



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET ANALYST REPORT

Date Issued: September 4, 2024

IBA Report Number: 25-29

Public Safety Committee Meeting Date: September 18, 2025

Item Number: TBD

Proposed Response to Grand Jury Report

“The Gaslamp Enforcement Team Needs the Community’s Help!”

On May 27, 2025, the San Diego County Grand Jury filed a report, titled “The Gaslamp Enforcement Team Needs the Community’s Help.” This report outlines concerns about public safety, staffing shortages, and community trust in the Gaslamp Quarter, including a call for expanded daytime bicycle patrols and enhanced community engagement.

The Grand Jury report included three findings and five recommendations, of which one recommendation (recommendation #5) is directed to both the Mayor and City Council. The proposed joint Mayoral and Council response covers the three findings and five recommendations applicable to the City of San Diego and is provided as Attachment 1 to this report.

Per the Grand Jury report, the Mayor and Council are required to provide comments to the Presiding Judge of the San Diego Superior Court on the applicable findings and recommendations within 90 days. However, the Council President’s office requested and received an extension for the response to November 21, 2025.

In responding to each Grand Jury finding, the City is required to either (1) agree with the finding or (2) disagree wholly or partially with the finding. Responses to Grand Jury recommendations must indicate that the recommendation (1) has been implemented; (2) has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future; (3) requires further analysis; or (4) will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. Explanations for responses are requested when applicable.

For this Grand Jury report, various departments assisted the IBA in the development of the proposed Council response, including Compliance, San Diego Police Department (SDPD), City

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Attorney's Office, and the Mayor's Office. We request that the Public Safety Committee provide feedback and forward its approved proposed response to full City Council.

While this is a joint Mayoral and Council proposed response, the Council may choose to amend or change this response. If the final response that the Council approves is agreeable to the Mayor, then the joint City response will be sent to the Presiding Judge. Otherwise, the Council and Mayor will send separate responses.

Summary of Draft Response

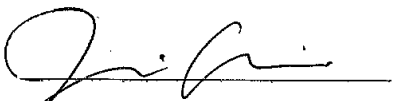
The Mayor agrees with two of the three findings and partially disagrees with one, citing operational limitations of bicycle patrols and the need to balance visibility with emergency response capabilities. To address the recommendations, the draft response highlights recent efforts such as the reinstatement of the Gaslamp Walking Team, the formation of the Downtown Response Team, and ongoing community outreach initiatives. While some recommendations have already been implemented—such as interpersonal skills training and trust-building efforts—others, like expanding bicycle patrols, are deemed unreasonable due to current staffing constraints. The draft response emphasizes the City's commitment to public safety and community partnership while acknowledging the need for strategic resource allocation and continued evaluation of enforcement strategies.



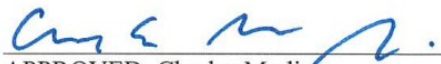
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Attachments:

1. Proposed City Response to San Diego County Grand Jury Report titled "The Gaslamp Enforcement Team Needs the Community's Help!"
2. San Diego County Grand Jury Report titled "The Gaslamp Enforcement Team Needs the Community's Help!"

**City of San Diego Response to
San Diego County Grand Jury Report Titled
“The Gaslamp Enforcement Team Needs The Community’s Help!”**

Pursuant to California Penal Code Section 933(c), the City of San Diego provides the following response from the Mayor to the applicable findings and recommendations included in the above referenced Grand Jury Report. Additionally, the Mayor and City Council provide the following joint response on recommendation 5.

RESPONSE TO FINDINGS:

Finding 1: *Building confidence in public safety in the Gaslamp requires a concerted effort by day and nighttime Gaslamp Enforcement Teams.*

Response: The Mayor agrees with the Grand Jury’s finding.

The San Diego Police Department (SDPD) agrees building confidence in public safety in the Gaslamp takes a coordinated effort, especially when it comes to community engagement. That’s why SDPD goes beyond the work of the Gaslamp Enforcement Teams to build connections and serve our communities.

Patrol officers, detectives, and citywide resources like the Neighborhood Policing Division and Homeless Outreach Teams dedicate significant time and attention to the Gaslamp Quarter.

