

PUBLIC SAFETY:
Survey sought public perception of crime

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presented the compilation of the results of a public safety survey conducted in August and September 2019.

The intent of the survey was to reach residents and business-owners within the city and gather direct data regarding their feelings on public safety and levels of law enforcement. The City used utility accounts as the survey distribution list, resulting in 1,681 surveys going out. Through September 24, the City received 617 completed surveys, a 36.7 percent response rate.

The City had hoped for a higher rate of return, but acknowledged it was “a robust response rate for a mailed survey.”

The information gleaned from the survey is being used to inform decisions by City staff and the City Council regarding future law enforcement services in the city of Sisters. The current three-year service contract with the Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office will expire at the end of June 2020. Misley is currently negotiating a new contract with the DCSO to include enhanced quality and quantity of services, which will necessarily increase the cost of the contract.

Currently the City pays over \$620,000 a year for those services. Citizens will have an opportunity to hear the details of the new contract and expected costs prior to its adoption.

According to responses on the survey, there is a willingness to pay more for increased and enhanced law enforcement service, with 52.5 percent of respondents Very Willing or Somewhat Willing, while 23.9 percent were Neutral, and 23.5 percent were Somewhat Unwilling or

Very Unwilling. Many of the comments expressed a need to better understand the relationship between increased and enhanced law enforcement services and the increase in amount paid by a resident or business.

Respondents living in Sisters from one to four years accounted for 33.4 percent of the surveys returned, with 66.6 percent indicating a residency of greater than 5 years. Of the 66.6 percent, 43.3 percent indicated greater than 10 years.

When asked to identify the one biggest threat to public safety in Sisters, 50.2 percent chose traffic, followed by property crimes at 22.5 percent and drugs at 12.8 percent. Rankings for each type of crime, as to whether respondents considered it a major, moderate, minor, no problem, or didn’t know, the following figures tell the story:

- Property crimes are considered a Minor Problem or Not a Problem by 63.4 percent.
- 74.1 percent think

violent crimes are Minor or No Problem, with 55 percent Not a Problem.

- Illegal drugs as a problem is seen by 31.2 percent to be Major or Moderate, 41.9 percent Minor or No Problem, and 26.9 percent Don’t Know.

- Alcohol-related offenses were rated Minor or Not a Problem by 50.3 percent, a Major Problem by 25.5 percent, 24.2 percent Didn’t Know.

- A majority of respondents Didn’t Know if domestic violence or child abuse were problems, with only about 6 percent considering them Major or Moderate problems.

- Traffic safety as a Major or Moderate problem garnered 53.7 percent and 43.4 as Minor or Not a Problem.

- 60.7 percent view public disorder offenses as Minor or No Problem.

Based on several of the quantitative questions, people generally feel very safe in Sisters both during the day and at night, and are not worried about being a victim of crime. However, a little under half of respondents (44.5 percent) reported feeling Sisters is Less Safe over the past 12 months, while Stayed the Same (34 percent) and Don’t Know (20.2 percent) were the next largest answers — only 1.3 percent chose Safer.

Scaled questions, with 0 strongly disagree and 10 strongly agree, reflected the following averages:

- Sisters is a good area to raise children 9.01
- I am happy to live/work here 9.20
- People in Sisters

can be trusted 8.47

- I share responsibility for the quality of life and safety in Sisters 9.30 (highest rating)

- I have been active in helping to improve the quality of life and safety in Sisters 7.00

Over 50 percent of respondents rated the current DCSO services as Very Effective or Somewhat Effective, while 22 percent indicated Neutral, 17.6 percent Needs Some Improvement, and 7.1 percent Needs Major Changes.

Throughout the written comments, the themes of wanting more deputies and patrols, and more interaction with and visibility of officers were repeated. The calls for establishing a municipal police department were far fewer.

Two of many comments collected in the open-ended comment section reflect the majority public opinion.

“Sisters is a wonderful, safe community. Safety and low crime rates have as much to do with its citizens being involved as law enforcement. The community must continue coming together and not rely on City structures alone to solve our issues.”

“Growth in Sisters tells me that enhanced law enforcement will be necessary to maintain our very satisfactory quality of life and safety.”

Misley closed out his executive summary: “Overall, the City appreciates those who took the time to fill out the survey to help us better understand public sentiments and law enforcement needs, and ultimately provide tailored services on behalf of the community.”

The City plans to release crime statistics to the public to compare them with perceptions of public safety as reflected in the survey.

For a copy of the raw survey data, contact City Recorder Kerry Prosser at kprosser@ci.sisters.or.us or call City Hall at 541-549-6022.

SURVEY: PERCEIVED THREATS TO PUBLIC SAFETY



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