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## Oakland police involve community, focus on the streets in new strategic plan, meeting tonight

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Photo by Emilie Raguso for Oakland Local.

If Police Chief Anthony Batts has his way, Oakland will be one of the safest large cities in the state come 2015.

He released a strategic plan Feb. 19 that he said will become more specific as community members tell police their priorities in a series of public forums scheduled through March.

Batts held the first meeting Thursday night.

In the interim, he has moved more than 30 officers from desk duty to full-time patrol shifts to try to cut down on emergency response times that he called "unacceptable." From 80 to 100 officers, including detectives, youth services staff and other investigators, also will spend one day each week in uniform on patrol.

Response time for serious incidents averages about 15 minutes. Batts said the number should be closer to five.

"We need to shift that," he said Thursday morning in a news conference.

Police spokesman Jeff Thomason said it takes 10 minutes for dispatchers to send officers, and another five or so for them to arrive on scene. (Police Capt. Anthony Toribio said last week that there is a shortage of 14 dispatchers in the 911 call center, which fielded 650,000 calls in 2009. The Police Department is working to fill the positions.)

Batts pointed to double-digit drops in crime this year as an indication that the department is on the right path to increased safety. According to police, violent crime dropped 38 percent in January and 27 percent in February compared with the same time periods last year.

But police and community members alike need to do more. To make it easier for the public to share views, police created an online survey to collect ideas and comments.

"The central focus of this bull's eye should be our children," Batts said. "The city is on the precipice of change. People want to get involved. They're just looking for an avenues. They're ready."

In 2008, Oakland had 984 violent crimes per 50,000 people, according to the Federal Bureau

of Investigations. The next highest large city, Sacramento, had just 499. San Jose saw just 193.

Oakland also has the lowest clearance rates for large cities in the state, with just 23 percent of violent crimes solved in 2007, according to the state Office of the Attorney General. (San Francisco came in at 24 percent.) Oakland police clear just 7 percent of property crimes.

Of 810 people surveyed in January, just 26 percent said police had a handle on violent crime, 23 percent said gang violence was under control and just 19 percent said the same for gun violence.

On a brighter note, 75 percent said they "trust police" to treat them fairly and 76 percent said they believe police will protect their rights.

Of a slightly larger group surveyed, 15 percent had "very favorable" views of the Oakland Police Department. The bulk of those questioned, 54 percent, said they had a "somewhat favorable" view.

Inside the department, Batts said, many struggle with low morale. An employee survey completed in November, shortly after he came on the job, found that only 26 percent of police employees feel they're valued by the community, and 10 percent feel valued by city government. Most indicated their departments were short staffed and that they weren't happy with career development opportunities.

Only 67 percent said they were proud to be part of the department, and 56 percent said they were satisfied with their jobs.

"This needs to change," Batts said Thursday. He said closer to 90 percent of his employees should feel pride in the department, and that he wants police staff to like coming to work.

The strategic plan, a work in progress, offers a laundry list of goals, from beefing up on training and mentoring to improving beat coverage in the community.

Batts dodged a question from the media about whether he would stay through 2015 to ensure that his goal, of making Oakland one of the state's safest large cities, would be met. He said he was "committed to staying as long as I can be productive."

Police consultant Scott Bryant said, in two different rankings of about 400 American cities, Oakland places in the top 10 most dangerous places to live.

With the release of a working strategic plan and the start of five community conversations, Batts said, now is a potent time for change.

"This is a rebirth for the Police Department. This is a new beginning for the Police Department," he said. "We turn this Police Department around and we turn around the city of Oakland at the same time. We celebrate this on this day."

## TAKE ACTION

Fill out the online survey created by police to collect ideas and comments.

Hear more from Chief Batts here .

Attend any or all of five community meetings with the chief.

TONIGHT, Feb. 18, 6pm

455 7th Street, Oakland, CA (Auditorium)

March 3, 6:30 to 8 pm

Montera Middle School, 5555 Ascot Dr.

March 4, 6:30 to 8 pm

East Oakland Senior Center, 9255 Edes Ave.

March 10, 6:30 to 8 pm

West Oakland Senior Center, 1724 Adeline St.

March 11, 6:30 to 8 pm

Manzanita Recreation Center, 2701 22nd Ave