Central Division’s management team regularly meets with the Downtown San Diego Partnership, the Gaslamp Quarter Association, the San Diego Padres, the San Diego Convention Center and other community groups. Reciprocally, these organizations have standing invitations to the monthly Captain’s Advisory Board meetings at Central Division.

The newly formed Downtown Response Team (DRT) addresses quality-of-life issues in the greater downtown area, which includes the Gaslamp Quarter. This team works to proactively address criminal activity and mitigate threats to large events.

The Gaslamp Walking Team was reinstated in August of 2025. This two-officer, full-time assignment will engage with residents and businesses in the Gaslamp Quarter during daytime hours, identify local problems, and work toward collaborative solutions.

Finding 2: *By adhering to the Neighborhood Policing policy and patrolling on bicycles during daylight hours, the Gaslamp Enforcement Team has the opportunity through community outreach to build the types of relationships with residents, visitors, and businesses that lead to crime reduction and trust in law enforcement.*

Response: The Mayor disagrees in part with the Grand Jury’s finding.

SDPD agrees that adherence to Neighborhood Policing principles increases trust and legitimacy within communities. This is a pillar of SDPD culture. Officers in every

assignment engage in community outreach and work to build relationships with residents, visitors, and businesses.

Bike officers support that mission and SDPD does employ them in the Gaslamp, but they also come with operational limitations this report does not address.

Officers deployed on bicycles are limited in their ability to respond to life-threatening emergencies compared to those in vehicles. Officers on bikes have limited or no access to life-saving equipment like defibrillators and medical kits; active-shooter response gear like patrol rifles and heavy body armor; less-lethal tools like beanbag shotguns; and computers for investigations and report-writing. They also must always account for and secure their police bikes and rely upon officers in vehicles to transport anyone in custody.

SDPD must balance the benefits of bike patrols with the reduced emergency response capacity they bring.

Finding 3: *The rise in crime combined with SDPD staff shortages make it even more critical for SDPD to garner the help of community members in reducing crime in the Gaslamp Quarter.*

Response: The Mayor agrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

SDPD agrees and consistently finds ways to lead through community policing. SDPD members at all levels focus on building partnerships between law enforcement and the communities they serve to proactively address crime and public safety issues. Central Division command staff, Community Resource Officers, and patrol officers consistently attend a wide range of community meetings in addition to meeting with business owners, residents, and other stakeholders on a regular basis.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS 1-4:

Recommendations 1-4 are directed to only the Mayor, and as such, are approved by the Mayor only.

Recommendation 1: *Treat staff shortages as an opportunity to be creative and resourceful, and thereby, more effective with existing staff levels.*

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

SDPD agrees that innovation in the face of staffing shortages is critical, but it's also important to understand the scale of the challenge. Nearly 30 years ago, when San Diego's population was 1.1 million, SDPD had over 2,300 budgeted officers. Today, with 300,000 more residents, SDPD has just 2,031 budgeted officers and an active staff closer to 1,800.

Because of these challenges, SDPD is constantly looking for new ways to balance the need for fast emergency response with the need for proactive, community-focused policing across the City.

As part of this effort, Central Division created the DRT to focus on quality-of-life and crime issues in the greater downtown area. DRT works closely with the Downtown San Diego Partnership, Gaslamp Quarter Association, and other community

stakeholders. The division uses a data-driven model to determine the most effective work schedule for DRT, and the DRT schedule was strategically chosen to make the greatest impact on the downtown area.

Central Division will assign two officers to the Gaslamp Walking Team. Historically, a daytime walking team has seen success in the Gaslamp Quarter. SDPD will continuously evaluate the efficacy of this team against the demands of 911 calls from the community.

On a citywide level, SDPD is always looking to leverage data to maximize staffing at divisions across the City, including Central Division.

Recommendation 2: *Maximize the use of officers patrolling on bicycles in the Gaslamp to include a dayshift, a minimum of five days a week and on weekends and holidays, to provide a highly visible and more effective police presence.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

SDPD agrees the use of full-time bike officers in the Gaslamp District would be a benefit to the community. Unfortunately, this is not realistic given SDPD's current staffing situation. SDPD has made strides to increase foot and bike patrols in the Gaslamp Quarter during daytime hours but cannot commit any more full-time resources considering current response times to 911 calls. Currently, the average response time to a Priority 1 call in Central Division is 34.5 minutes, more than double the target time of 14 minutes. Priority 1 calls include armed robberies, assaults, and other immediate threats to physical safety.

