

# Public Safety

## Why is this important?

In addition to its immediate threat to physical well-being, crime can have a negative impact on mental health, property values, economic activity, social cohesion, and civic engagement.<sup>53</sup> Crime and fear of crime is a major reason people choose not to walk, use recreational facilities, or allow their children to play outside. In many ways, rates of crime reflect many underlying, indirect, and systemic influences – such as poverty, social disconnection, or poor access to mental health and healthcare services – which can be difficult for a city to address directly. However, features of the built environment, including housing design, block layout, land use and circulation patterns, and physical deterioration, can all have an impact on levels and fear of crime.

Crime along particular streets can decline or vanish after implementing building patterns that provide “defensible space” (an area that residents feel they control), “natural surveillance” (the ability to see what’s happening around an area) and “a sense of order” (places that are well tended and lack visible signs of deterioration).<sup>54</sup> Equally important, such design features help residents feel safe. A study of more than 500 zip codes in California found that an increase in the number of bars and take-out alcohol retailers (liquor, convenience, and grocery stores) corresponded with an increase in the rate of violence.<sup>55</sup> Also, residents living in “greener” surroundings report lower levels of fear, fewer incivilities, and less aggressive and violent behavior.<sup>56</sup> In addition to improvements to the physical environment, general improvements in poverty rates and economic activity, social networks, and access to mental health services are likely to increase public safety in a city in the long term.

## Defining Sustainability

A sustainable state for the City is one where crime levels are low and safety and perceived safety levels are high.

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<sup>53</sup> R. Taylor and A. Harrell, *Physical Environment and Crime*, presented to the National Justice Institute, 1996.

<sup>54</sup> O. Newman, 1996, *Creating Defensible Space*, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research; and A. Zelinka and D. Brennan, 2001, *Safescape: Creating Safer, More Livable Communities Through Planning and Design*, American Planning Association (Chicago), page 42

<sup>55</sup> P. Gruenewald, July 2006, *Changes in Outlet Densities Affect Violence Rates*, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*.

<sup>56</sup> F. Kuo and W. Sullivan, 2001, *Environment and Crime in the Inner City: Does Vegetation Reduce Crime*, Vol. 33, No. 3, *Environment and Behavior*, pages 343-367.

# Indicator Results

## Violent Crime

- Rates of violent crime in Redwood City are generally below state averages, with the exception of 2005, when rates were similar.
- The number of homicides in 2005 and 2006 was higher than the 6-year average for Redwood City.
- Property crimes peaked in 2005, but then declined in 2006.
- The number of robberies in 2005 and 2006 was higher than the 6-year average for Redwood City.

**Table 31: Violent Crimes in Redwood City**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Homicide	1	1	2	1	3	6
Forcible Rape	22	25	17	18	22	16
Robbery	59	72	61	60	103	80
Aggravated Assault	203	243	287	240	260	198
Violent Crime Rate per 100,000 people, Redwood City	371	436	488	429	526	407
Violent Crime Rate per 100,000 people, California	N/A	N/A	N/A	528	526	533

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008

## Property Crime

- Rates of property crime in Redwood City per 100,000 residents are near state averages.
- Rates of motor vehicle theft more than doubled from 2001 to 2006 and have stayed consistently high since 2004.

**Table 32: Property Crimes in Redwood City**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Burglary	472	307	383	359	354	307
Larceny, Theft	1,297	1,640	1,590	1,738	1,831	1,523
Motor Vehicle Theft	152	194	217	376	368	349
Arson	16	20	17	22	29	19
Property Crime Rate per 100,000 People, Redwood City	2,501	2,739	2,911	3,328	3,458	2,954
Property Crime Rate per 100,000 People, California	N/A	N/A	N/A	3,424	3,321	3,171

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008

## Domestic Violence

Violence between intimate partners or former partners in dating or marriage relationships is considered domestic violence. In 30% to 60% of families that experience domestic violence, children are also abused (some estimates of this co-occurrence are even higher). Children raised

in violent family environments are also at risk of becoming abusers or victims themselves during adolescence or adulthood.<sup>57</sup>

- Domestic violence calls fluctuated between 171 and 229 calls per year for the period between 2002 and 2006.

**Table 33: Domestic Violence Calls in Redwood City**

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number of Domestic Violence Calls for Assistance	171	172	226	229	206

Source: California Department of Justice, 2007

## Juvenile Arrests

Juveniles (people younger than age 18) who commit crimes have a high rate of recidivism (repeat offenses) and a lower chance of developing life, job, and social skills than juveniles who do not commit crimes. Increased juvenile crime increases the chance of future burden on the social, economic, and criminal justice system.<sup>58</sup> Salient features of Table 34, “Juvenile Felony Arrests in Redwood City,” are as follows:

- There were between 120 and 128 juvenile felony arrests per year between 2002 and 2006, and the number of arrests is not increasing or decreasing noticeably.
- About 1.2% of all 10-19 year olds in Redwood City were arrested on a juvenile felony charge in 2005 and 2006.<sup>59</sup>

**Table 34: Juvenile Felony Arrests in Redwood City**

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number of Juvenile Felony Arrests	128	120	123	125	127
Percent of Redwood City 10-19 Year Olds Arrested for a Juvenile Felony	N/A	N/A	N/A	1.22%	1.21%

Source: California Department of Justice, 2007

## Summary of Results

Redwood City’s rates of violent crime are generally below state averages, while property crime rates are similar to state averages. Around 1% of Redwood City young people between age 10 and 19 are arrested each year for juvenile felonies.

<sup>57</sup> “Domestic Violence,” “Why This Topic Is Important,” from kidsdata.org, accessed June 2008 at [http://www.kidsdata.org/topictrends.jsp?csid=0&t=3&i=2&ra=3\\_132&link=](http://www.kidsdata.org/topictrends.jsp?csid=0&t=3&i=2&ra=3_132&link=)

<sup>58</sup> “Juvenile Arrests,” “Why This Is Important,” from kidsdata.org, accessed June 2008 at [http://www.kidsdata.org/topictrends.jsp?csid=0&t=4&i=1&ra=3\\_132&link=](http://www.kidsdata.org/topictrends.jsp?csid=0&t=4&i=1&ra=3_132&link=)

<sup>59</sup> This figure assumes the same person was not arrested more than once. The American Community Survey aggregates population data to include 15-19 year-olds in one cohort. In the legal system, “juveniles” are defined as persons under age 18. Therefore, this percentage figure does not include 18 or 19 year olds arrested (who would be arrested as adults, not juveniles), and the total percentage of 10-19 year-old arrested for either a juvenile or adult felony is higher – by an unknown margin – than the stated figure.

## Potential Policy Responses

- Continue to improve the City's social and economic conditions, which will have a long-term positive impact on crime rates and residents involved in criminal activity.
- Continue to support youth programs that provide job training, education, and activities.
- Encourage “defensible space,” “natural surveillance,” and “a sense of order” in the built environment.
- Limit concentrations of liquor stores.