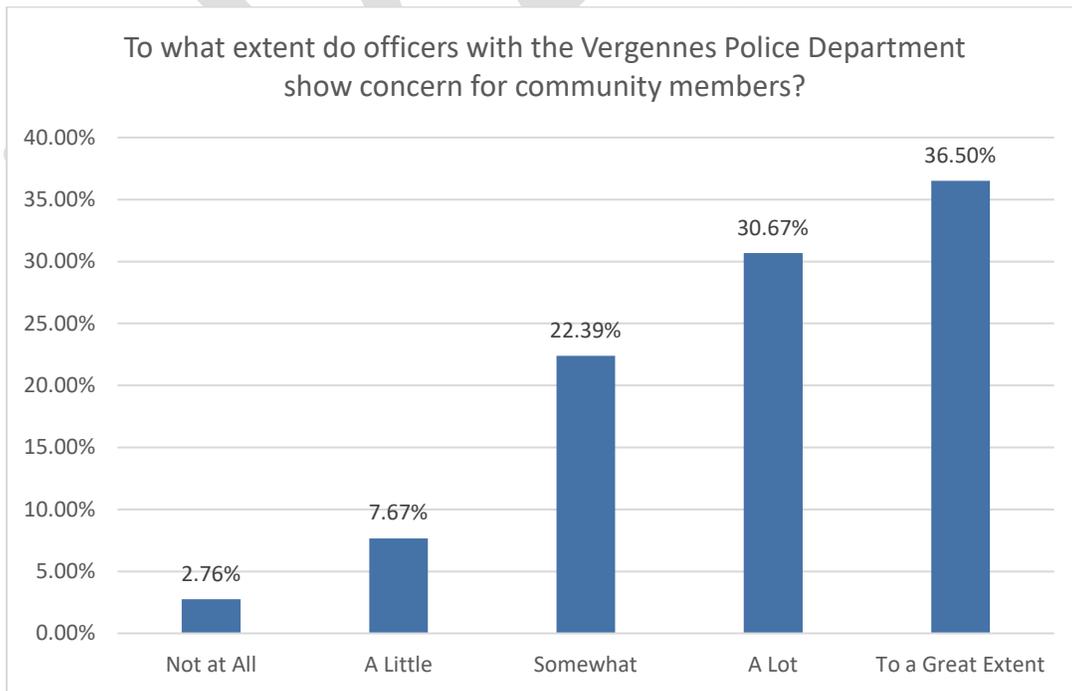
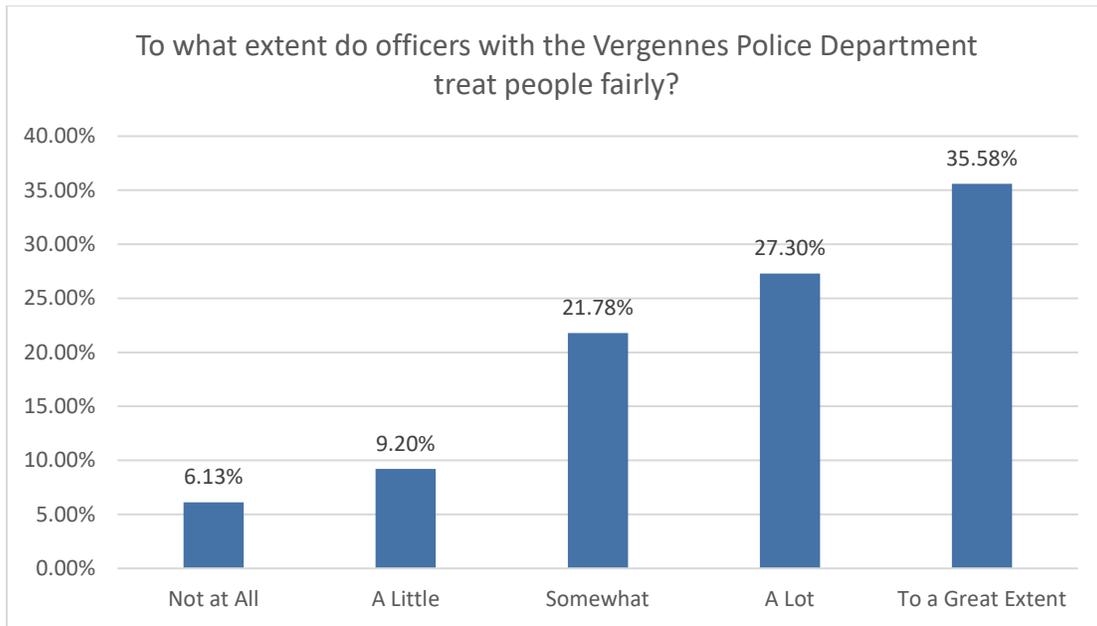
**Question #10: Over the last 12 months, to what extent have your feelings of safety in your community increased, decreased, or stayed the same?**