DRT members are trained and can patrol on bicycles in the Gaslamp on occasions when the use of bicycles creates a more effective approach to safety, trust, and efficiency.

The implementation of the Gaslamp Walking Team will provide high visibility and a consistent presence for Gaslamp residents, visitors, and businesses.

Recommendation 3: *Mandate interpersonal skills training for the Gaslamp Enforcement Team with an emphasis on the application of SDPD's existing Neighborhood Policing guidelines.*

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

SDPD has some of the highest training standards in the country. SDPD requires a full week of Advanced Officer Training every two years. This course, which is certified by the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), includes classes on de-escalation, strategic communications, racial profiling, arrest and control, defensive tactics, and more.

Supervisors receive additional training each year during the annual Command Training, which in 2024 included the City of San Diego's Race and Equity Academy, crucial conversations, leadership, legal updates and managing civil disorder. In 2025 it will include field tactics scenarios, which includes de-escalation techniques and mental health updates among other contemporary topics.

Gaslamp Enforcement Team members receive semi-regular team-specific training on de-escalation, arrest and control tactics, interpersonal skills, and wellness.

Recommendation 4: *Direct the Gaslamp Enforcement Team to build trust by being more approachable and available to Gaslamp Quarter residents, visitors, and business owners with the objectives of deterring and preventing crime.*

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

SDPD command staff, supervisors, and the Gaslamp Enforcement Team continue to focus on building trust and approachability with visitors, residents, business owners, and their staff. Command Staff has identified senior officers in the Gaslamp Enforcement Team and have established quarterly internal meetings to discuss current issues, future training, and resources requests.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 5:

Recommendation 5 is directed to both the Mayor and City Council, and as such, is approved by both the Mayor and City Council.

Recommendation 5: *Appropriate additional funding and resources to the SDPD to allow maximization of the number of officers patrolling on bicycles in the Gaslamp to include a dayshift, five days a week and on weekends and holidays.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable.

As discussed in response to Recommendation 2, SDPD cannot increase the number of Officers patrolling in the Gaslamp given current sworn staffing. Moreover, SDPD currently has approximately 200 budgeted sworn positions that are vacant; allocating additional funding for new officers is not reasonable until existing vacancies are filled.

Requests for additional programmatic budget appropriations are proposed by City departments during the annual budget cycle. Requests are reviewed by the Mayor's Office and considered along with all other citywide needs and priorities. The Mayor releases a draft budget in April followed by a May Revision that is then reviewed and adopted by the City Council.

Should SDPD require and request additional funding for the Gaslamp Enforcement Team, this request will be included as part of the City's annual budget process and considered by the Mayor and the City Council.

***THE GASLAMP ENFORCEMENT TEAM
NEEDS THE COMMUNITY'S HELP!***



SUMMARY

The Gaslamp Quarter (Gaslamp) in downtown San Diego is a world-class neighborhood and business district rich in history and cultural vibrancy. Victorian architecture blends seamlessly with modern skyscrapers, and over 100 restaurants—rooftop escapes included—appeal to a wide audience, locally and globally.

Residents and visitors can choose from an array of entertainment options: theaters, museums, live performances, bars, clubs, cigar lounges, and retail shops. With everything within walking distance, the Gaslamp promises to make just about any visit unforgettable. But lately, the Gaslamp has been deemed unforgettable for something other than its entertainment options and festive nightlife. That “something other” is what prompted this investigation.

