



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT
MEETING DATE: 5/20/2025
DEPARTMENT: Management Services

SUBJECT:

LAW ENFORCEMENT CONTRACT WITH THE COUNTY OF ORANGE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025-26

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Approve and authorize the Mayor to sign the Agreement with the County of Orange for Law Enforcement Services for Fiscal Year 2025-26.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City of Lake Forest contracts with the Orange County Sheriff's Department ("OCSD") for law enforcement services. The proposed cost for the attached Fiscal Year 2025-26 Law Enforcement Agreement ("OCSD Agreement") is \$22,738,891, which is \$1,378,418 or 6.45% more than the current fiscal year (Attachment 1). This year-over-year increase is primarily due to increased labor costs and the addition of one new patrol deputy. The proposed OCSD Agreement includes a staffing plan that describes personnel and other resource allocations (Attachment 2).

Through proactive policing and partnership with the community, Lake Forest consistently has one of the lowest crime rates within Orange County. A historical record of "Part 1" crimes is described later in this report and in Attachment 3, which documents significant local crime trends across the region (Attachment 3).

Staff recommend the City Council approve the new one-year OCSD Agreement. Sufficient funding has been proposed as part of the draft 2025-2027 Operating Budget to cover the costs of the recommended action.

BACKGROUND:

When the City incorporated in 1991, the "contract city" service model was implemented for a variety of public services, including law enforcement. Consequently, the City has a long-standing contractual relationship with OCSD, which also provides law enforcement services to many other Orange County cities. The contract service model has been an effective and efficient model for service delivery and crime mitigation.

The City's annual contract with OCSD includes salaries, benefits, and other associated overhead costs for the number of direct and shared positions required to support public safety and police operations within the City's boundaries. Cities that contract with OCSD capitalize on the economies of scale associated with the sharing of certain facilities, vehicles, training, personnel, specialized policing units (i.e., Directed Enforcement Team, Behavioral Health Bureau, Special Weapons and Tactics, Major Accident Reconstruction Team, Mounted Unit, Air Support, K-9 Unit, Bomb Squad, and the Gang Enforcement Team) and other costs. Each year, as part of the City's budget compilation process, staff review the proposed costs associated with these services and present an annual contract with OCSD to the City Council for consideration.

In 2025, the City published the results of the biannual Community Satisfaction Survey ("Survey"). According to the survey, more than 90% of residents noted that maintaining a low crime rate was of key importance for Lake Forest Police Services, and 82% of those residents were satisfied with the results. Since 2021, the Survey has consistently identified public safety as a primary concern for the community.

DISCUSSION:

Year in Review

The OCSD continues its partnership with the community to reduce and prevent crime in Lake Forest through various initiatives. Highlights from 2024 include:

- Over 5,000 service hours donated by the Sheriff's Team of Active Retired Seniors ("STARS") and an increase in the number of STARS recruited to serve the City
- Increased parking citation issuance by over 50% to help effectuate street sweeping and respond to resident-submitted complaints about parking violations.
- Deputies Daniel Serrano and Mathew Harm were honored at the 36th annual Medal of Valor ceremony for their extraordinary bravery during the mass shooting at Cook's Corner in Trabuco Canyon on August 23, 2023.
- Deputy Mathew Harm was recognized by the Orange County Auto Theft Advisory Commission ("ATAC") as one of the top officers and deputies in vehicle theft recoveries for 2024. His efforts not only led to the recovery of stolen vehicles but also to the apprehension of the suspects involved.

- Deputy Mathew Harm has been named this year’s Deputy of the Year in recognition of his outstanding work ethic, diligence, and proactive approach to law enforcement. As a valued member of the Special Enforcement Team, Deputy Harm has demonstrated exceptional skill in identifying stolen vehicles and addressing criminal activity.
- Implemented Precision Policing practices in coordination with the Real Time Crime Center.
- Maintained an average call for service response time of 5:11 minutes.