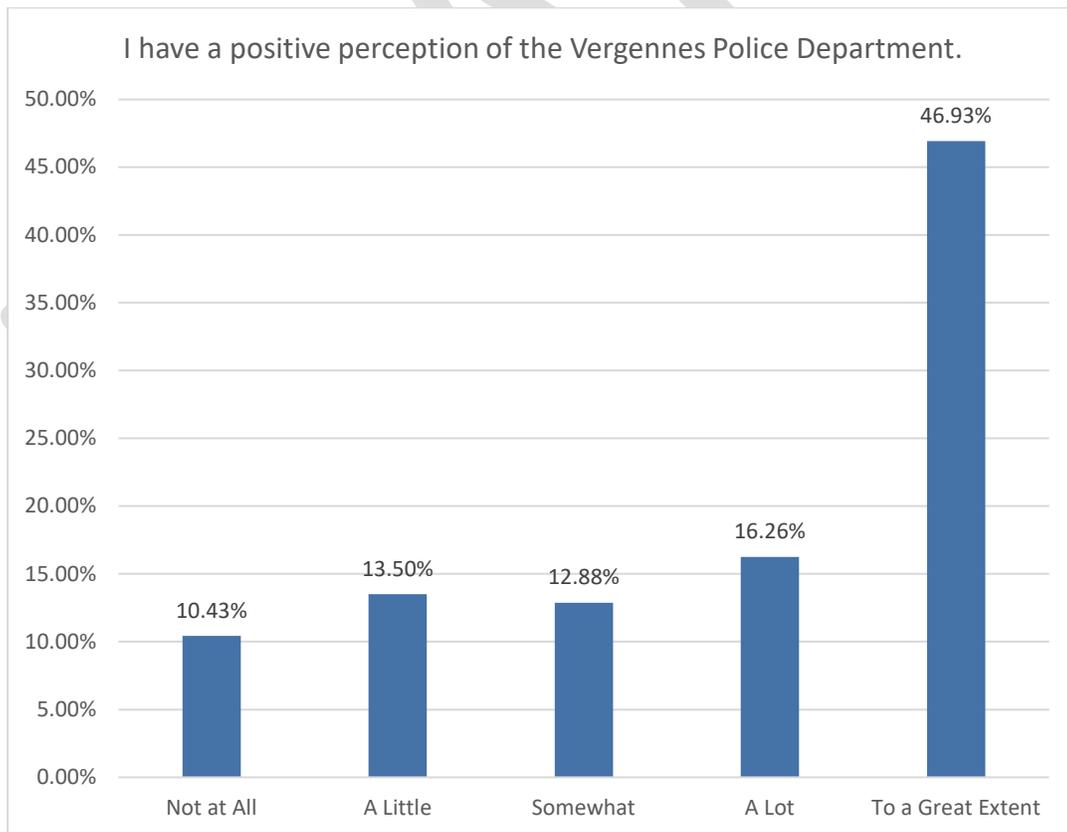
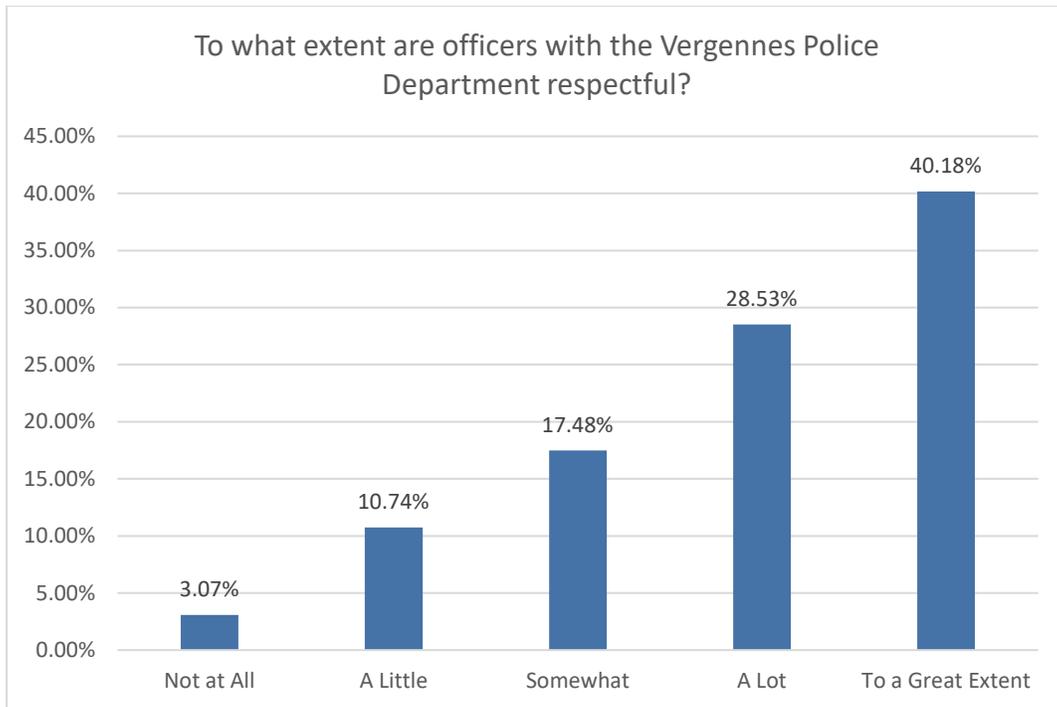
Answered: 332 Skipped: 18