The 2024/2025 San Diego Grand Jury (Grand Jury) investigation revealed the following:

- Millions of tourists visit the Gaslamp annually.¹
- In the past three years, crimes against persons and society in the Gaslamp have increased.²
- San Diego Police Department (SDPD) created the Gaslamp Enforcement Team, formerly known as Downtown Bike Team, specifically to meet the law enforcement needs of the Gaslamp Quarter.
- The Gaslamp Enforcement Team is deployed from 5 p.m. to 5 a.m., Thursday through Saturday nights.³
- Media reports and interviews note a negative public perception of the Gaslamp Quarter and the Gaslamp Enforcement Team exists.^{4, 5}
- SDPD is short-staffed.⁶

Community safety is a priority for Gaslamp residents, visitors, and businesses, but as with any major destination area, crowds of people bring safety challenges. SDPD addresses safety concerns in part with the Gaslamp Enforcement Team that patrols three nights a week on bicycles, providing crime prevention through accessibility and community engagement as well as rapid emergency response through congested streets. The Gaslamp Enforcement Team is an integral part of nighttime safety in the Gaslamp; however, reports and social media videos of clashes between bicycle patrol officers and citizens have tainted public perceptions of the Gaslamp Enforcement Team's effectiveness.⁷ Interviews during this investigation revealed:

- SDPD strives to help people feel safe downtown.
- Community trust is essential to the police department.
- The Gaslamp Enforcement Team needs the community's help and cooperation.

The Grand Jury recommends the bicycle team be visible and active during the daytime as well. A daytime team will require a more effective use of existing personnel, interpersonal skills training—and perhaps additional resources dedicated to bicycle patrol. Daytime visibility would also give officers greater opportunities to build community trust. Studies have shown a strong correlation between community trust and crime reduction.^{8, 9, 10}

BACKGROUND

Visitors to the Gaslamp have spoken out about their experiences in Opinion articles published in local newspapers. The questionable validity of Opinion articles notwithstanding, the Grand Jury found the following articles to have viable credibility: On April 13, 2022, a *San Diego Union-Tribune* Opinion article warned, “Tourism is at risk if the streets are not policed.”¹¹ In an August 2024 *San Diego Union-Tribune* Opinion article, a Gaslamp visitor issued a vitriolic warning to readers to stay away from the Gaslamp if they want to be safe. The author makes claims of open drug use, public intoxication, and littered streets. He also states the police—whether in patrol cars or on foot—were either unwilling or unable to do anything about the open drug use that “was happening on Fourth Avenue and continuing down E Street.” “This neglect,” the author argues, “erodes the community’s trust in the Police Department’s ability to maintain public safety.”¹²

Residents and businesses are also concerned about the safety and image of the Gaslamp. On September 23, 2024, Downtown San Diego Partnership (DSDP) proposed a five-point plan to a coalition of City, County, and State officials and stakeholders to improve safety and cleanliness in downtown San Diego.¹³ DSDP is a nonprofit organization that serves as the principal voice and driving force behind the economic prosperity and cultural vitality of downtown San Diego through membership, advocacy, public services, and community investment.¹⁴ One of the tenets of the five-point plan focuses on crime reduction and is directed to the Mayor, Council Offices, Police Chief, City Attorney, and San Diego Police Department.^{15, 16} DSDP president and CEO stated, “Immediate action on the plan is absolutely essential to make sure downtown remains the thriving, welcoming community that our city expects and deserves.”¹⁷ Yet, to date, the plan has not been implemented by the coalition.

Noting tourist and community concerns about safety in the Gaslamp, the Grand Jury investigated the Gaslamp Enforcement Team’s role in addressing criminal activity and building community trust.

PROCEDURE

The Grand Jury interviewed staff from the following agencies:

- San Diego Police Department
- Gaslamp Quarter Association
- Downtown San Diego Partnership

The Grand Jury reviewed the following documents:

- *San Diego Police Department Policy Manual*¹⁸
- *San Diego Police Department Central Division Policy Manual*¹⁹
- *Bike Patrol Policy Manual*²⁰
- Downtown San Diego Partnership's Five-Point Safety Plan²¹
- Gaslamp Quarter Year-to-Date Crime Data²²
- Proposition 47²³
- Proposition 36²⁴

The Grand Jury requested to attend Gaslamp Enforcement Team shift briefing and to visit the bicycle storage and pick up location; however, SDPD Central Division failed to respond.

Repeated requests were made to interview key Gaslamp Enforcement Team personnel. The interviews did not take place as there were scheduling conflicts as well as failures to respond.

