

Curbing crime in South Delta

By [Christine Lyon - South Delta Leader](#)

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Canada's national crime rate has been falling steadily for the past 20 years and the municipality of Delta is no exception to this long-term, downward trend.

According to a crime trends [report](#) released late last year by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Delta's crime rate was 59.5 in 2010, down from 65.8 in 2009 and 73.8 back in 2001.

The number is a measure of criminal code offenses—excluding drugs and traffic—reported for every 1,000 people. Delta's rate falls below the 2010 B.C. average (84), and is lower than neighbouring municipalities Surrey (92.2) and Richmond (62.2).

In Delta, nearly all types of criminal offenses have dropped over the last decade, including violent crime, assaults, robbery, property offenses, theft, break and enters, and motor vehicle thefts.

Among the few offenses that have increased since 2001 are drug offenses and disturbing the peace.

Nationally, the declining crime rate has been attributed to legislation changes, shifts in police enforcement, changes in the willingness of victims to report crime, and an aging population.

So, what's the story in Delta?

Changing demographics

One reason for Delta's drop in crime is related to the municipality's aging population, said [Delta Police](#) spokesperson Const. Ciaran Feenan.

"Age-related theories say that the crime rate should decline as a crime-prone age group of young people mature," he said. "That's probably what they're seeing across most of the country."

Because of this, he expects crime rates will continue their downward trend.

Increased crime awareness at the elementary and high school level, as well as residents attaining higher levels of post-secondary education are also contributing factors.

"The education we're doing in our schools with young people to make them aware of their choices, we think, is certainly something that is helping drop the rates," Feenan said.

Meanwhile, Delta police have instituted a community-based policing model based on the theory of Sir Robert Peel who famously stated: "The police are the public and the public are the police."

"We rely on the community to inform us when crime is occurring and where it's occurring," Feenan said.

Feenan did not have a breakdown of the crime rates in North and South Delta, but said that because North Delta borders Surrey along 120th Street and is connected to Richmond and New Westminster via the Alex Fraser Bridge, it has the potential to pull in crime from other areas.

It takes a community

Mayor Lois Jackson, who chairs the Delta Police Board, said it's easy to get distracted when drug and gang-related crime stories are picked up by the media, so it's important to look at the overall picture—which is that crime is dropping in Delta.

Jackson said the community has worked hard on crime prevention, creating programs in schools that encourage kids to adopt good values and stay on "the straight and narrow."

"We divert, we prevent. Those take a lot of time, trouble, effort and analysis," she said.

As a community, Jackson said citizens are taking more responsibility for their streets, reporting incidents that seem suspicious.

"It takes a whole community to want to be safe and not to allow bad things to happen," Jackson said.

Jackson also lauded the benefits of having an independent municipal police department.

"The training that's provided for our municipal forces comes through the Justice Institute (of British Columbia), and it is second to none," she said. "We have the best of people. They go through rigorous analysis."

According to a 2011 [Stats Canada report on police resources](#), Delta's actual police strength is 156 police officers per 100,000 people—lower than the provincial average of 196 officers per 100,000.

Jackson said police in Delta are very familiar with their posts.

"We try to grow our own police force from Delta because people that live in the community know the community best," she said.

Still, Jackson said there are well-known "pockets" that police keep eye on. Commercial strips, for example, are more prone to crime, Jackson said.

"They are easier targets because there's not a lot of eyes on the commercial areas, particularly at night. Also, industrial areas over on River Road."

With a grain of salt

It's important to use caution when reading crime statistics, said [Delta-Richmond East MP Kerry-Lynne Findlay](#), who explained that statistics are compiled from incidents reported through law enforcement agencies.

"You often have crime, particularly property crime, that simply isn't reported," Findlay said. "Also, sometimes crime isn't reported because a victim or a witness is afraid. They're afraid that they will be called to testify, or maybe they even know the perpetrator."

Findlay and the federal Conservatives are promoting their [omnibus crime bill](#) which, among other things, would increase mandatory minimum sentencing for crimes involving cases related to drugs, sex and violence.

"The overall crime rate has continued to show a modest decline, which is good news. However, I would say that crime is still a serious concern for Canadians," Findlay said, pointing to several jurisdictions in Canada where the volume and severity of crime is up.

Findlay said Delta does not have the same pressures of the big city, but substance abuse and addiction still exist.

"I would say we are relatively safe, but that doesn't mean we're immune."

She said that we need to give more tools to law enforcement to keep us safe.

"In our community, like every community, we have repeat offenders and it's frustrating for law enforcement to continue to bring the same people in over and over again, only to have them back out on the street very quickly."