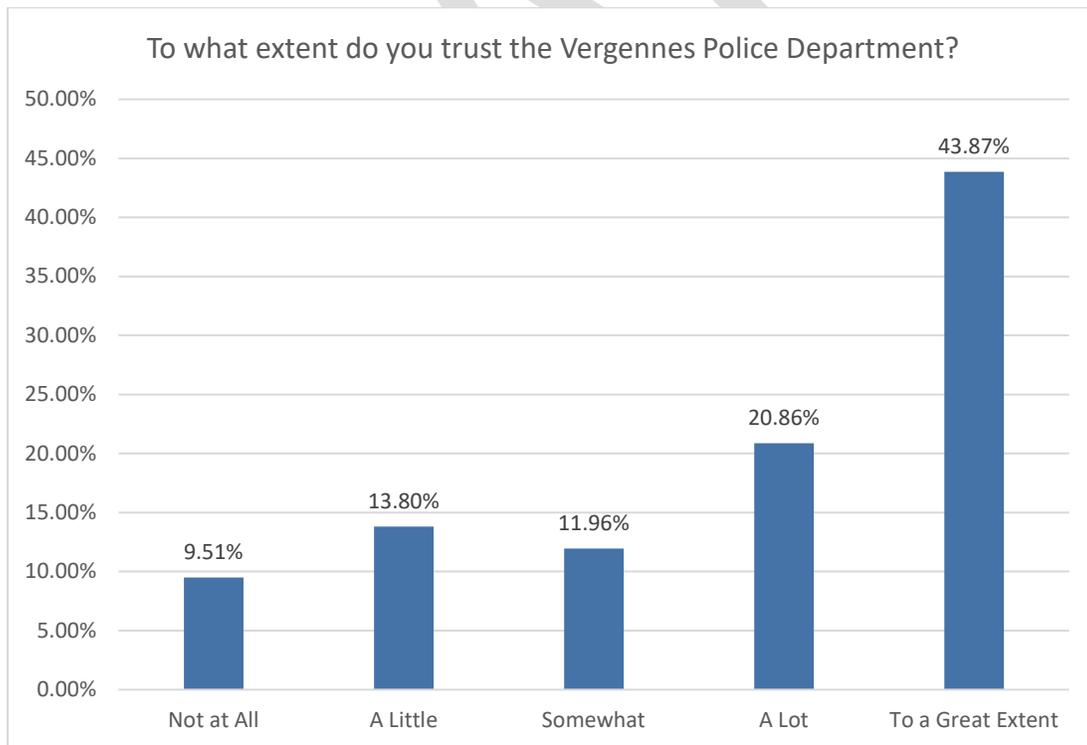
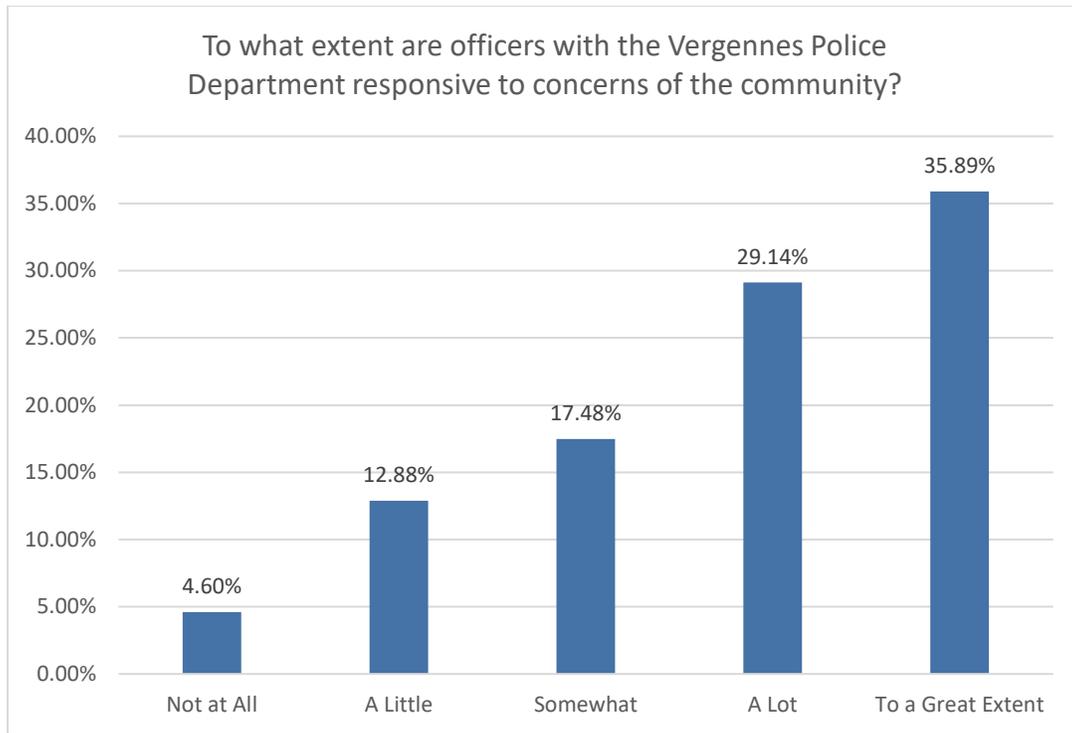


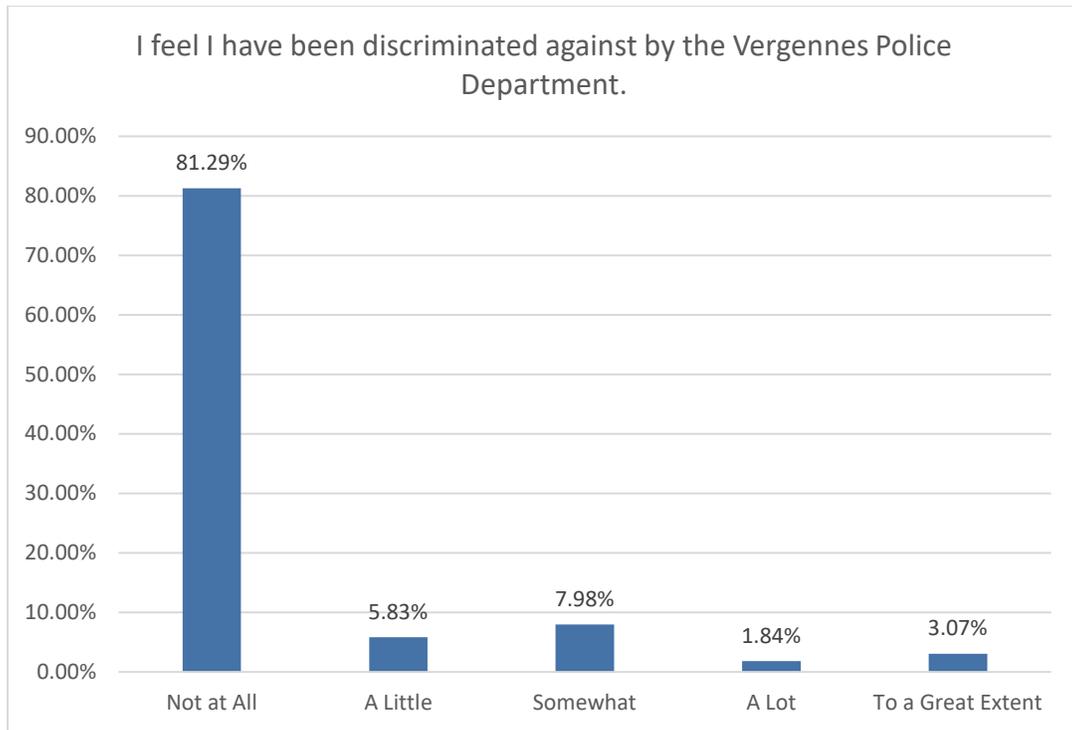
### Question #11: Please Respond to the following questions from Not at All to To a Great Extent