DISCUSSION

The Gaslamp Quarter is well known as the heart and soul of downtown San Diego due to its rich history, vibrant atmosphere, and status as a cultural and entertainment hub. It is also listed as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places. The rectangle-shaped, 16 ½ square-block area is bounded by Broadway and K streets between Fourth and Sixth avenues. More than 1,000 people reside in the Gaslamp;^{25, 26} and with more than 400 businesses in the area,²⁷ the Gaslamp attracts millions of visitors annually, which translates into significant revenue for the City.²⁸ Its close proximity to Petco Park and the San Diego Convention Center also contribute to Gaslamp's popularity and revenue.²⁹

Crime in the Gaslamp Quarter

Rising crime poses risks for residents and businesses alike.^{30,31,32} While crime has decreased in the City of San Diego at large,³³ interviews indicated "crimes against persons" are increasing in the Gaslamp. Therefore, the Grand Jury focused on crime trends in the Gaslamp over the past

three years. City of San Diego annual crime data for 2022 as reported in the Automated Regional Justice Information System (Uniform Crime Reports by Geographical Area) is as follows for the Gaslamp:³⁴

- Aggravated Assaults: 108
- Violent Crimes: 150
- Armed Robberies: 6
- Strong Armed Robberies: 25
- Rapes: 11

From January to December 2023, there were 369 crimes against persons in the Gaslamp.³⁵ From January to December 2024, there were 385 crimes against persons.³⁶ Crime data can fluctuate daily. During this investigation, Gaslamp crime data showed that while property crimes are down 69%, there is a 17% increase in crimes against persons, such as murder, rape, and assault; and a 6% increase in crimes against society, such as gambling, prostitution, and drug violations.³⁷

As many as 50,000 people visit the Gaslamp on Friday and Saturday nights.^{38, 39} Interviews with SDPD indicated there is “a level of lawlessness” police have not seen in recent years. “The atmosphere in the Gaslamp has changed...there is an emboldened perception by some people that rules do not matter because of Proposition 47.” From responding to people jumping on hoods of parked police cars to instances of open drug use, theft, panhandlers preying upon tourists, and fights ensuing when bars close, police officers in the Gaslamp “are doing the best [they] can from the law enforcement side” to address the community’s safety concerns.

Under Proposition 47, which passed November 4, 2014, certain offenses were reclassified from felonies to misdemeanors. As a result, prison and jail populations plummeted along with charges for drug and property crimes.⁴⁰ Proposition 36, which reclassifies some misdemeanor drug and theft crimes as felonies,⁴¹ became effective December 18, 2024. Proponents of Proposition 36 believe it will help address and alleviate rising crime and drug abuse.⁴²

The Grand Jury investigation and interviews further revealed Gaslamp Enforcement Team officers often encounter intoxicated individuals resisting arrest as well as numerous instances of “friends” attempting to “grab offenders from the arresting officers; and there is also an increased number of homeless and mentally ill individuals on the streets of the Gaslamp. Rapes have occurred; and in the fall of 2024, there was a homicide in front of a Gaslamp club.⁴³

The Gaslamp is vital to the City, and confidence in public safety is essential to it remaining a hub for entertainment and dining. A review of SDPD Policy Manual indicates that by adhering to existing Neighborhood Policing guidelines, SDPD can help increase community trust and reduce crime in the Gaslamp.⁴⁴

SDPD’s Gaslamp Chain of Command and Officer Duties

The Gaslamp is one of the communities (neighborhoods) that falls under Central Division’s jurisdiction. Central Division is one of SDPD’s nine divisions. Each division or Area Command is headed by a police captain. Duties and responsibilities⁴⁵ of the Captain include but are not limited to:

- Ensuring proper response to community needs and crime problems under the Neighborhood Policing philosophy and guidelines.
 - Neighborhood policing (also known as community policing) is a philosophy of full-service policing where officers patrol the same area for an extended time, develop partnerships with citizens and collaboratively identify and solve problems. It encourages interactive partnerships between law enforcement agencies, officers, and the community, aiming to proactively address public safety issues.
- Establishing direct communication with community leaders, including City Council representatives.
- Promoting problem solving at all levels and encouraging community participation to maintain a strong partnership.
- Approving assignment changes and temporary assignments of personnel within the command and temporary assignments of personnel in specialized units.