Traffic & Parking Enforcement Statistics

The recommended California State Office of Traffic Safety (“OTS”) Traffic Enforcement Index is between 25%-35%. This index is determined by dividing the number of hazardous violations by the number of fatal and injury collisions. In 2023, the City’s Traffic Enforcement Index was below that range at 11.2%. There was a decrease in the number of fatal traffic accidents from four to two from the prior year and the number of injury traffic accidents decreased by 12.87%. A three-year comparison of traffic enforcement statistics is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: OTS Statistics

Incident Type	2022	2023	2024
Hazardous Moving Citation	2,591	2,144	1,691
Non-Hazardous Citations	453	1,584	1,342
Fatal Traffic Accidents	6	4	2
Injury Traffic Accidents	138	171	149

In 2024, 10,932 parking citations were issued. Of these citations, 6,762 were issued by OCSD and 4,170 were issued by the City’s in-house Parking Control Officers. This correlates to an over 50% increase in parking citation-related activity by OCSD. Relative to 2023, the City doubled parking enforcement activity overall in 2024.

Calls for Service

Calls for service include calls that were generated from dispatch and by the patrol deputies’ self-initiated observations. In 2024, there was a 3.7% increase in the volume of calls for service and an increase in the average response time of 8.4%. Of these calls for services, those that are potential life-threatening incidents are identified as “Priority 1” calls. Table 2 below provides a three-year comparison of response times for all calls for service. More specific data on service calls and other demands is available in Attachment 3.

Table 2: Calls for Service and Response Times

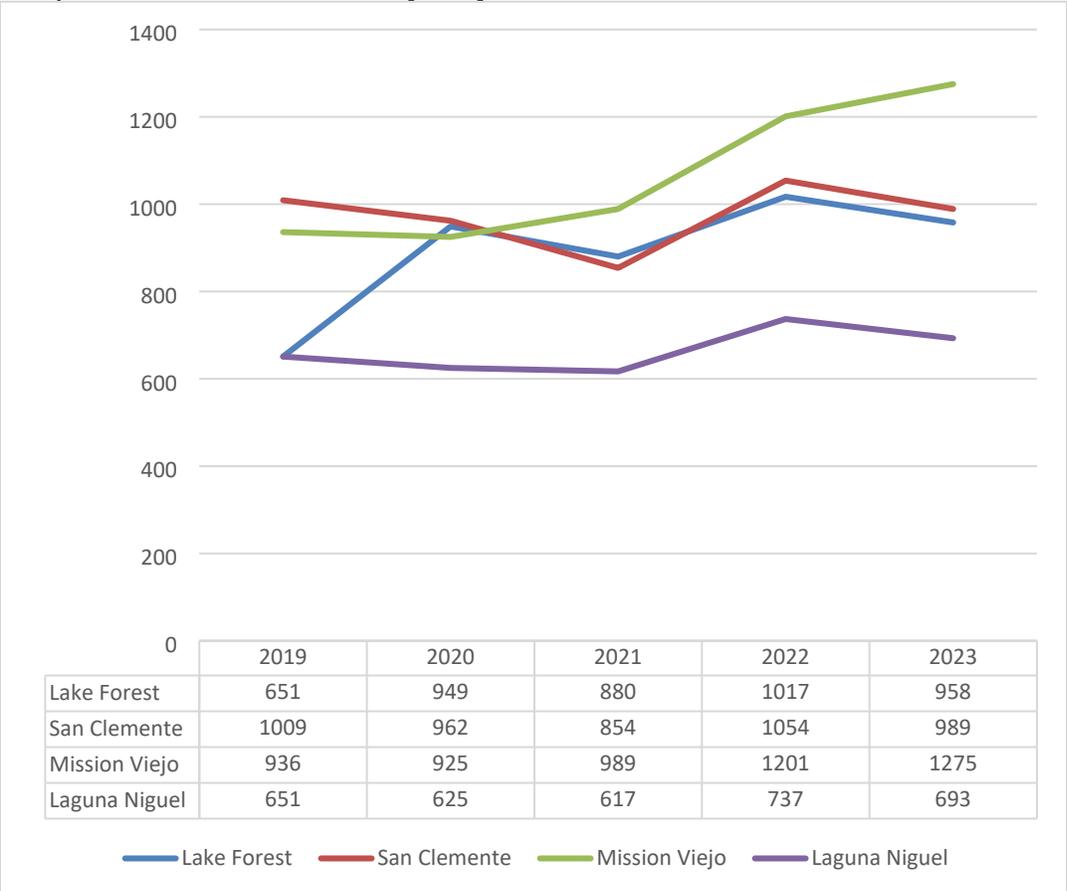
Metric	2022	2023	2024
Total Calls for Service	27,329	28,211	29,255
Priority One Calls	423	451	371
Response Times for Priority One Calls	4:28 min	4:47 min	5:11 min