Answered: 326 Skipped: 24





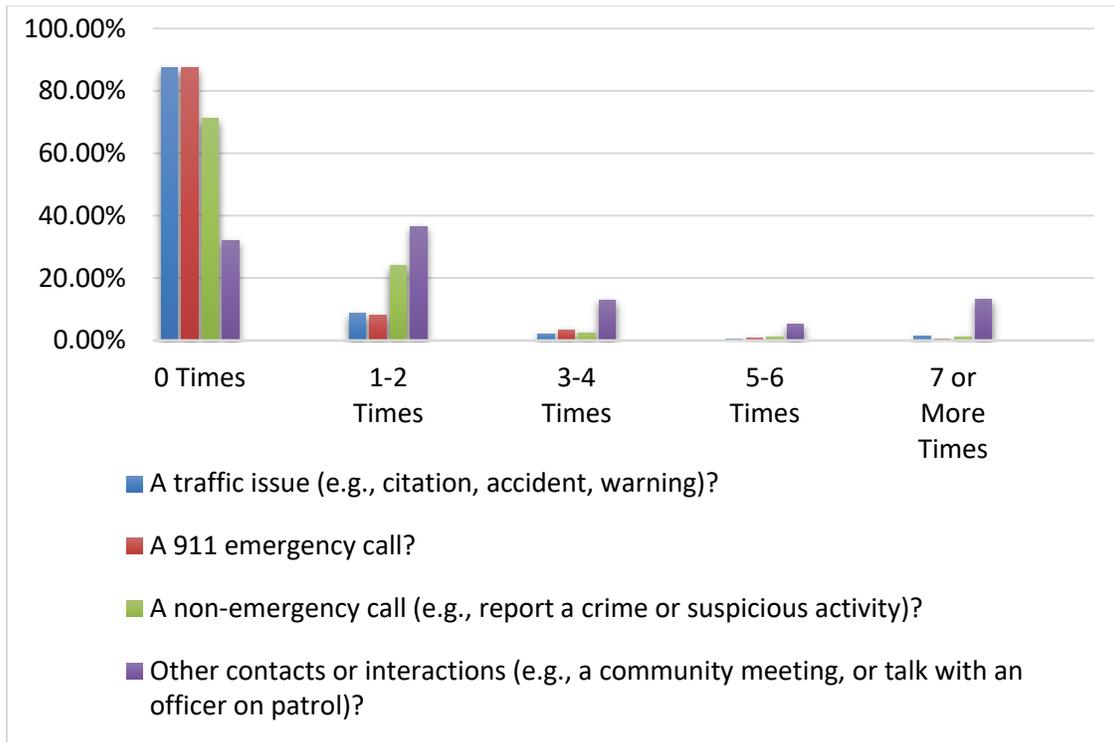




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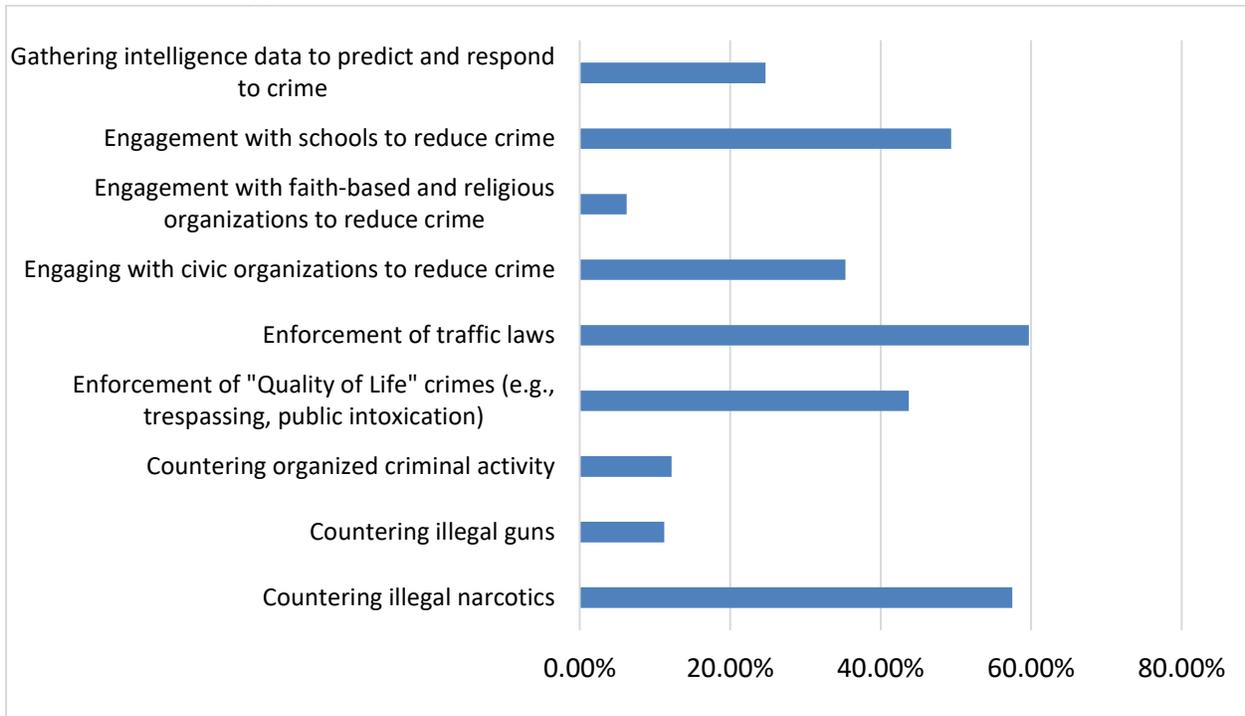
### Question #12: How many times in the past 12 months have you had contact with the Vergennes Police Department for:

