

## [NEWS](#)

### Fort Pierce police to increase recruitment, expand community policing after survey results

[Olivia McKelvey](#) Treasure Coast Newspapers

Published 6:02 a.m. ET Dec. 29, 2021

FORT PIERCE — Hire more and pay more.

[Those were two themes from a recent online survey, created by the Police Community](#)

[Advisory Committee, aimed at gauging resident satisfaction with the Police Department.](#) The results prompt the question: What changes will be made?

For Police Chief Diane Hopley-Burney the answer is two-pronged: improving recruitment efforts to address officer retention and expanding community policing efforts, a strategy that focuses on developing relationships with residents beyond officers' traditional crime- prevention duties.

[Survey: Satisfied with Fort Pierce police? Citizens committee launching online survey to find out](#)

[One year after BLM: Small changes but no significant reform leave some hopeful, others unheard](#)

[Committee: Fort Pierce Police Community Advisory Committee gets little public input](#)

### Feedback

The city received 143 responses, compared to 749 responses to a parking survey that was online [four fewer days](#) earlier this year.

The police-satisfaction survey was comprised of 19 free-response, multiple-choice and yes- or-no questions. It took more than a year to roll out because of delays related to COVID- 19, according to committee Chairman Charles Hayek, and yielded the following feedback:

32%, or 45 respondents, are very satisfied with the visibility of the Police Department [Correct Page 1](#)

51%, or 73 respondents, said police presence was not adequate in their neighborhood [Correct Page 8](#)

55%, or 78 respondents, said traffic enforcement (speeding, running stop signs) was not adequate [Correct Page 9](#)

24%, or 34 respondents, said they felt safe when walking alone at night in their neighborhood

[Misrepresented, Page 6. The correct numbers are:](#)

|           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| Neutral   | 21.12% |
| Safe      | 23.94% |
| Very Safe | 19.72% |

96%, or 135 respondents, said citizens reporting suspicious activity and crimes is vital to keeping the community safe [Correct Page 11](#)

83%, or 110 respondents, said they would call 911 to report suspicious activity, even if they were unsure there was a problem  
[Correct Page 12](#)

92%, or 129 respondents, said they would call 911 to report suspicious activity even if it involved someone they know [Correct Page 13](#)

29%, or 41 respondents, said the Police Department has improved within the past four years

Misrepresented, Page 16. The correct numbers are:

|                |        |
|----------------|--------|
| About the same | 25.53% |
| Better         | 29.08% |
| Much Better    | 9.93%  |

"Be out more. Be visible in cars, parking (lots), cruising, on foot, everywhere. Don't hide behind the desks," said one resident in response to the question 'how would you improve the Fort Pierce Police Department?' [The respondent does not live in Fort Pierce their comment on where do they live is: Olive in PSL , but are often in Ft P Driving home Sat evening at speed limit on US I ...tailgated and then passed by three large Ford trucks going at least 55/ 60...no police visible anywhere !](#)

Although he would have liked a higher response, Hayek said, he was pleased to see some positive feedback.

"(If) people don't respond much, I feel like the police, maybe, are doing a good job," Hayek said.

The committee initially planned an in-person survey in churches and community centers, Hayek said, but COVID-19 forced it into an online format.

### Retention issues

Factors such as higher pay at Port St. Lucie Police Department and St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office make it difficult to retain officers, according to Hogley-Burney.

"I have a young force in many capacities ... and unfortunately, when we get (officers), where we want them to be, the carrot is waved and they take that experience elsewhere," Hogley- Burney told the Police Community Advisory Committee Dec. 9.

Even with incentives for native, or "home-grown," officers — such as a monthly \$250 bonus for officers living in the city — there's still 20 vacancies on the force, according to Hogley-Burney.

The chief said she's optimistic the City Commission will approve raises next year.

In addition, she said, a sponsorship program, in which the Police Department pays for some officers to attend the police academy in exchange for at least a two-year commitment, is a step in the right direction.

### Community policing

Community policing has long been sought by some residents and the demand was fueled in 2016 when [Demarcus Semer](#), a 21-year-old Black man, was fatally shot after he fled from police during a traffic stop.

[The tragedy led to creation of the Police Community Advisory Committee](#) in 2018. The committee, however, has received [little public input since its inception](#).

Now, in an effort to foster stronger community relationships, Hogley-Burney wants to open a second Resource In Community Hope ([R.I.C.H.](#)) House — [a place](#) where older adults and children can receive specific help with anger management and bullying and with tutoring or computer and technology classes.

It would be at the city Recreation Center, 903 S. 21st St.

Once the Police Department hires another victim advocate, Hobbly-Burney hopes to move forward with opening RICH House south.

The first RICH House, 2304 Ave., opened in July.

Initiatives such as front-porch roll call and the courageous kids programs and events such as Shop with a Cop and Santa Cop also are examples of how the Police Department is working to improve its trust with residents, Hobbly-Burney said.

*Olivia McKelvey is TCPalm's watchdog reporter for St. Lucie County. You can reach her at [olivia.mckelvey@tcpalm.com](mailto:olivia.mckelvey@tcpalm.com), 772-521-4380 and on Twitter @olivia\_mckelvey.*