

Enforce from 1A

The county's most recent numbers available are from 2012, and they show a total of 1,479 total arrests for the year. Four for murder or non-negligent manslaughter, 10 for robbery, 134 for aggravated assault.

"What is not going to be accurate is everything outside the violent crime index," Trapp said. "Property crime, drug crime. When you look at the statistics, Lane County looks like a good place to live. Our property crime rate is statistically low, as is our drug crime rate."

The problem is, many of these other crimes are under reported.

Trapp said the sheriff's office responds to two types of call for service — threats to person safety and threats to property.

A threat to personal safety will garner an immediate response, but if there's someone breaking into a barn, or a person finds their car broken into in the morning, then officers may not come out to the scene at all. Instead, they'll mail out a Citizen Self Report form.

"We mail you a form in the mail and say, 'Write your own police report,'" Trapp said. "The concept for that was that we would use this form for those very minimal crime where the citizen didn't want an investigation, they just wanted a case number to provide to their insurance company."

The sheriffs can only report to the FBI crimes that have a police report to back up the data. However, only 50 percent of the self-report forms are sent back in.

"We also don't have people calling," Trapp said. "Because the last time your house was broken into, or your car, and you called the office and they sent you that form, you don't call in again."

One way to look at possible crime in Dunes City is by researching incoming dispatch calls from the sheriff's office.

For the dates between April 2017 and yesterday, only 21 incidences of prowlers, suspicious activity and trespassing were called into dispatch.

There were 15 calls for burglary, robbery, fraud and theft, five calls for vandalism, five calls for "threat" and three calls for assault. There were zero incidences of rape, homicide or narcotics called in.

It should be noted that these are just initial calls. For example, a suspicious activity call could end up being a tourist walking down the street. A theft could be simply a misunderstanding.

The Dunes City calls are relatively low, particularly when compared to areas just outside city limits. The Glendora area, just north of Dunes City and south of Florence, saw eight burglary, robbery and theft calls. There were 17 calls for prowlers, suspicious activity and trespassing. There were also four calls for narcotics.

"I do know we've come out," Schleicher said about Oregon State Police's responses in Dunes City. "One of them started out with a domestic, which turned into a mail theft, which turned into an identity theft, and they just sentenced that individual to four years. We get calls. But from what I've seen, there's not a high volume for calls for service here."

However, as Trapp pointed out, it could be that people are not calling in to report crimes.

"What it tells me is that, any of you who've had your car broken into and you haven't called the sheriff, we're kind of our own problem," Forsythe said. "We need to make that call, fill the form out, so they have statistics that actually show what's going on. So, if we're

having a lot of that, please do it. It's not a good representation of the crime rate that is here if we're not reporting it."

Trapp understood why people can be frustrated with self-reports and why people don't feel to call in property crimes.

"It's not the best way to police a community, but it's the level of service we have," he said. "So now we're trying to have community dialogue and understand the level of service we have. It's not that the sheriff's office doesn't care, or that we don't want to respond to this community. It's just finding the best way to allocate the very limited resources we have on a daily basis."

Just how limited are the resources of the Lane County Sheriff's Office? Trapp explained the problems, beginning with geography.

"Countywide, [the sheriff's office] goes from the beach, 100 miles east, and then 50 miles north and south. It's 4,600 square miles and 370,000 residents — and 98,000 of them, when they call 911, rely on my office to respond. That's a lot of people."

To cover that distance, the office only has 22 deputies for patrol.

"That provides, on average, three-and-a-half deputies on shift, 24/7," Trapp said. "We've looked across the country, and unless you go to third world countries, you don't find communities less policed than rural Lane County. It's just astounding. The national average is 1.77 officers per 1,000, and that's just not sustainable for us."

The ratio dips to 0.61 for all sheriff offices throughout Oregon. For Lane County?

"Our sheriff's office is 0.16," Trapp said. "We have 65 sworn personnel in the police division. We need 215 to be Oregon sheriff average. I would love to be an average Oregon sheriff. We can't even strive, honestly, to be average. We have to shoot way lower than that bar."

The reason for the low resources can be found in the decline of the timber industry.

"Lane County relied on an agreement with the National Forest," Trapp said. "Harvest receipts from timber harvest will be shared with the counties. Lane County had millions of dollars of annual revenue from timber harvest. We didn't create a large tax base because of that. We're \$1.28. You look at a comparable county like Marion, they're at \$3, but they don't have timber revenue. But we've had about a 93 percent reduction in timber revenue over the past 20 years. And so, we have gone from a very large funded county government with fairly robust services to a very limited level of service provided by our federal funded tax base."

Between 2007 and 2012, the Lane County Sheriff's laid off 95 employees, cutting the office by a third.

"From 2010 to 2015, we didn't have 24 hours on duty," Trapp said. "At one point we were only on duty 16 hours a day. We still responded, but we called our deputies from home and got them out of bed. In 2015, with some road fund use, we were able to get 24-hour duty back online. But it's just a very base level of 24-hour coverage, and it doesn't provide a lot of extra service."

Trapp said there are currently two county deputies assigned to the Siuslaw region, west of Walton and to the Pacific. One is contracted to cover the dunes areas on contract with the state parks department, and the other is assigned to the rest of the region.

"It's a big district. They stay busy," Trapp said. "They're rela-

tively close geographically during their work day and work week, but they work 40 hours a week."

There are a number of ways to get more patrols in the region, but all of them come down to raising taxes.

"How do you structure a tax that the public is willing to accept?" Trapp asked. "It hasn't occurred yet."

One of the first ways to create more revenue in Lane County is through levies, voted on by the tax district to fund specific programs. The levies go up for renewal every five years. One levy has already been put in place to enhance the jail systems, and Bozievich, commissioner for western Lane County, has been looking at another to bolster the budget for patrols.