Answered: 325 Skipped: 5



### Question #13: Please select the top 3 priorities you see as the priority for the Vergennes Police Department.

Answered: 320 Skipped: 30



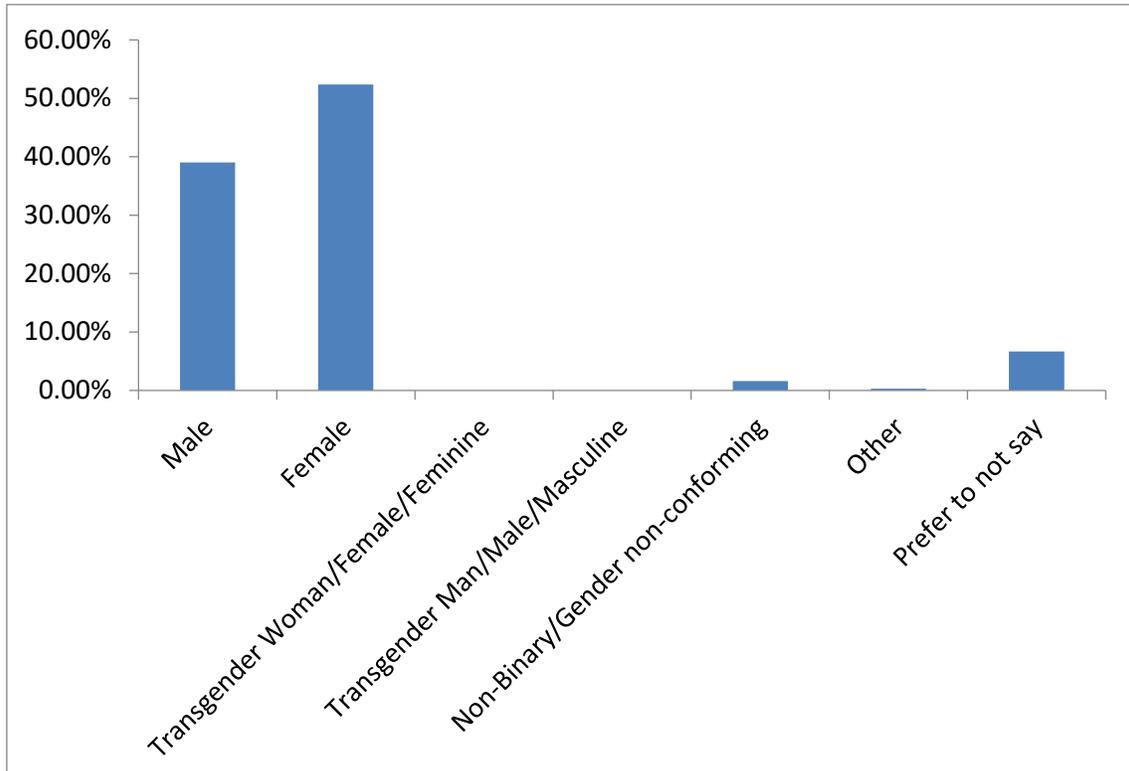
### Question #14: What is your birth sex?

