

# CHIEF'S CORNER

## APRIL 2022

I hope this message finds everyone in the Fountain community doing well. I hope we can safely say (fingers crossed) COVID-19 is in the rear-view mirror and we are mostly back on track as a community. We hope as a public safety department that during the COVID 19 pandemic the citizens of Fountain continued to receive the quality and timely service without interruption. There is a lot of behind the scenes work to make sure our quality of work does not change, regardless of the circumstances. Our police officers and firefighters over the last two years came to work every day around the clock to ensure the safety of our community was not compromised; we should all be very thankful and proud of their efforts and dedication. This will always be the promise to our citizen's that your quality of life /safety here in Fountain does not change We live in a wonderful city and know that most people chose to live in Fountain for a reason. That also means the word is out and even more people want to come and live here, we are no longer the best kept "secret" in Southern Colorado.

With that said, I want to discuss some changes that are coming to Fountain in the next 5-8 years that I feel are extremely important to the quality of life I mentioned above. The Fountain community is growing rapidly...it should be no secret to anyone who has lived here any length of time. There are a confirmed 40% more residential homes coming to the city limits of Fountain with a population increase of 17,000 – 23,000 people. The City of Colorado Springs wants to annex everything just east of the Fountain border along Marksheffel Rd. and along Link Rd., bringing approximately 8,000 more homes and another 24,000 people. That is a grand total of approximately 50,000 people moving to this area in the next 5-8 years. These numbers should be concerning to everyone that lives in Fountain.

From a public safety perspective, we need to address these issues now rather than wait and see what happens. There are several examples of cities both large and small that waited for the people to come before adding resources, and they were immediately playing catch-up, and ultimately never got caught up. One of the things the City of Fountain is not willing to sacrifice is public safety. An unfortunate result of population growth means more crime. Some of the population growth will be inside the city limits of Fountain and some will not. Regardless, if the people live in Fountain or just outside our city limits, they will be using our cities resources. They will be driving on the roads, shopping at local businesses, eating at restaurants, attending our schools, and frequenting our parks. All these entities and everything in between will need to expand their resources with public safety being a top priority. Everyone wants to live in a safe community and your police and fire departments play an integral part in that safety; we strive to keep our streets/roadways, parks, businesses and homes safe around the clock.

Traffic safety and congestion is another major concern that must be addressed with the future growth. Obviously, more people equal many more vehicles traveling on the roads. This will lead to much heavier use of our roadways, in turn leading to more traffic accidents. Not to mention

maintaining the roads now is difficult with current traffic volume, it will only get worse if we don't address problem that is about to be on our doorstep.

I would like to provide some statistics and trends we have been keeping close watch on for several months now. Please look at the chart below for some local crime statistics:

	CHARGES	
	2020	2021
Assault (1st, 2nd, 3rd Degree, Vehicular)	149	170
Burglary	79	94
Homicide or Attempted Homicide	8	7
Menacing (Threat, Physical, Real or Simulated Weapon)	52	62
Motor Vehicle Theft	97	146
Narcotics Violations	167	267
Robbery	18	22
Sex Crimes (Internet, Strong Arm, Rape, etc.)	64	44
Theft (from auto, building, shoplift, etc.)	512	540
Weapons Offenses	80	99

Generally, there is an increase in most crimes within the City of Fountain and it is even worse state wide. It is our belief that these numbers will continue to increase for a couple of reasons. First, Colorado laws are changing and becoming less severe across the board. Many drug offenses are being decriminalized and certain crimes are no longer jailable offenses. An example of this is a previously convicted felon that was in possession of a gun (POWPO) would be arrested and placed in jail. Now, unless the person was convicted of a victim rights crime, or "violent offense" and was in possession of a gun, they are no longer brought to jail, rather issued a summons, and released back into the community. There are many other examples of police not being able to arrest the person and have to give them a ticket. We continue to face many bad legislative bills from our state legislature that is more focused on Denver and Boulder than small communities around the state and our citizens will continue to pay that price.

A final point I would like to make is regarding police response times to calls. Current numbers show police respond to priority calls within 5 minutes, and non-emergent calls within 6 minutes. As a department we are satisfied with those times, but we are always trying to do better. The national average for a police response to a priority call is 11 minutes. Those are the current numbers with the current population and staffing. Again, based on the projected growth in the coming years, those numbers will change significantly, and not for the better. With current staffing resources, it is our opinion we are just keeping up with the calls. That will be impossible to maintain if we do not act now as a community and a city. The time is now to increase resources in this city before we are unable to recover. Playing catch-up with public safety will never be acceptable for us as a Public Safety department and should not be acceptable as a community. Additionally, we must not wait to build a 4<sup>th</sup> fire station on the Eastern side of our

city to account for the growth that we KNOW is coming. By 2025 we will have the money to begin construction, but we will not have the firefighters or EMS personnel to man it. We have to address this as a priority for our city in the next couple of years. Building a fire station with a police substation will also increase our city's ISO (Insurance Services Office) rating potentially saving homeowners several hundreds of dollars per year on their insurance rates.

We have a wonderful community here in Fountain and it is our true desire to keep it that way. As stated earlier, growth can be a positive thing IF we as a municipality prepare and predict our needs accordingly and timely. Many municipalities in our region struggle daily with police/fire/EMS response times, lack of qualified staff, and traffic issues that are almost insurmountable and ultimately unsafe for their citizens. As Colorado Springs is continuing to grow around us, we must have a plan to deal with the people. This message should not be viewed as doom and gloom but rather a call to action for this community to get involved and have a voice when it comes to city resources, and how we plan to increase them with the increase in population by working together.

Many of our citizens ask me what they can do to help. Here is the advice I always give; please continue to thank our first responders and military personnel when you see them, that little act of kindness goes along way. Second, get involved with your local /state elected officials and make sure your voice gets heard as part of our democratic process. We are very lucky to have great local officials in Fountain representing us at the state level, but your voices do matter. Lastly, please come visit us at the local police and fire stations, we work for you! Your thoughts, ideas, questions matter to us, and we are more than ready to provide you with additional information or address your concerns the very best we can. Hopefully we can all work together in a transparent and constructive manner to address these concerns before we ever get to crisis mode playing catch up. The continued population growth and expansion around us in the next several years is my number one top concern and the single thing that keeps me awake at night.

As always, with best regards,

Chief Chris Heberer