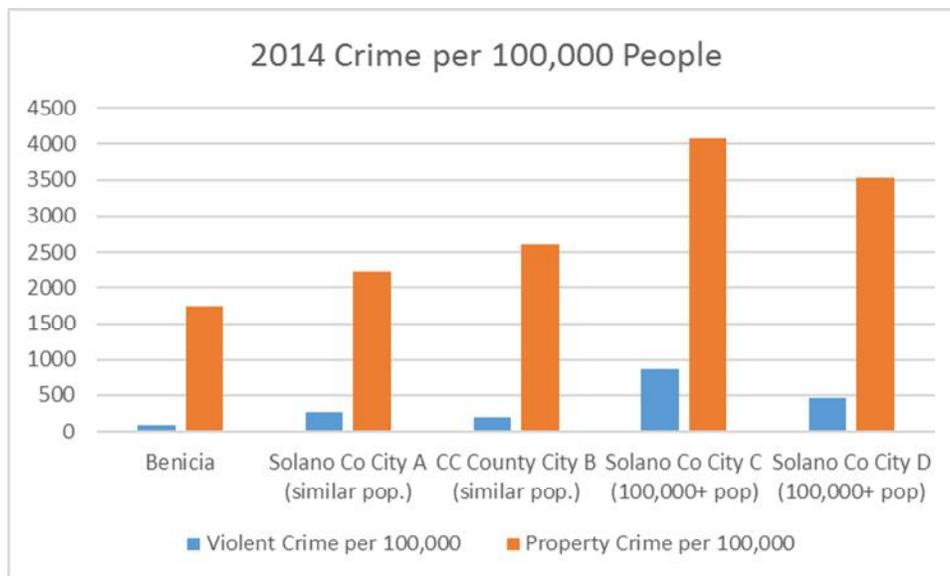




Police Department
MEMORANDUM

Date: February 19, 2016
To: City Manager Brad Kilger
From: Chief of Police Erik Upson
Subject: Crime Update

Benicia has been a safe community for many years. Current trends show that this continues today. Benicia was recently ranked the 40th safest city in California. More recently another study, using data from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, found Benicia to be the 17th best place in Northern California to raise a family. One of the key benchmarks used in this study was the community’s “crime risk score”. Additionally a third study listed Benicia as the 16th safest suburb in the Bay Area. These studies confirmed what most Benicia residents know full well; this is a very safe community. The most recent statistics back this up. Data from 2014 (we do not yet have regional data from 2015) shows that even when we take into account population variance from different cities by examining per capita crime rates Benicia does better than neighboring cities and neighboring cities with a similar population:



The data we use tracks Part 1 crimes from the Uniform Crime Report (UCR). Part 1 crimes make up the most serious crime categories and are collected by the FBI from over 17,000 law enforcement agencies representing over 90% of the U. S. population.

The FBI's primary objective in the UCR data is to generate a reliable set of crime statistics for use in law enforcement administration, operation, and management in the United States. In short they are the primary benchmark used to track crime trends in the United States. The UCR tracks the following crimes:

Violent Crimes

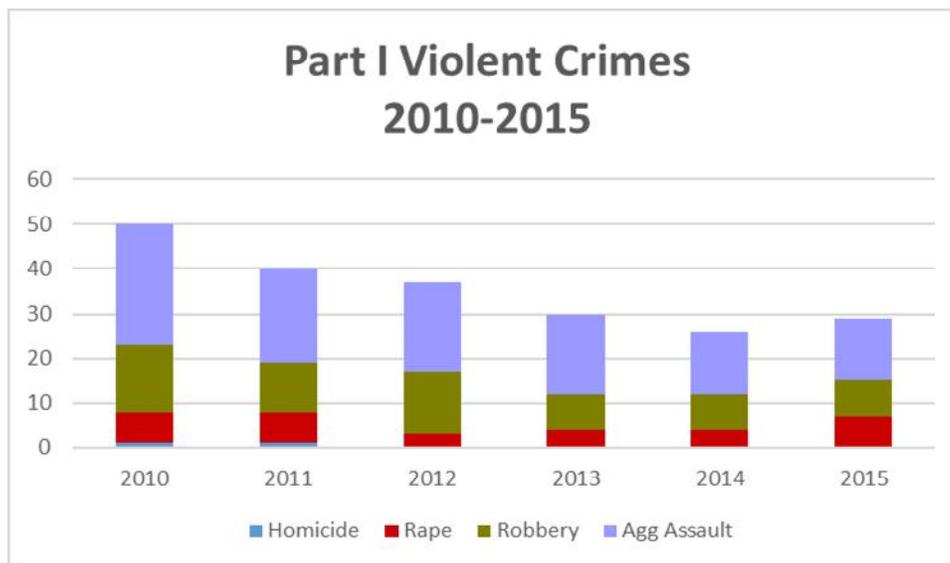
Murder
Rape
Robbery
Aggravated Assault

Property Crimes

Burglary
Larceny (petty and grand theft, auto burglary)
Auto Theft
Arson*

**Arson is a UCR crime tracked separately from violent and property crime. It is included in the accompanying graphs.*

Moving to 2015 data, our violent crime rates remain near historic lows at 29 for the year.

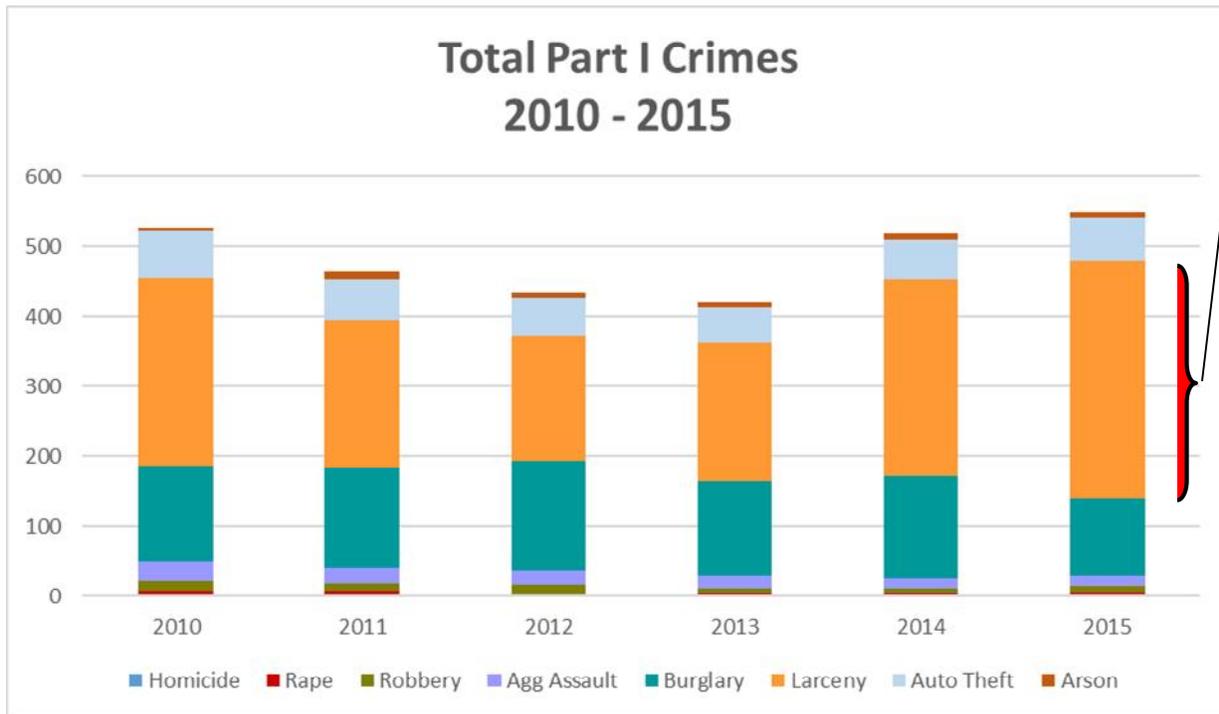


Despite these low numbers for 2015 there has been a 5.8% increase in Part 1 Crimes. This was almost entirely due to a significant increase in the 'Larceny' category, which trended up 19% over last year. All other categories, with the exception of Rape (which only accounts for 1% of our Part 1 crimes) remained relatively unchanged or decreased. The category of 'Burglary' actually decreased by almost 25%.