Answered: 315 Skipped: 35



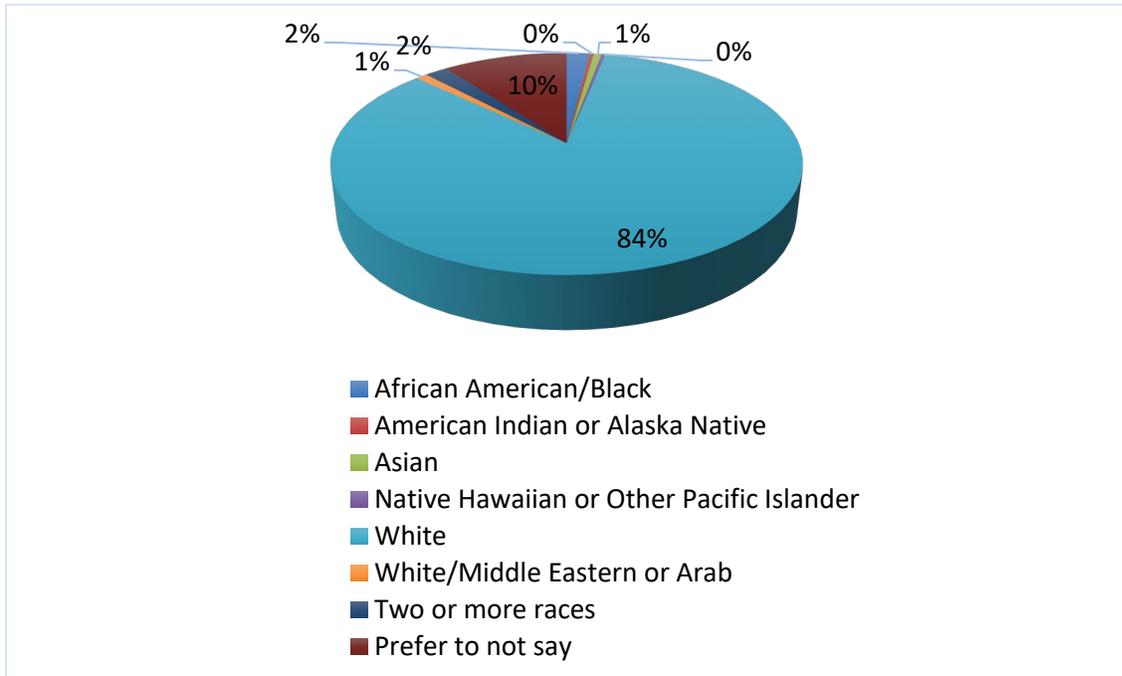
### Question #15: Gender identity: I am

Answered: 315 Skipped: 35



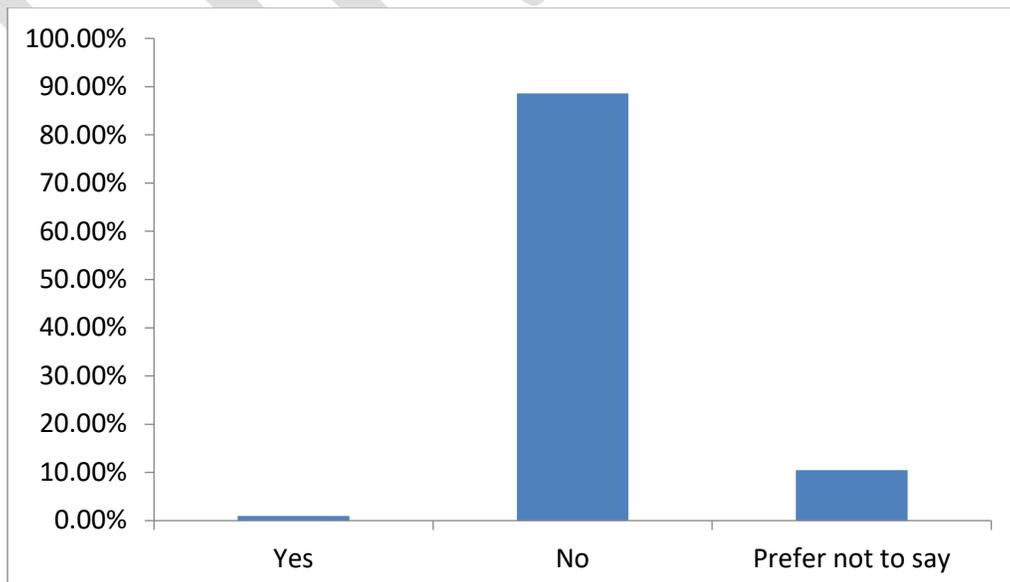
### Question #16: What is your race?

Answered: 315 Skipped: 35



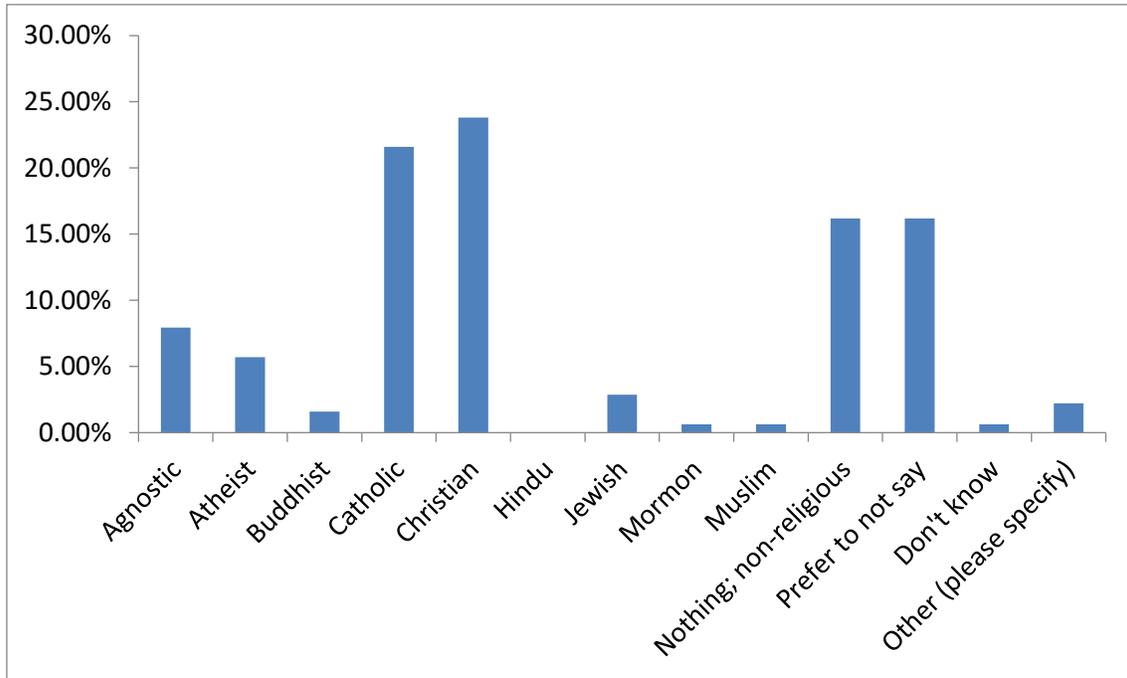
### Question #17: I am Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx

Answered: 315 Skipped: 35



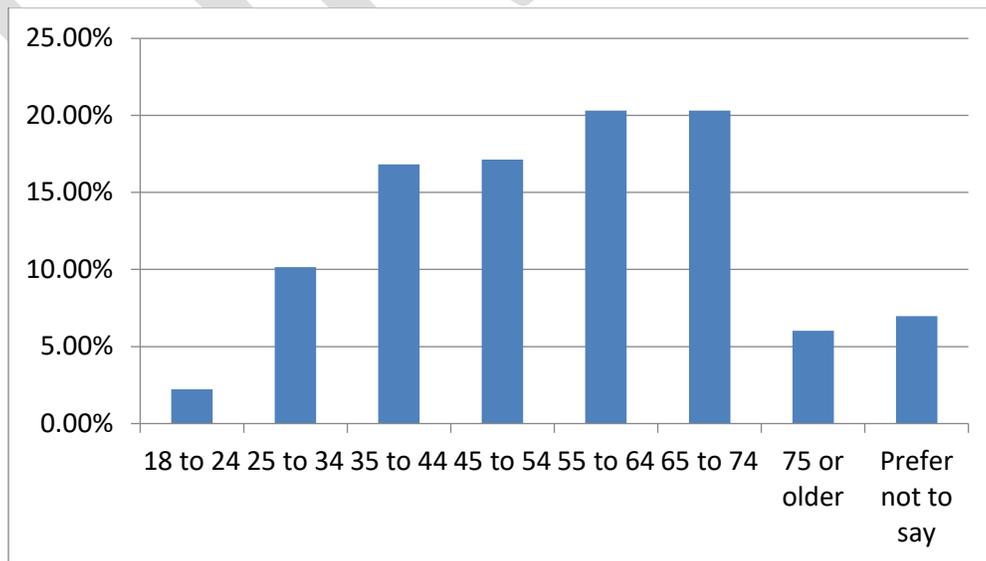
### Question #18: What is your religious affiliation?

Answered: 315 Skipped: 35



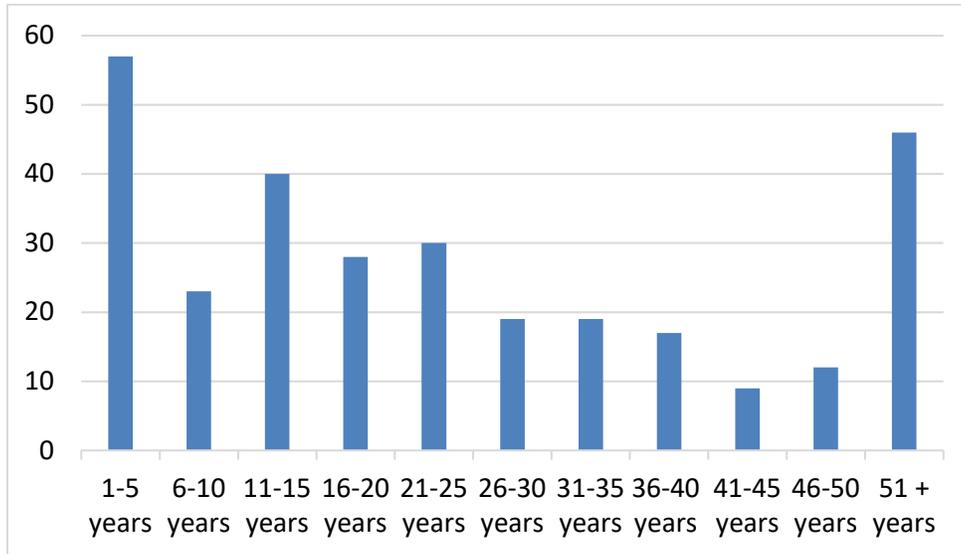
### Question #19: What is your age?

Answered: 315 Skipped: 35



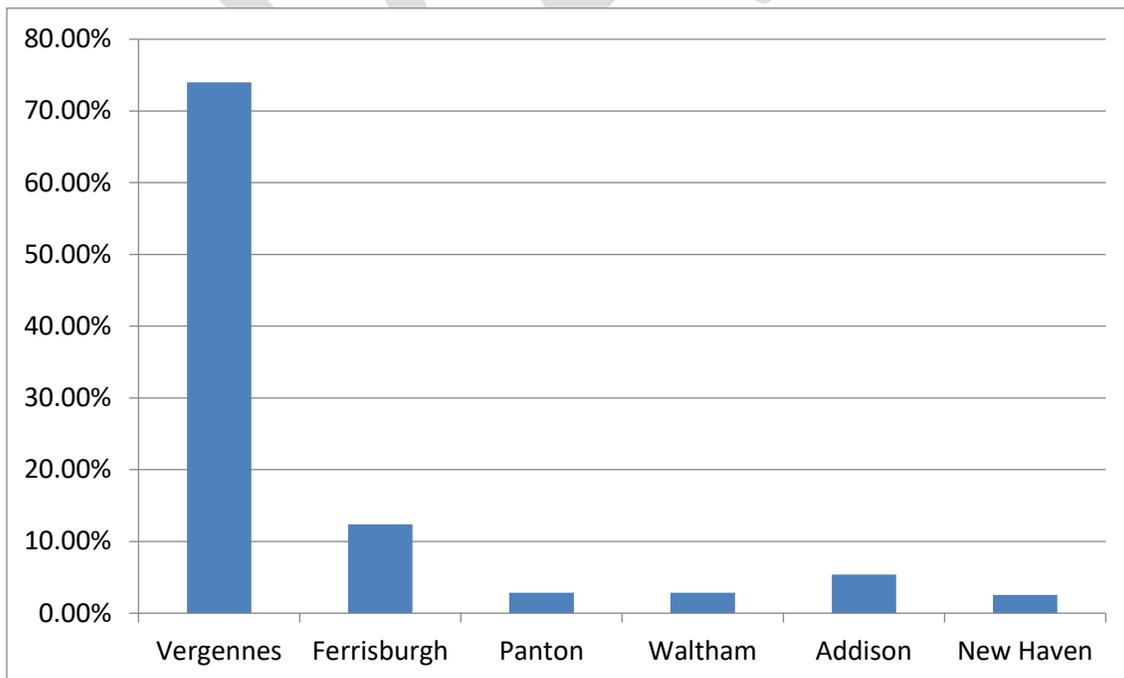
**Question #20: How many years have you lived in the Vergennes area?**

Answered: 315 Skipped: 35



**Question #21: In which city/town, located in the Vergennes area, do you reside?**

Answered: 315 Skipped: 35



## Appendix B: Additional Tables

Table 8 . Total Reports by Category and Report Nature (2015-2020)

