

Public Safety in Orange Beach

1400 words

January 15, 2017

Public Safety in Orange Beach

Executive Summary

Orange Beach's greatest asset is Public Safety, knowing life would be unbearable without it, drunken parties on the beach, running from fear of hooligans with babes in your arms, shootings as they drive-by, muggings in the parking lots. This is not what civil society in Orange Beach is about.

Essay

Why is Public Safety so important to Orange Beach?

Mayor Tony Kennon has often said, "They keep us safe," referring to Fire and Police, understanding this statement as a declarative commitment, keeping the residents and visitors safe, securing tourism revenue at the same time, because well protected and safe communities are the same places people want to take their families on vacation.

The culture of Orange Beach is one of casual prosperity, limited by the number of residents on the island and the price of homes (\$449K average).¹ Orange Beach had 5788 permanent residents in 2014,² protected by 56 full-time Police Officers, staffed by 47 full-time Firefighters who are cross-certified as EMTs or Paramedics, compared by population to Gulf Shores (pop. 10,963 in 2014)³ with 45 full-time Police and 43 full-time Firefighters; and Foley (pop. 16,243 in 2014)⁴ with 25 full-time Police and 18 full-time Firefighters, seeing the difference in the levels-of-commitment is both physical and fiscal dedication, keeping Orange Beach safe.

¹ Zillow, *OrangeBeach Home Prices and Value*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.zillow.com/orange-beach-al/home-values/>

² City-Data, *Orange Beach, Alabama*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Orange-Beach-Alabama.html>

³ City-Data, *Gulf Shores, Alabama*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Gulf-Shores-Alabama.html>

⁴ City-Data, *Foley, Alabama*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Foley-Alabama.html>

Public Safety in Orange Beach

| Town | Population (full-time residents 2014) | Firefighters (full-time 2016) | Police (full-time 2016) |
|---------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Orange Beach | 5,788 | 47 | 56 ^o |
| Gulf Shores | 10,963 | 43 | 45 ^o |
| Foley | 16,243 | 18 | 25 ['] |

The Council’s devotion to Public Safety is expressed quantitatively, knowing our Police Department is larger than the City of Foley, because Orange Beach swells to 150,000+, during the summer months. Whereas Gulf Shores is also a resort town, employing approximately 20% fewer Police than Orange Beach, underscoring how seriously City Council takes Public Safety in Orange Beach.

During the 2008 Recession the City of Orange Beach had a Reduction-in-Force (read: lay-offs), cutting Police to 35 full-time officers, growing to its present level of 56 in response to economic indicators and the expansion of tourism in Orange Beach, providing sufficient policing for our residents, coupled with the fact that Orange Beach swells to a size of 150,000+ in the summer months, enabling the city to create an environment of safety.

Police-involved shootings totaled 591 in the United States⁸ whereas Orange Beach had none. There are several reasons for this, being located on a barrier island, housing prices, mainly educated-white community, overwhelmingly complete desire from residents to live in a place where some do not have keys to their houses nor want to have locked doors. Our Police and Fire are sworn to a very-high level of customer service, mandated by the Mayor’s Office, being always polite and smiling even when writing a citation or helping a victim, having a culture of de-escalation and non-confrontation in place helps maintain trust within the community.

Being well heeled facilitates the charm of a small-resort town, making Orange Beach a favorite family destination for vacations, having a beautiful shoreline, fostering a turtle-nesting program, having trails for walking, paying for public safety is part of the equation for success.

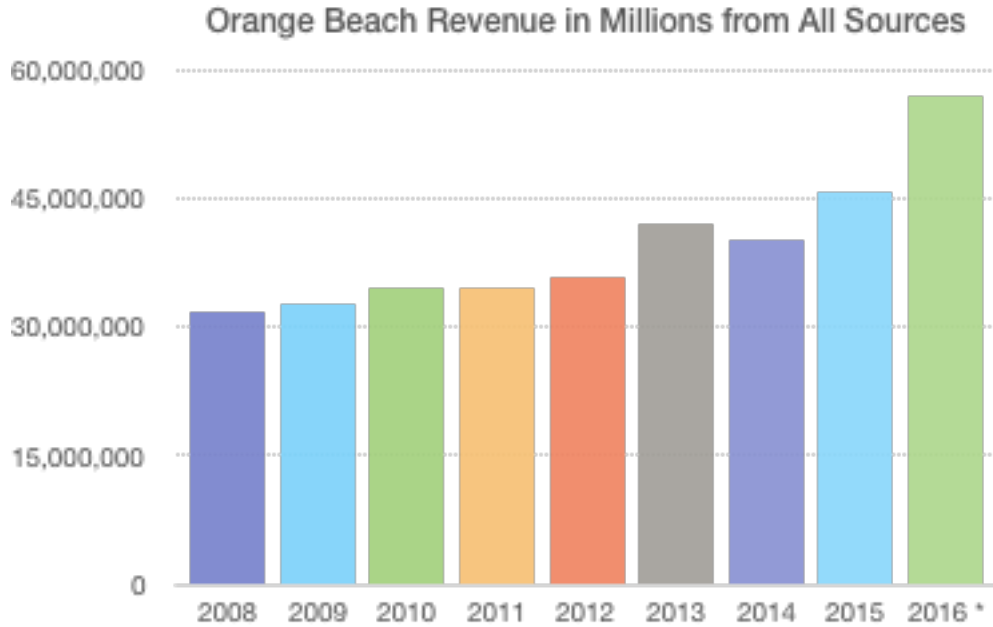
⁵ HR Department, City of Orange Beach, Accessed January 11, 2016