Next in command is the Service Area Lieutenant whose duties and responsibilities⁴⁶ include but are not limited to:

- Supervising and evaluating assigned Patrol/Specialized Unit Sergeants.
- Monitoring personnel and equipment needs, resource allocation, and providing annual budget documentation.
- Monitoring personnel staffing.
- Establishing interaction with community leaders.
- Promoting a positive environment and reward system for excellent work, community involvement, and Neighborhood Policing efforts.

The Gaslamp Enforcement Team Sergeant (Patrol Sergeant) reports directly to the Service Area Lieutenant. The patrol sergeant's duties and responsibilities⁴⁷ include:

- Ensuring problem-solving is implemented with community input.
- Conducting meetings and briefings to identify crime trends.
- Making recommendations to the Service Area Lieutenant regarding work priorities and training needs.
- Evaluating problem-solving activities initiated by officers.
- Recognizing and commending officers for community involvement and for applying successful neighborhood policing tactics.
- Providing oral and written expectations to squad members.

Created specifically to meet the law enforcement needs of the Gaslamp, the Gaslamp Enforcement Team reports directly to the Patrol Sergeant. Each team is normally composed of one sergeant and seven to eight officers who work a twelve-hour nightshift from 5:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m., Thursday through Saturday.

The Gaslamp Enforcement Team has a comprehensive list of duties and responsibilities:⁴⁸

- Patrol on bicycle with specific emphasis on the Gaslamp Area.
- Develop community partnerships and enlist assistance in problem solving.

- Respond to incidents in the Gaslamp area that involve problems with:
 - a. Traffic
 - b. Pedicabs
 - c. Street entertainers
 - d. Illegal street vendors
 - e. Public intoxication
 - f. Pedestrian traffic
 - g. Disorderly behavior with nightclub patrons
 - h. Transients
 - i. Operation of valet services
 - j. Holiday and special event crowd problems
- Be an ambassador for the City by willingly assisting visitors.
- Attend community meetings/forums in the assigned area.
- Provide reactive and proactive enforcement in known crime areas to deter and prevent criminal activity.

Gaslamp Enforcement Team's Effectiveness

Interviews with Gaslamp Quarter Association staff indicated that due to the number of bars and restaurants in the Gaslamp, public safety would be an even greater concern without the presence of the Gaslamp Enforcement Team. “The bike team is helpful to the Gaslamp...the police department is doing the best job they can.” When asked whether a daytime police bicycle team would be helpful, staff replied: “Oh, absolutely! Their presence would deter potential crime.”

Generally, officers on bicycles are perceived as more approachable and less intimidating compared to officers in patrol cars.⁴⁹ However, there is a perception in the media of the Gaslamp Enforcement Team officers being “overly aggressive toward people leaving clubs and bars, leading to several violent confrontations and multiple arrests.” It is also claimed that even when arrests are warranted, “lately the officers have been coming in overly aggressive from the start, making a bad situation worse.”⁵⁰ Through interviews the Grand Jury learned those public comments are not reflective of the full encounter, and officers are held accountable when they do

wrong. Nevertheless, negative perceptions of police officers can erode public trust, making it more difficult for them to do their jobs.⁵¹

To help combat unfavorable perceptions, SDPD has a policy to foster community trust. According to policy, members of the Department “shall be tactful in the performance of their duties, shall control their tempers, exercise the utmost patience and discretion and shall not engage in argumentative discussion even in the face of extreme provocation.”⁵² Through research, the Grand Jury learned that SDPD chief’s “main priority is improving the trust the community has in the police department. Without that, none of his goals for the department can be achieved.”⁵³ Building trust with the community is essential in crime reduction and/or prevention:

When people feel confident in law enforcement, they are more likely to report crimes, cooperate with investigations, and engage in crime prevention activities. A trusting relationship between the police and the community creates an environment in which citizens are not only willing to report crimes but also actively participate in crime prevention efforts.⁵⁴

Short-staffed

Central Division reported it needs an additional 50 to 100 officers. There are staff shortages within the bicycle unit as well. Research has shown that each sworn officer hired translates into 1.3 fewer violent crimes annually.⁵⁵ Moreover, staff shortages bring additional challenges as they potentially increase risks for citizens. Low staffing levels also leave officers little time for community engagement. During the interviews, the Grand Jury learned that “being consistently proactive along with keeping up with calls and making arrests is difficult for officers patrolling the Gaslamp.” Nationwide, police departments are being creative in response to staff shortages by using deployment strategies that maximize the effectiveness of existing staff.^{56,57, 58}

Whereas six to eight officers make up the nighttime Gaslamp Enforcement Team, three to four officers in the daytime might be sufficient for community engagement and routine criminal response. The Grand Jury finds that by expanding coverage to daylight hours, a few officers can begin to build trust within the Gaslamp community through Neighborhood Policing.