Report Category	Reported Nature	Average # of Incidents Per Year	Total Count of Incidents	% of Total Number
<b>Administrative</b>	Background	10.00	60	0.52%
	Court Time	0.50	3	0.03%
	Fingerprints	119.33	716	6.25%
	Public Speaking	51.17	307	2.68%
	Social Media	1.17	7	0.06%
	Training	12.83	77	0.67%
	VIN Inspection	73.33	440	3.84%
<b>Administrative Total</b>		<b>268.33</b>	<b>1610</b>	<b>14.05%</b>
<b>Crimes Against Persons</b>	Assault - Aggra	10.67	64	0.56%
	Assault -Simple	1.33	8	0.07%
	Child Abuse	0.50	3	0.03%
	Kidnapping	0.17	1	0.01%
	Sex Offense	4.00	24	0.21%
	Sexual Assault	0.50	3	0.03%
	Stalking	1.17	7	0.06%
	Threatening	11.83	71	0.62%
<b>Crimes Against Persons Total</b>		<b>30.17</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>1.58%</b>
<b>Other</b>	911 Hangup	20.50	123	1.07%
	Ambulance Call	0.17	1	0.01%
	Bad Check - NSF	0.50	3	0.03%
	Boating Inciden	0.17	1	0.01%
	Cond of Release	1.83	11	0.10%
	Custodial Disp.	1.50	9	0.08%
	Custodial Int.	0.17	1	0.01%
	Death Inv	2.17	13	0.11%
	Deliver Message	0.83	5	0.04%
	Escort	0.33	2	0.02%
	Fish & Game	0.17	1	0.01%
	Found Property	19.50	117	1.02%
	Information	5.83	35	0.31%
	Juvenile Prob	15.50	93	0.81%
	Medical	0.83	5	0.04%
	Miscellaneous	0.67	4	0.03%
Missing Person	3.33	20	0.17%	

Report Category	Reported Nature	Average # of Incidents Per Year	Total Count of Incidents	% of Total Number
	Odor Investigat	0.17	1	0.01%
	Phone Problem	3.83	23	0.20%
	Property Watch	61.50	369	3.22%
	Restraining Odr	1.67	10	0.09%
	Runaway Juvnile	0.33	2	0.02%
	Search Warrant	0.50	3	0.03%
	Service of APO	10.33	62	0.54%
	Sex Offend Reg	0.67	4	0.03%
	Sick Animal	0.50	3	0.03%
	SOT	6.50	39	0.34%
	Suicide Attempt	2.67	16	0.14%
	Unconsciousness	0.17	1	0.01%
	UNK	0.50	3	0.03%
	Utility Problem	0.33	2	0.02%
	Wanted Person	3.83	23	0.20%
<b>Other Total</b>		<b>167.50</b>	<b>1005</b>	<b>8.77%</b>
<b>Property Crime</b>	Burglary	9.17	55	0.48%
	Embezzlement	0.33	2	0.02%
	Forgery	0.33	2	0.02%
	Fraud	11.17	67	0.58%
	Property Damage	3.33	20	0.17%
	Robbery	0.33	2	0.02%
	Theft	39.83	239	2.09%
	Theft-Automobil	1.17	7	0.06%
	Vandalism	14.83	89	0.78%
<b>Property Crime Total</b>		<b>80.50</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>4.22%</b>
<b>Quality of Life</b>	Abandoned Vehic	1.00	6	0.05%
	Alarm	40.17	241	2.10%
	Alcohol Offense	2.17	13	0.11%
	Animal Noise	1.83	11	0.10%
	Animal Problem	27.00	162	1.41%
	Burglary Alarm	11.33	68	0.59%
	Citizen Assist	113.17	679	5.93%
	Citizen Dispute	20.33	122	1.06%
	Complaint	1.00	6	0.05%
	Disorderly	2.67	16	0.14%
	Drugs	17.83	107	0.93%
	DUI	24.50	147	1.28%
	Family Fight	12.50	75	0.65%

Report Category	Reported Nature	Average # of Incidents Per Year	Total Count of Incidents	% of Total Number
	Fireworks	1.00	6	0.05%
	Illegal Burning	0.17	1	0.01%
	Intoxication	9.00	54	0.47%
	Littering	2.83	17	0.15%
	Lockout	40.83	245	2.14%
	Loitering	0.50	3	0.03%
	Lost Property	4.33	26	0.23%
	MV Complaint	119.83	719	6.28%
	Noise Disturban	8.50	51	0.45%
	Overdose	0.67	4	0.03%
	Parking Problem	52.00	312	2.72%
	Pornography	0.67	4	0.03%
	Suspicious	117.17	703	6.14%
	Tobacco Offense	0.17	1	0.01%
	Trespassing	4.33	26	0.23%
	Unlawful Misch	0.50	3	0.03%
	Unsecure Premis	10.33	62	0.54%
	Vagrancy	0.17	1	0.01%
	Weapon Offense	0.17	1	0.01%
	Welfare Check	36.00	216	1.89%
<b>Quality of Life Total</b>		<b>684.67</b>	<b>4108</b>	<b>35.85%</b>
<b>Traffic</b>	ATV Incident	1.00	6	0.05%
	Checkpoint	3.50	21	0.18%
	Comm Veh Insp	8.33	50	0.44%
	Crash Damage	59.67	358	3.12%
	Crash Injury	2.83	17	0.15%
	Directed Patrol	287.00	1722	15.03%
	DLS	4.67	28	0.24%
	Foot Patrol	100.17	601	5.25%
	Traffic Hazard	6.17	37	0.32%
	Traffic Offense	1.33	8	0.07%
<b>Traffic Total</b>		<b>499.33</b>	<b>2996</b>	<b>26.15%</b>
<b>Agency Assist</b>	Agency Assist	203.83	1223	10.67%
<b>Agency Assist Total</b>		<b>203.83</b>	<b>1223</b>	<b>10.67%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>			<b>11458</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



**IACP**<sup>®</sup>  
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