⁶ HR Department, City of Gulf Shores, Accessed January 11, 2017

⁷ HR Department, City of Foley, Accessed January 11, 2017

⁸ Harvard Business Review, *The Organization Reasons Police Departments Don’t Change*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2016/08/the-organizational-reasons-police-departments-dont-change>

Public Safety in Orange Beach



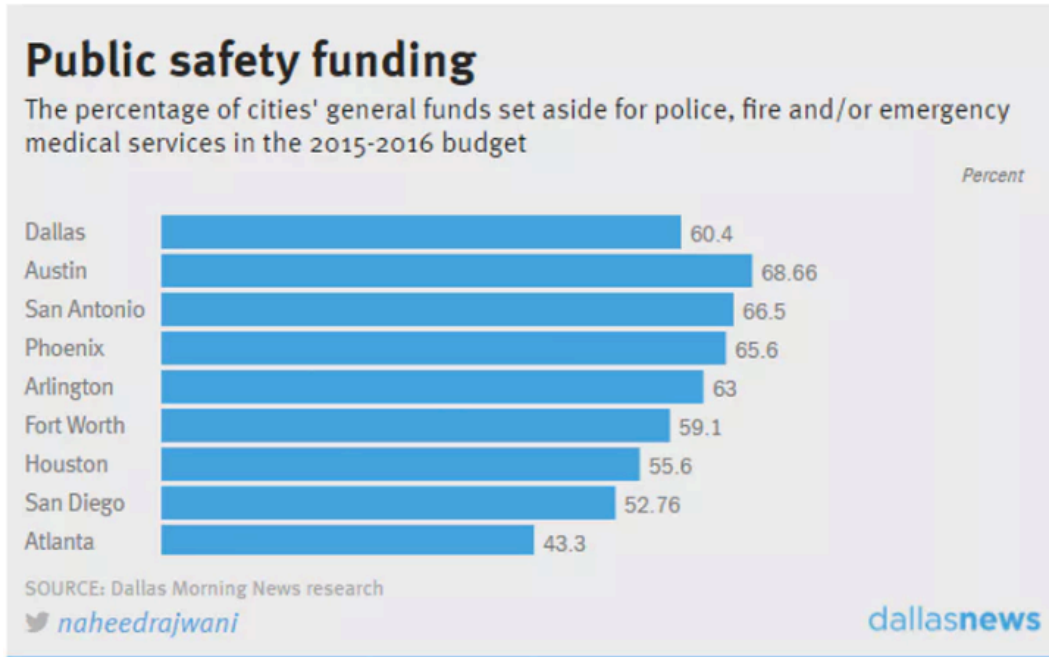
* Includes \$10 Million BP Settlement⁹

The costs associated with an aggressive Public-Safety Policy are huge, tying up significant resources in a Municipal Budget¹⁰, gaining comparative insights from other cities.

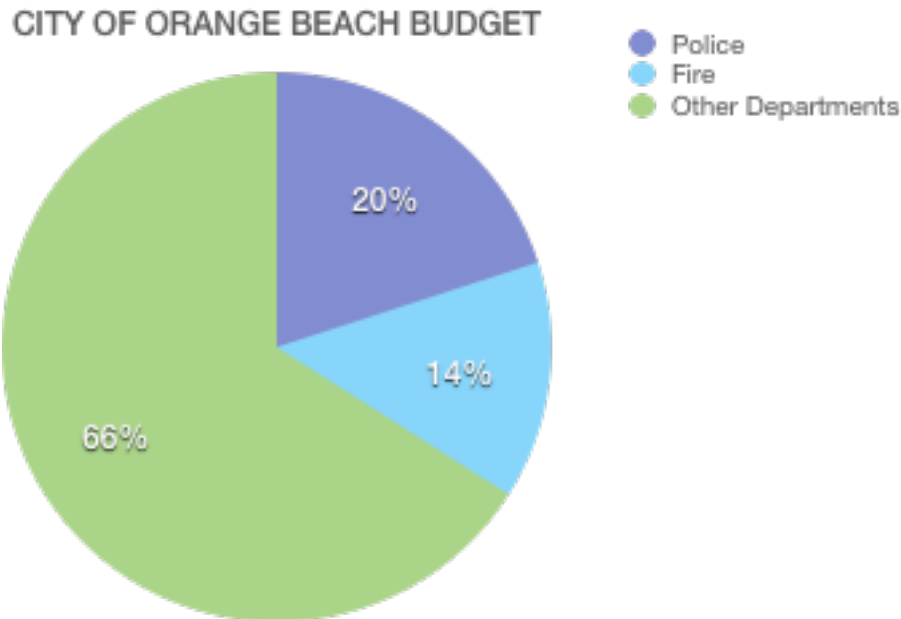
⁹ Orange Beach Finance Department, *Revenue from 2008 - 2016*, Accessed January 9, 2017

