



PUBLIC SAFETY CITIZEN TASK FORCE

Executive Summary

Introduction: There are two faces of Santa Cruz. One is a community of limitless beauty and opportunity. Towering redwood rainforests and deep green coastal grasslands dominate the hillside landscape. Pristine beaches and world-class surf breaks bring Monterey Bay and Pacific tides to the edge of the forest. This extraordinary community is tucked in between the sea and the mountains.

Cradled by this exceptional natural environment, Santa Cruz enjoys opportunities not usually found in small rural areas. The community is home to a University of California campus. Students and university jobs bolster the local economy. Research and entrepreneurship are shared values of faculty and local residents, oftentimes leading to remarkable innovation.

Santa Cruz hosts visitors from around the world and its tourism industry is the economic bedrock of the town. Tourists are drawn to Santa Cruz for its recreation, seaside amusement park, bustling downtown, and endless beaches. Art, culture, sustainable agriculture and locally sourced food and wine connect community members and visitors alike in museums, along Downtown streets, on farms and vineyards, and around local restaurant tables.

The community fabric is interwoven with these vivid threads of beauty and opportunity. People lucky enough to live and spend time in Santa Cruz reap the benefits of this vibrant community every day. However, the fabric of Santa Cruz also contains threads of different and darker shade that is the second face of the community.

The small geographical space between the mountains and the sea is home to metropolis-level crime and complex societal issues. Santa Cruz property and violent crime rates rival or surpass even those of inner-city California communities. Drug addiction is rampant and fuels high property crime rates and a public health crisis around flagrantly discarded hypodermic syringes in public spaces. Alcohol spurs violence in the Downtown entertainment district. Gang culture is prevalent and dominates the lives of countless at-risk youth and young men. Youth violence is sparked by gang rivalries, at times ending in teenage homicides. An exorbitantly large population of homeless, nearly the highest concentration in the State, lives within the City boundaries. Many Santa Cruz homeless suffer from crippling addiction and/or mental illness, and with those extenuating factors, often exhibit dysfunctional public nuisance behaviors.

42 Metropolitan cities manage these extreme public safety issues within their immense
43 geographic boundaries utilizing vast budget resources, health services and all-
44 encompassing criminal justice systems. Often metropolitan cities and counties are
45 bundled under one government agency, ensuring common public safety goals are
46 achieved. On the contrary, Santa Cruz manages these same issues with a lean police
47 force and budget within a condensed geographical space. Although the County seat and
48 host to County Health, the Main Jail and the Superior Court, Santa Cruz's public safety
49 goals have not historically been prioritized by the County. This lack of collaboration and
50 unified vision is partly to blame for the City's public safety challenges.

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52 Community discourse over Santa Cruz's public safety challenges has evolved over the
53 years. Tolerance has long been an overarching value of the community, but many believe
54 blind tolerance to be another cause of the City's current safety concerns, especially
55 around drug addiction, related crime, and public health concerns. New community
56 discussions are focused on balancing tolerance and compassion with accountability.

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58 Within this realm of contemporary community discourse, and on the heels of a series of
59 horrific events, the Santa Cruz City Council elected to form a Public Safety Citizen Task
60 Force to grapple intimately with the different themes of collaboration, tolerance,
61 compassion and accountability. 15 members were selected and given six months to
62 arrive at a set of policy recommendations capable of markedly improving public safety
63 conditions in the City. Although a colossal task, the 15 members rose to the challenge,
64 armed with open minds and hearts, a common vision and respect for each other and the
65 process. After six months of education and heated deliberation, several high-priority
66 recommendations were identified that coalesce around the following topics.

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68 Prevention: Discarded hypodermic syringes in the City's open spaces, beaches and
69 residential neighborhoods pose a significant public health problem. Task Force finds that
70 the County has not properly accounted for and mitigated the unintended consequences of
71 locating a Syringe Services Program (SSP) within a residential neighborhood and
72 geographical constraints of Santa Cruz. There should be no occurrence of spent
73 hypodermic syringes being found in the City. Until this public health crisis is rectified,
74 the Task Force finds that the County Board of Supervisors should consider the
75 management of SSP as a top priority and move the SSP out of a residential neighborhood.

