



Perris News

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Perris Crime Continues to Decline

Crime in Perris continues to decline in 2009, a result of innovative policing methods and the City's staunch commitment to funding law enforcement even during a deep economic downturn.

But City officials worry the trend will reverse if Measure C, a property assessment intended to fund public safety, is defeated on the Nov. 3 ballot. That could mean up to five fewer police officers as well as cuts in paramedics.

Major crimes fell 12 percent between 2008 and the beginning of 2009 and have declined another 5 percent since the beginning of this year, said Perris Police Chief James McElvain. The decline was most significant in the south side, including the Monument Ranch subdivision, where major crimes have fallen about 10 percent in 2009, McElvain said.

The decrease in the north end, home of May Ranch and the Villages of Avalon, was about two percent, he said. Major crimes include homicide, rape, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, auto theft, personal theft and vehicle burglaries.

Overall, the number of thefts fell from 305 in the first five months in 2008 to 276 this year; burglaries dropped from 282 to 244 and the number of aggravated assaults decreased from 160 to 155. The number of reported robberies and rapes also declined.

Perris police employ zone policing, a strategy that allows officers to spend more of their time in a specific part of the City so they get to know residents, business owners and community leaders. Just as important, officers also learn who doesn't belong in the area.

Perris police work with probation and parole officers to learn the identity of recently released inmates who might be committing crimes. The group Cops and Clergy brings together uniformed law officers and ministers to discuss and share information about matters important to both groups, like providing jobs and support services to parolees. Officers from the Perris station also participate in regional narcotics and gang task forces aimed at reducing criminal activity along the Interstate 215 and Highway 74 corridors.

The City is committing 60 percent of its \$21 million general fund to pay for police, fire and public safety protection. While money isn't the only tool in the arsenal to fight criminal activity, McElvain says that "when it comes to crime, you have to have resources to throw at the problem."

"When you have resources, you get to do better police work," McElvain said. Perris elected officials fear the City will suffer a major setback if Measure C goes down to defeat.

"It would definitely be a setback in the momentum we have established," said Mayor Daryl Busch. "Public safety has always been a priority of this City Council and we are seeing the effects in reduced crime. Without adequate resources, we would have to reduce services."

Measure C could raise \$2 million for public safety--police, fire, ambulance and other emergency services. It would ask residents to pay \$135.88 annually. Residents living north of Nuevo Road and in Perris' south end already pay between \$277 and \$325 a year for public safety and their tax bill would decrease substantially if the measure is approved.

Councilman Al Landers, who owns a real estate company in Perris, said he is delighted by the decrease in crime but worries that the City will suffer if the upcoming ballot measure fails. He said the proposed assessment "levels the field" for all residents instead of punishing residents who live in newer housing tracts.

"We have done a great job in reducing crime and as a businessman, resident and council member, I could not be happier," Landers said. "These reductions show we are on top of crime. But it takes money to put police officers on the street. Good intentions do not fight crime." Landers said low-crime rates are a major attraction to potential new residents and business owners.

"I want our citizens to feel safe in their parks, shopping centers and at home," Landers said. "But if we don't pass this assessment, I am afraid we may have to scale back our efforts and that quite frankly makes me sad." Councilwoman Rita Rogers said the City is using some of its reserves to get through the tough times. Budget projections anticipate Perris will use about \$6 million in reserves during the next two years.

"We must be frugal with our reserves," Rogers said. "We are asking residents to pay a minimal parcel fee to ensure police and fire protection now and in the future."

Councilwoman Joanne Evans, a retired firefighter, said losing paramedics from ambulances could result in patient deaths.

"It's absolutely critical for us to have this," she said. "I'm a firm believer in this measure."

Mayor Pro-Tem Mark Yarbrough said other departments have already felt the effects of the budget crunch. City workers gave up raises and have accepted furloughs to reduce costs. Police and public safety are the last areas the City wants to trim, he said. But there will be no choice without the necessary funding, he said.