¹⁰ Dallas News, *Dallas officials wonder if we spend too much on public safety, but how do we fare against other U.S. cities?*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/dallas-police/2016/09/20/dallas-officials-wonder-spend-much-public-safety-fare-us-cities>

Public Safety in Orange Beach



The Public-Safety Number for Orange Beach is 34% of the Budget, considerably less than Atlanta and no where near what Dallas is spending. That does not mean Orange Beach cares less about Public Safety, indicating it costs less in Orange Beach to get an excellent result, because we have an overall lower motivation-rate for crime than Atlanta or Dallas.



I agree with the Mayor's position, keeping Orange Beach safe and paying whatever it takes for a high-level of Public Safety is good for the community and good for business, being smart about resource allocation and budgets.

Public Safety in Orange Beach

The essence of investing resources into Public Safety, paying dividends to keep the community safe is difficult to measure, arguably the most important role a government can play, generating a certain ROI for the taxpayers,¹¹ calculated on data that may not represent the customer-service index where residents are very pleased to interact with their Police and Firefighters, perhaps more important to individual resident than the local data suggests.

| ORANGE BEACH | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| POLICE DATA | 2015 | 2016 |
| SERVICE CALLS | 12,823 | 17,089 |
| TRAFFIC STOPS | 765 | 1,289 |
| DUIs | 95 | 64 |
| SPEEDING | 245 | 406 |
| ACCIDENTS | 636 | 668 |
| DRUG ARRESTS | 83 | 180 |
| | | |
| FIRE DATA | 2015 | 2016 |
| TOTAL CALLS | 2714 | 2850 |
| MEDICAL AS PART OF TOTAL | 1696 | 1690 |

“34% of the entire Budget for Fire and Police seems excessive,” the resident said. “We could be investing in Boat Launches and Resident-Beach Accesses, improving the quality-of-life for the people who live here.”

I disagree, allocating funds for Public Safety is as necessary as air, keeping the residents and visitors safe, knowing they will not get jumped at the market or be subject to a purse-snatching at the pharmacy, understanding the value of protecting their families.

Newport Beach is paying 101%, Mission Viejo 76% and Laguna Beach 71%,¹² of their annual budgets for Public Safety, being the cost in those jurisdictions and I do not expect their overheads to sunset anytime soon.

Orange Beach is therefore an exception, controlling crime by geographical barriers, surrounded by water, having two routes on and off the island, living behind a *de facto* wall-of-protection, re-enforced by high-property values, making Orange Beach a desirable place to live, keeping the community safe at 34% is envious compared to other jurisdictions.

¹¹ Wallet Hub, 2016’s Best and Worst for ROI on Police Spending, Accessed January 10, 2017, <https://wallethub.com/edu/cities-with-the-best-and-worst-roi-on-police-spending/9565/>

¹² Orange County Register, *Public Safety Devours City Budgets*, Accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/public-635037-safety-percent.html>

Public Safety in Orange Beach

Public Safety deserves a serious conversation, giving Elected Officials reason to reflect on what is really important to their constituents, being a priority for families, absolutely a necessity for visitors who do not know the area, already cautious about being in a new place, counting on City Services to keep them safe, ensuring they come back, growing our economy. We must keep the spending level for Public Safety at 34% or more, possibly increasing it to accommodate new technologies.

Public Safety in Orange Beach

Works Cited

City-Data, *Orange Beach, Alabama*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Orange-Beach-Alabama.html>

City-Data, *Gulf Shores, Alabama*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Gulf-Shores-Alabama.html>

City-Data, *Foley, Alabama*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Foley-Alabama.html>

Harvard Business Review, *The Organizational Reasons Police Departments Don't Change*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2016/08/the-organizational-reasons-police-departments-dont-change>

HR Department, City of Orange Beach, Accessed January 11, 2017

HR Department, City of Gulf Shores, Accessed January 11, 2017

HR Department, City of Foley, Accessed January 11, 2017

Dallas News, *Dallas officials wonder if we spend too much on public safety, but how do we fare against other U.S. cities?*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/dallas-police/2016/09/20/dallas-officials-wonder-spend-much-public-safety-fare-us-cities>

Orange Beach Finance Department, *Revenue from 2008 - 2016*, Accessed January 9, 2017

Orange County Register, *Public Safety Devours City Budgets*, Accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/public-635037-safety-percent.html>

Wallet Hub, *2016's Best and Worst for ROI on Police Spending*, Accessed January 10, 2017, <https://wallethub.com/edu/cities-with-the-best-and-worst-roi-on-police-spending/9565/>

Zillow, *OrangeBeach Home Prices and Value*, Accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.zillow.com/orange-beach-al/home-values/>