Reports of Crime and Crime Rates

The Uniform Crime Reporting (“UCR”) database, which includes the official record of Part 1 Crimes, is reported on a calendar year basis by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”). Effective June 1, 2021, the OCSO began to report crime statistics via the National-Incident Based Reporting System (“NIBERS”). Often in the commission of criminal acts, suspects commit multiple crimes. Unlike UCR, NIBERS quantifies all crimes committed during a criminal incident, not just the most severe of the crimes committed. As a result, the new crime data published via the public portal of crime statistics is both more accurate and quantifies a greater volume of crimes.

Despite this technical change, Lake Forest remains one of the safest cities in all of Orange County in terms of Part 1 crime incidence. Part 1 crimes are considered the most serious offenses, and include homicide, rape, burglary, and auto theft. Graphic 1 below includes a table that describes the total volume of Part 1 crimes committed in Lake Forest since 2018. Graphic 1 also provides comparative trend lines that include the cities of San Clemente, Mission Viejo, and Laguna Niguel.

Graphic 1: Part 1 Crimes by City 2019-2023



On a per-capita basis (total volume of Part 1 crimes divided by 2020 Census population record), Lake Forest remains one of the safest cities in Orange County. Graphic 2 below illustrates Lake Forest’s per-capita Part 1 crimes compared to Orange County overall. Table 3 below provides a five-year trend of Part 1 crimes across many cities in Orange County that contract with OCSD for law enforcement services. Both Graphic 2 and Table 3 below demonstrate that Lake Forest remains a safe community relative to other cities in the region. In most of the cities used for comparison with Lake Forest Part 1 crime statistics, cities showed an increase in Part 1 crime incidence beginning in 2021. Staff believe this increase can, at least in part, be attributed to the OCSD’s switch from the UCR to the NIBERS crime reporting system effective June 1, 2021, which accounts for all Part 1 crimes committed during a single crime incident.

Graphic 2: Per Capita Part 1 Crime

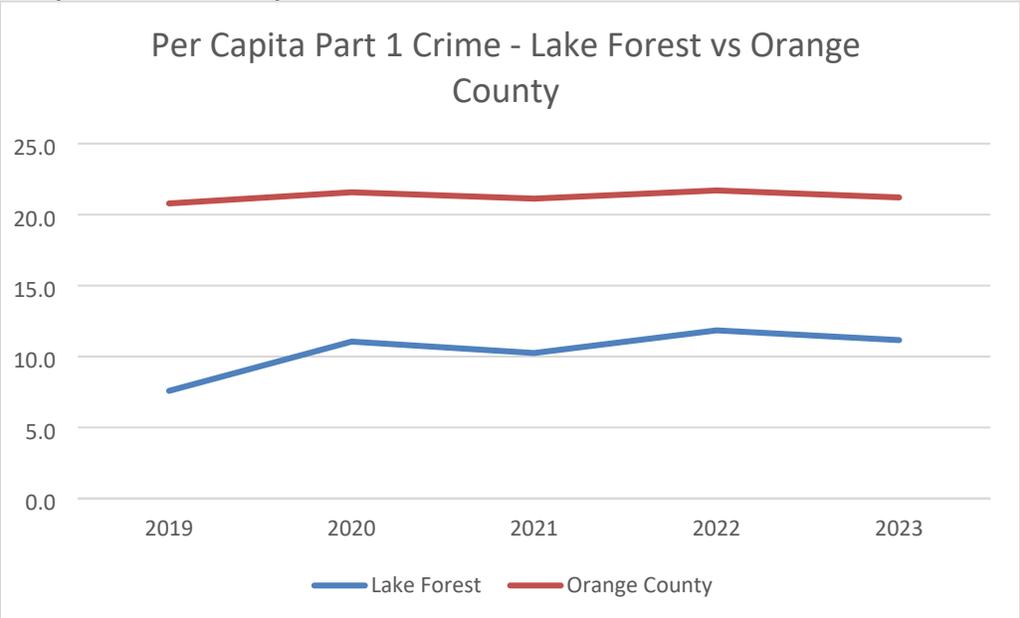


Table 3: Part 1 Crimes by City (Per Capita)