One argument being made about the reasons we and other regions are seeing an increase in larceny is the effects of Proposition 47. No conclusive studies have been completed, however the Los Angeles Times has written a number of stories on Proposition 47. In their November 6th, 2015 piece the LA Times provides several anecdotal stories about criminals who are fully aware of Proposition 47 and use it to continue to commit crimes while skirting any significant consequences.

We have seen very similar anecdotal stories here in Benicia. For instance, we recently arrested a suspect for theft and possession of stolen property. A search of his shed found numerous stolen and suspected stolen items. The suspect freely admitted that

he only steals from unlocked cars in order avoid any significant consequences. An unlocked car versus a locked car is the difference between a misdemeanor and a felony, as long as the amount of stolen property has a value of less than \$950...an amount that more than doubled due to Proposition 47. Additionally, Proposition 47 significantly reduced our ability to charge petty theft with prior convictions of petty thefts as a felony. The suspect in this case was out within days and was subsequently re-arrested approximately one week later committing the same violations.



We are working on several approaches to help reverse this trend in 2016. We will be increasing and improving our crime analysis to respond faster and more efficiently to trends and series. As we identify and arrest our top offenders, we will track them and work with the Courts and the Probation Department to prevent recidivism. Additionally we will be engaging the community by leveraging our new social media resources to quickly communicate information related to crime trends and wanted suspects as well as to obtain tips and leads from the community.

One category we saw a significant decrease in was burglaries. This is a significant crime that leaves victims feeling violated and vulnerable and as such it is one of our top priorities as a police department. We had several great success stories in regards to burglaries in 2015. In one case we were having a series of burglaries in West Benicia. One night alert neighbors and victims spotted the suspects in that burglary series. A neighbor used his truck to block the suspect's vehicle from escaping. The suspects were ultimately identified and brought to justice. In another case no less than seven neighborhood residents called in and/or followed several attempted burglary suspects, allowing us to capture and arrest them. These cases, and the willingness of our residents to get involved, quickly put a stop to burglary series that would have continued and significantly increased our numbers for the year. We hope to continue

that trend in 2016 by increasing community awareness and involvement in crime fighting and the number of organized neighborhood watch groups in Benicia.

While the numbers of rapes increased from four to seven from 2014 to 2015, the five-year average is just over five per year. In all of these cases the suspect knew the victim and all were closed via arrest or with a warrant sought. We will continue to promote awareness about this issue and, perhaps as critically, alcohol and drug awareness (85% percent of these cases involved alcohol or drugs) with our youth through the Benicia Youth Action Coalition (BYAC) and our Alcohol Tobacco and other Drugs (ATOD) grant.

Our goals as a department for 2016 are to keep our violent crime rate at historic lows and to reverse the trend of increasing property crime through greater outreach and partnership with the community, faster and more effective response to crimes in progress, and comprehensive follow-up of all available investigative leads.

We will continue to focus on and develop our community partnerships by proactively working with our residents. They can assist us with this by maintaining vigilance in their neighborhoods, getting to know their neighbors and looking out for each other every day. It is critical that suspicious behavior is reported immediately to the Benicia Police Department. While direct confrontation is not generally recommended, information obtained by the community relating to suspect descriptions, license plates, direction of travel, etc. is critical to our success. We will also promote other steps such as neighborhood watch groups which connect neighbors and encourage networking, use of alarm systems, and new technology such as doorbell cameras which give residents the ability to see who is at their door and interact with them from anywhere in the world. Finally we will be conducting an outreach campaign to ask residents to lock their cars and not leave valuable items in plain view.

We would also ask the community to join us on social media by liking us on Facebook (up and running as of this January 2016) and following us on Twitter as we roll that out this March.

For any questions, please contact Kelly Botello in the Office of the Chief of Police at 707-746-4265.