Other Jurisdictions Utilizing Daytime Bicycle Patrols

San Diego Gaslamp Quarter does not currently have a daytime police bicycle patrol, but evidence of the effectiveness of daytime bicycle patrols in other communities suggests a daytime bicycle team in the Gaslamp could be very effective.

Santa Monica, CA

The Santa Monica Police Department’s Downtown Services Unit utilizes bicycles to increase officer visibility to the community and provide a tactical approach to crimes in progress. The Downtown Services Unit patrols on bicycles the 3rd Street Promenade, an area similar to the Gaslamp Quarter. Shifts include daylight hours and weekends.⁵⁹

Bellingham, WA

On January 7, 2025, police officers began patrolling on bicycles and on foot in downtown Bellingham, WA. According to their police department, one sergeant and four officers will patrol downtown Bellingham from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., seven days a week.⁶⁰ Like San Diego, Bellingham neighborhoods contain varying levels of safety, but compared to communities of all sizes—from the smallest towns to the very largest cities—Bellingham has one of the highest crime rates in America.⁶¹ Bellingham is also coping with police staff shortages. However, on their official Facebook page, Bellingham Police Department emphasizes how “officers riding bikes allow them to be so more accessible to members of the community.” They also stress the opportunity bicycle patrol officers have to develop long-lasting relationships with the people who work, live, and frequent Downtown Bellingham.⁶² In support of their police force, more than 1.5K individuals have reacted favorably on Bellingham Police Department’s Facebook page to news of the return of the daytime bike patrol.⁶³ One of the page’s top fans was excited to see “proactive policing back in.” Another exclaimed, “Yes!!! I have missed the bike patrol!! They made downtown so much better.” Notwithstanding the source, these comments have merit. Gaslamp Quarter residents and visitors might have similar reactions to a daytime bicycle patrol team.

City of London, UK

The City of London Police’s Cycle Response Unit was formed in July 2023 to combat drug-related crimes and respond to community concerns about road safety and antisocial behavior. By June 2024, the Response Unit had “made a huge difference.” The City of London Chief

Superintendent said, “Despite being a small team, this dedicated group of officers has made huge strides in education, engagement and enforcement in the Square Mile.”⁶⁴

A Way Forward

Though the public is aware of the need for law enforcement, it is not always cognizant of the role the community can play in keeping our neighborhoods safe. Sir Robert Peel, the father of modern policing and founder of the first police force (1829), established the following principles that still hold true today in law enforcement:

The goal of policing is preventing crime, not catching criminals. If the police stop crime before it happens, we don’t have to punish citizens or suppress their rights. An effective police department doesn’t have high arrest stats; its community has low crime rates. The key to preventing crime is earning public support. Every community member must share the responsibility of preventing crime, as if they were all volunteer members of the force. They will only accept this responsibility if the community supports and trusts the police. The police earn public support by respecting community principles. Winning public approval requires hard work to build reputation: enforcing the laws impartially, hiring officers who represent and understand the community, and using force only as a last resort.⁶⁵

An excerpt of the San Diego Police Departmental Executive Order echoes Peel’s principles of policing:

Policy consists of principles, values and philosophies, which guide the performance of members. It is based on police ethics and experience, the desires of the community and legal mandates. Policy is broad in scope so that it will encompass most situations. It is stated in general terms. Methods of procedures will be disseminated in the form of Department Procedures. The Policy Manual and Department Procedures are available to all members via computer on-line. Policies and Procedures convey the same authority and require compliance by all members. Each member must be familiar with the contents of the Policy Manual and the Department Procedures. Violations of any portion of the Policy and Procedures Manual may result in disciplinary action.⁶⁶