But relying solely on levies can be a difficult in the long run.

"If you start having so many rotating levies for various services, people stop trying to connect the dots between votes," Bozievich said. "If we have a jail levy come up this year, and then a year and a half later there's something for patrol, and if there's then something for the D.A.'s office, it all gets lost."

Another problem is finding balance. If a levy is passed to increase patrols on the street, then it's possible that more people may be arrested. If that happens, another funding mechanism must be found to fund the understaffed courts to processes criminals. And after they're processed, the current jail levy would have to be bolstered to account for more people ending up in jail.

"But the problem is, if we passed a patrol levy today, you're not going to see those deputies for five years," Trapp pointed out. "We passed a five-year levy to enhance services at the jail five years ago. This year, we just finished filling deputy sheriff positions. Today, 29 percent of our jail deputies are still actively in training. Seventy percent of our work-force has under four years of seniority. We have hired 130 deputies in four years for 50 positions. That's because of attrition, new hires not making probation, people leaving for various reasons — people pay better than we do."

"So, the challenge is, when we do get support for funding for enhancing services? Sometimes the community starts to question whether or not we're following through. So, if it's not sustainable long-term funding, we're spinning our wheels. I'm hesitant about looking at short term levies to get us to a base level of what would be functional."

Another solution would be to have a special police district, akin to Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue and Western Lane Ambulance.

"If you set that up, it would get its own permanent tax rate for that district," Bozievich said. "That's one of the ways of permanently solving our public safety issue. We've been trying to set up an enhanced law enforcement district in Veneta, and we had a town hall meeting trying to put it on the ballot. I was worried about getting out of that meeting safely. We were talking about raising people's taxes. You can't believe the number of rural residents who came out and said, 'I've got a big dog, my own gun, and I've never been robbed. I'm not paying more taxes for patrol.' Once you talk about raising taxes, people on a fix income don't want to see their property taxes raised."

The City of Veneta is currently utilizing a third possible solution to getting patrols, and that's through contracting with the Lane County Sheriff's Office for its own deputies.

"They get law enforcement

without all the overhead," Trapp said.

But the program does come with costs.

"A single deputy contract will come in around \$180,000 a year," Trapp explained. "That's the deputy, the vehicles, radios and all the equipment. When we contract with a deputy for a patrol service, we have to add in the support services and the record management. There's a lot of back office work that supports what you see in the field from police officers. We generate a lot of paperwork and we have dispatchers who tell us where to go. Portions of that gets built into the rate. As you buy more deputies by contract, that will drop. Each extra deputy will be more like \$150,000."

But having one deputy may not get the coverage that a city like Dunes may want.

"The sheriff's office has a 70 percent show up rate for our deputies," Trapp said. "Thirty percent of the time they're off doing other things — court, training, vacation, sick leave, you name it. And then, while he's on duty, he isn't in the community all the time because he has to spend a day in court in Eugene. Every time you have to arrest someone in this community, you have to drive them to Eugene. There's a lot of things that take deputies away from the field. So ultimately, you'll end up with a full deputy covering not a lot of hours visibly in your community, and they're not going to be necessarily mitigating those 3 a.m. calls because they probably work between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m."

Ultimately, Veneta pays \$866,000 for four deputies and a sergeant to keep full coverage in the city.

The Town Hall also considered looking into an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with the City of Florence. Would Dunes City be able to contract with the larger to save money?

Turner stated that creating additional jurisdictions would be difficult for the city, even if Dunes City was floating the bill.

"Our services are very commensurate with our tax base," he said. "To interrupt that with contracting with other cities, it becomes very burdensome for a jurisdiction. The thing I would encourage you to

look at is the sheriff's office. That program is already there, it's just a matter of making use of it. Our prices would not be different from the sheriff's office, and this is only for the duration of the contract. And if contract falls, what's going to happen? Are you going to fire these people?"

Trapp said, "If we were to sign a contract today, I could give you a deputy tomorrow and it won't cripple our operation. It would impact some of our service level to a degree, and we would have to backfill that, but we could do that with overtime without taking service away from the rest of the county. We're going to have an easier time than Chief Turner with a very small department. If he was going to fill your contract tomorrow, he would lose a police officer off the shift serving Florence for a full year to train a replacement. Then, if you decide in a year you don't want to do this, I don't have to lay that deputy off because I have sufficient attrition that I can absorb that deputy back into my ranks. The chief might have to lay that position off."

Turner also stated that creating

an IGA was a temporary fix to the problem with law enforcement in Lane County, a bandage that would not address the issue as a whole.

"You need to fix the base services, the county, to be able to provide more law enforcement," he said. "That would be the permanent fix."

And to do that, it would mean finding a greater tax base for the Lane County Sheriff's Office.

"From a personal perspective, I am not an advocate of abdicating my jurisdiction," Trapp said. "I don't want to be misinterpreted as trying to maintain a kingdom, but I don't want to lose what we have so we're less functional as a broader community. I think that a healthy sheriff's office is one that supervises and polices its full jurisdiction. The more marginalized the office becomes in parts of our community, the less likely a comprehensive approach to public safety will be available. I think it's critical that we as a full community discuss restoring county public safety services. Let's fix the whole system collectively, where we all benefit."



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Jim Hoberg is a Florence native, and has been working in Real Estate since 1989. He has served as a Principal Broker for 28 years, and is the "founding father" of West Coast Real Estate Services, Inc. He has obtained several designations that require continuing education, which keeps him on the cutting edge of the industry and he is constantly looking for ways to expand his areas of expertise. Jim enjoys helping people find solutions to their real estate needs and discovering why Florence is such a great place to live.

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