City	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	5 Yr Avg
Orange County	20.8	21.6	21.1	21.7	21.2	21.3
San Clemente	15.7	15	13.3	16.4	15.4	15.1
Laguna Hills	14	15.3	16.2	15.3	15.1	15.2
San Juan Cap	10.3	10.4	11.9	16	13.6	12.4
Mission Viejo	10	9.9	10.6	12.8	13.6	11.4
Laguna Niguel	10.1	9.7	9.6	11.5	10.8	10.3
Lake Forest	7.6	11.1	10.2	11.8	11.2	10.4
Laguna Woods	7.6	9.6	6.2	5.5	6.0	7.0
Rancho SM	6.8	6.3	5.6	5	4.6	5.7

Public Safety Ad-Hoc Committee Review of Staffing

In 2023, the City Council approved the 2023-2025 Strategic Business Plan (“Strategic Plan”). Project SP#80 Law Enforcement Staffing Needs Evaluation directs staff to develop a standard for assessing the staffing needs of the City’s contract police service with OCSD. Throughout 2024 and 2025, the Public Safety Ad-Hoc Committee (“Committee”), which includes Mayor Pro Tem Pequeño and Councilmember Cirbo, met to discuss the potential need to increase the number of patrol deputies in the OCSD contract.

The Committee received presentations from OCSD leadership that summarized various police staffing models, including algorithmic staffing models promoted by

the International City/County Management Association (“ICMA”) and various law enforcement associations. Virtually all formal staffing models rely on a combination of metrics like population size, lane miles, crime statistics, calls for service, and response times. However, there is no single staffing model that has been standardized and adopted broadly by municipalities across the United States.

In reviewing the potential need to adjust patrol staffing, the Committee focused on five key metrics: (1) population growth, (2) calls for service, (3) average response time, (4) crime statistics, and (5) budgetary resources. The Committee reviewed how this data changed as far back as 2015. Through this time horizon, the City has always staffed 37 sworn OCSD Patrol Deputies.

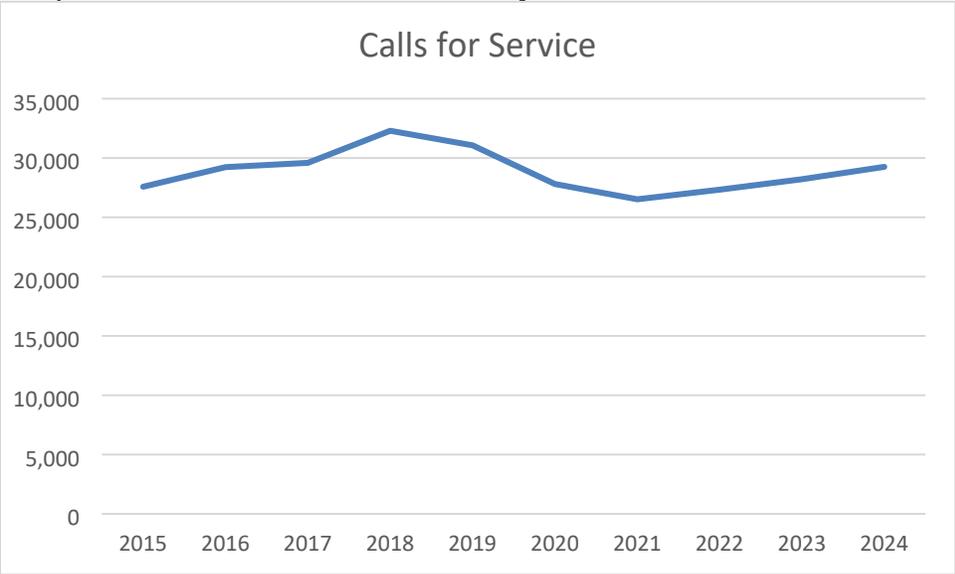
Population Growth:

The City’s official U.S. Census-provided population record grew from 77,264 in 2010 to 85,858 in 2020. The current estimate for the Lake Forest population is 87,159. This presents an estimated 12.8% growth in population since 2010. Also, in 2015, the City had 10 hotels. The City now has 14 hotels. While the increase in hotel properties does not significantly impact the City’s population, hotels generally require more public safety services than permanent residences.

Calls for Service:

Since 2015, Lake Forest originates about 28,887 calls for service each year. The City experienced a modest drop in calls for service volume during the COVID-19 pandemic, which helped alleviate public safety resources, but calls for service have started to increase and normalize back to pre-COVID-19 years. Graphic 3 below illustrates this trend. Calls for service are stable, but increasing.

