



2021 in review: Police release annual crime statistics and complaint data

The year 2021 continued with unprecedented challenges felt by the impacts of the global pandemic. Notwithstanding organizational changes, the Police Department continued to work with our community, residents and businesses toward the goal of a safer city.

Police officers and professional staff within the Police Department contact the public in several ways, including response to calls received by the dispatch center, flag downs or requests made in public, along with “self-initiated” activities (which range from traffic to pedestrian stops). Not all service calls result in written reports or citations. Staff use their discretion, experience, knowledge of laws/policies and communication skills to resolve situations.

The pandemic “lock down” and “stay-at-home” orders were lifted in various stages throughout the year. The police department lobby became accessible and more contacts between the police and the community began to increase. While some services were limited in 2020, the police department was able to continue to respond to calls, and in 2021 were able to resume more in-person services. In 2021, police staff provided an increased amount of public safety services as compared to 2020. The calls for service picked up due to the state, county and city’s gradual opening back up for in-person workspaces, business and schools. While not at full capacity, more people resumed commuting and gathering in groups shifting close to trends pre-pandemic.

All department employees (sworn officers and professional staff) working in the community have been wearing body cameras since 2014 in an effort to strengthen staff’s performance and accountability, enhance department transparency, document encounters with the public, and investigate and resolve complaints and staff-involved incidents.

In 2021, the Police Department responded to over 20,000 calls for service, conducted over 3,550 traffic stops, over 870 pedestrian and bicycle stops, wrote over 2,200 reports and arrested 560 individuals. These numbers represent the current demands for service, reduction in staff, and the slight decrease in activity that is directly related to the continued COVID-19 impacts in Menlo Park. In addition to this activity, police staff handled hundreds of additional walk-in requests to the police facility and phone calls where professional staff, including administration, records and parking, provides services directly to the public (i.e., police report copies, vehicle releases, parking enforcement/permits, media inquiries, general questions, property/evidence, etc.)

The 2021 crime statistics showed a slight decrease in reported violent crime (homicide, rape, robbery and aggravated assault); 43 incidents in 2021 and 47 reported in 2020. There were no reported homicides in both 2020 and 2021; clearance rates for violent crimes (the percentage of crimes that are solved) decreased from 40.4% in 2020 to 37% in 2021.

Property crimes (burglary, larceny, auto theft and arson) in 2021 decreased by more than 28% in comparison to 2020. There were 558 property crime reports taken in 2021 compared to 776 taken in 2020.

The Police Department investigated six internal affairs cases in 2021, which was the same number for 2020. It should be noted that these six complaints are out of 32,420, or 0.01% of contacts with the public. This is a 40% decrease from 2019 for both years, where 10 internal affairs investigations were conducted. When reviewing internal and personnel complaints, it is important to look at the number and types of service calls officers respond to within the evaluated period. It is inevitable that given the total number of public contacts, there will be situations where a member of the public is not satisfied with the service received and has the right to file a complaint and/or an employee's conduct or behavior warrants an investigation.

Among the six complaints, two are pending, two were not sustained, one was exonerated, and one was determined to be frivolous in nature.

- A pending status means the complaint is currently under investigation.
- A not sustained finding means the investigation failed to disclose sufficient evidence to clearly prove or disprove the allegation(s).
- A finding of exonerated is determined when there is proof that actions were consistent with department policies and protocols.
- A finding of frivolous is reached when, the investigation found that the complaint is one that is "totally and completely without merit" or is taken "for the sole purpose of harassing the officer."

The use of body cameras has allowed supervisors to review incidents mentioned by complainants immediately. This review allows for an examination of a situation as it happened based upon the facts, as opposed to recollection.

With all this in consideration, six complaints per year is an acceptable number, but we will always strive toward zero.