Central Division’s Mission Statement reads: “Our mission is to maintain peace and order by providing a full range of police services crafted to the needs of [each of our jurisdictions]. We will work together to develop partnerships with the communities we serve.”⁶⁷

The Gaslamp Enforcement Team’s mission is to respond to the needs of both the business and residential community, ensure the safety and security of visitors to the area, and provide quality

police services.⁶⁸ To that end, in March 2024, the Gary Sinise Foundation donated 25 brand new Volcanic bicycles to SDPD's Gaslamp Enforcement Team to assist the team in fulfilling its mission.⁶⁹

The Grand Jury finds SDPD's policy supports its police officers in their efforts to reduce crime in the Gaslamp. Therefore, we recommend the Gaslamp Enforcement Team be expanded to include a daytime bicycle team. A daytime bicycle team provides the officers opportunities to make a positive impact by establishing good relations with visitors, residents, and businesses.

Conclusion

The Grand Jury appreciates the vast amount of work that goes into policing and recognizes law enforcement's vast authority and power: Authority not just to stop, detain, question, search and arrest individuals, but also the power to mitigate and resolve conflicts, and prevent crime and disorder. With the community's help and robust in-view bicycle patrolling, the Gaslamp Enforcement Team has the ability and responsibility to help keep the Gaslamp safe and maintain its world-class destination status.

FACT/FINDINGS

Fact: Public safety is a major consideration for residents, businesses as well as tourists seeking entertainment in the Gaslamp.

Finding 01: Building confidence in public safety in the Gaslamp requires a concerted effort by day and nighttime Gaslamp Enforcement Teams.

Fact: According to media reports, some members of the public perceive Gaslamp Enforcement Team officers as overly aggressive when responding to crime in the Gaslamp area.

Fact: Frequently, perception is reality, and consequently, negative publicity coupled with a negative perception can make it more difficult for police officers to do their job.

Finding 02: By adhering to the Neighborhood Policing policy and patrolling on bicycles during daylight hours, the Gaslamp Enforcement Team has the opportunity through community outreach to build the types of relationships with residents, visitors, and businesses that lead to crime reduction and trust in law enforcement.

Fact: Crimes against persons and society have increased in the Gaslamp Quarter in the past three years.

Fact: The San Diego Police Department is experiencing staff shortages.

Finding 03: The rise in crime combined with SDPD staff shortages make it even more critical for SDPD to garner the help of community members in reducing crime in the Gaslamp Quarter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2024/2025 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that City of San Diego Police Department:

R1: Treat staff shortages as an opportunity to be creative and resourceful, and thereby, more effective with existing staff levels.

R2: Maximize the use of officers patrolling on bicycles in the Gaslamp to include a dayshift, a minimum of five days a week and on weekends and holidays, to provide a highly visible and more effective police presence.

R3: Mandate interpersonal skills training for the Gaslamp Enforcement Team with an emphasis on the application of SDPD's existing Neighborhood Policing guidelines.

R4: Direct the Gaslamp Enforcement Team to build trust by being more approachable and available to Gaslamp Quarter residents, visitors, and business owners with the objectives of deterring and preventing crime.

The 2024/2025 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that City Council and Mayor of San Diego:

R5: Appropriate additional funding and resources to the SDPD to allow maximization of the number of officers patrolling on bicycles in the Gaslamp to include a dayshift, five days a week and on weekends and holidays.

REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

The California Penal Code §933(c) requires any public agency which the Grand Jury has reviewed, and about which it has issued a final report, to comment to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of

the agency. Such comment shall be made *no later than 90 days* after the Grand Jury publishes its report (filed with the Clerk of the Court); except that in the case of a report containing findings and recommendations pertaining to a department or agency headed by an elected County official (e.g. District Attorney, Sheriff, etc.), such comment shall be made *within 60 days* to the Presiding Judge with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors. Furthermore, California Penal Code §933.05(a), (b), (c), details, as follows, the manner in which such comment(s) are to be made:

(a) As to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

- (1) The respondent agrees with the finding.
- (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

(b) As to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

- (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
- (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation.
- (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.
- (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor. (c) If a

finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with the Penal Code §933.05 are required from the:

Responding Agency

San Diego Police Department

Recommendations

R1-R5

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