Graphic 3: Calls for Service History



Average Response Time:

The Committee reviewed average response times to Part 1 crimes. Since 2015, response times have gradually increased from 4:13 minutes to 5:11 minutes. Many factors can contribute to growth of average Part 1 response time, so the Committee further investigated the time allocations of the deputies. Since 2022, the OCSD has provided Lake Forest with their consumed time:preventative patrol time ratio. Consumed time represents the amount of time deputies spend responding to calls, initiating arrests, and moving through the administrative burden of those activities. Consumed time also includes a deputy’s time taking mandatory breaks, attending briefings, and training. Preventative patrol time represents the time deputies spend actively patrolling the community, enforcing traffic laws, communicating with residents, and searching for potential criminal activity. Agencies typically seek to maximize preventative patrol time, as this type of activity can suppress crime and provide a more visible public safety element to the community.

Since 2023, the amount of time deputies spend on preventative patrol has dropped from 40.3% to 29% of their time, while consumed time has increased from 57.7% to 71%. Coupled with an analysis of historical response times, the Committee identified the consumed time:preventative patrol time ratio as a key factor in assessing the need to adjust staffing.

Crime Statistics:

Fortunately, the City has maintained a relative low crime rate since as far back as 2015 as described earlier in this report. On average, Lake Forest originates

about 900-950 Part 1 crimes per year. There has been no significant change in Part 1 crime incidence per the Committee's review.

Budgetary Resources:

The City has benefited greatly from conservative and proactive financial management. The City does not carry debt and has routinely aligned service provision expenses with realistic revenue expectations. Typically, the addition of new patrol deputy has a first year cost of approximately \$400,000-\$450,000. The ongoing cost is less in subsequent years at around \$350,000 because all necessary equipment to deploy the deputy (vehicle, body camera equipment, technology, etc.) was purchased the first year. Pursuant to the draft 2025-2027 Operating Budget presented to the City Council on April 29, 2025, the City is in positive financial condition and can absorb the cost to add a new patrol deputy.

Considering these aforementioned analysis points, the Committee determined that adding one patrol deputy per year for two consecutive fiscal years (2025-26 and 2026-27) would enhance or preserve the City's public safety while maintaining the City's positive financial condition.

Proposed Fiscal Year 2025-26 Agreement

On an annual basis, OCSD prepares an estimate of potential costs that initiates the development of annual contracts with various cities. This process is purposefully iterative. OCSD works closely with contract cities and presents subsequent estimates of potential costs based on its operations, desired service levels, and other general feedback from the community. As part of the process, contract city representatives and OCSD discuss ongoing needs relative to public safety and cost-sharing/saving measures that provide sufficient funding for the desired level of services.

This year, the estimate provided by OCSD is \$22,738,891, which is 6.45% or \$1,378,418 more than current fiscal year costs. This year-over-year increase is primarily due to increased labor costs and the addition of one new patrol deputy. Relative to the previous fiscal year, the 2025-26 direct and indirect labor-related costs for OCSD will increase by \$1,143,908, with the direct personnel costs of adding a new deputy accounting for \$341,519 of those costs.

The 2025-26 OCSD Agreement includes changes relative to the contracts the City has entered into in previous year. These changes are:

- The addition of one new patrol deputy, bringing the total sworn officer count from 46 to 47.

- The specific staffing function of “Commercial Enforcement Vehicle” is removed. However, two patrol deputies will remain trained and have access to all the resources needed to provide commercial vehicle enforcement.

Staff recommend the City Council approve the attached OCSD Agreement and authorize the Mayor to sign the document (Attachment 1). The draft 2025-2027 Operating Budget will include sufficient funding to cover the costs of the recommended action.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The cost for the proposed Fiscal Year 2025-26 Law Enforcement Agreement is \$22,738,891. Sufficient funding has been proposed as part of the draft 2025-2027 Operating Budget to cover the costs of the recommended action.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Proposed FY 2025-26 OCSD Agreement
2. Proposed FY 2025-26 OCSD Staffing Plan
3. Lake Forest Police Services 2024 Annual Report

Initiated By: Sean McGovern, Deputy City Manager

Submitted By: Sean McGovern, Deputy City Manager

Approved By: Debra Rose, City Manager