76
77 Prevention programs for drug addiction and gang lures are under serving the community.
78 The City's open spaces are not designed and utilized effectively to reduce crime
79 opportunities. With that, priority of focus shall be on drug treatment funding and efficacy
80 to reduce criminal recidivism, at-risk youth after school programming, and enhanced
81 environmental design and pro-social activation of the City's most crime-ridden open
82 spaces, business districts, and parks.

83
84 Strategic Police Enforcement: The Santa Cruz Police Department (SCPD) is
85 understaffed and not primarily focused on enforcing low-level crimes and nuisance
86 behaviors in the City's open spaces, gateways and other geographical focal points. This
87 leads to disorder and high crime rates in the City's most prized areas. The Task Force has

88 identified two critical SCPD priorities. The Task Force recommends the City take
89 immediate measures to staff the SCPD at budgeted levels and move, in the long term, to a
90 force on par with national per capita levels. The Task Force recommends implementing a
91 targeted policing model, with a strategy that emphasizes enforcement of nuisance crimes
92 in natural, city entry and focal point areas.

93
94 Strategic Code Enforcement

95 Santa Cruz is burdened with a high number of high-risk alcohol outlets and residential
96 indoor and outdoor marijuana grow operations for medical and recreational purposes.
97 High-risk alcohol outlets contribute to alcohol-fueled violence and crime. Growing,
98 cultivation and processing of marijuana in residential neighborhoods is a serious public
99 safety concern, a code enforcement issue, and often involves criminal activity. The Task
100 Force therefore recommends regulatory reform of the City's high-risk alcohol outlets and
101 medical marijuana grows.

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103 Offender Assistance with Accountability/Recidivism Reduction: Repeat offenders are an
104 intense challenge to the City. A relatively small number of individuals are responsible
105 for an excessive number of arrests and citations. A new collaborative management model,
106 in partnership with the City's regional partners in Health Services, non-profits, and
107 criminal justice system, is required to effectively reduce the impact of repeat offenders on
108 the community. The Task Force recommends a specialty court model for substance
109 abuser and mentally ill or homeless offenders. The specialty court is a proven model in
110 halting the revolving door of recidivism by linking offenders to treatment and rigorous
111 judicial monitoring. Specialty courts are highly collaborative, bringing together the
112 criminal justice system and service providers to enforce court-ordered sanctions. The
113 Task Force finds that the specialty court model would provide offenders with the right
114 balance of treatment assistance with accountability.

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116 Criminal Justice Accountability: The Task Force finds that the Santa Cruz County Courts
117 have failed the community as it relates to criminal sentencing. Improved accountability
118 should come in the form of increased transparency, consistent adjudication of the City's
119 municipal code violations, and implementation of a specialty court model (as noted
120 above).

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122 The Task Force recommends the following measures be implemented by the Santa Cruz
123 County Superior Court:

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- 125 • Court to issue a misdemeanor warrant to individuals following three failures to
126 appear in a six-month period. This automatic warrant issuance will eliminate the
127 need for the City Attorney to prosecute repeat municipal code infraction offenders
128 who fail to appear.
 - 129 • Compel the Presiding Judge of the Santa Cruz County Superior Court to appear
130 before the Santa Cruz City Council twice a year to share what the Court is doing
131 to address high repeat offender rates in the City of Santa Cruz and receive input
132 from the City Council and City Attorney.
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134 Collaborative Accountability and Appropriate Funding: The Task Force expects each
135 jurisdiction named in the report to be responsive, in writing, to the recommendations that
136 impact their operations. Further, The Task Force recommends the City Council and
137 County Board of Supervisors consider an alternative funding mechanism to fund any (the
138 top priority programs identified herein that are outside of the City and County's regular
139 budget.

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141 Conclusion: Santa Cruz's public safety challenges are exceptionally nuanced and
142 complex. Community tolerance and lack of collaborative strategies among the City,
143 County and Court system has led to untenable situation. But even facing these staggering
144 challenges, 15 members of the community committed themselves to identifying solutions
145 through education, collaboration, and respectful dialogue. The outcome of that process is
146 a set of policy recommendations capable of far-reaching effect and a community ignited
147 behind positive change. Change will only happen with the full commitment of the City,
148 County, Criminal Justice system, social service nonprofits, and residents to move
149 together towards a common goal to improve public safety for all.

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