



# **SOLANO COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY**

2021-2022

**DELAYS IN RELOCATION OF VALLEJO POLICE  
DEPARTMENT ARE COSTLY**

# **DELAYS IN RELOCATION OF VALLEJO POLICE DEPARTMENT ARE COSTLY**

Solano County Civil Grand Jury 2021-2022

## **I. SUMMARY**

Continuous delays in relocating the Vallejo Police Department from its current facility have resulted in a substantial increase in the cost of such a move. In addition, they have resulted in a more dangerous, insufficient facility that affects the health of Vallejo's law enforcement and the health of the community at large. The lack of a decent facility directly affects recruitment efforts, therefore also affecting the community's safety because of an understaffed department.

In monetary terms, the delay is reflected in the millions of additional dollars that the retrofitting of the property at 400 Mare Island Way (the original relocation plan) will cost. The city of Vallejo purchased the building in 2019 for the police department relocation. The delay has already led to an additional cost of at least ten to twenty million dollars. An alternate suggestion is buying a different property and building a facility there, which means added expenditures to buy a new location and to erect a new building. The city is already struggling to find the funds to retrofit the existing building—the cost of purchasing and building on a new site will multiply the need for funding.

If the police department remains in the current facility, the city will continue to spend thousands of dollars each year to add "band-aids" to the current site. Meanwhile, the useable parts of the facility keep shrinking as rooms deemed unusable because of lead and asbestos contamination as well as mold (the current building floods each time Vallejo has a significant rain) are closed off to help ensure a healthy environment for the police personnel and visitors. Punishing current law enforcement officers for the alleged past shameful acts of others does not seem to be a reasonable step towards building a better, safer Vallejo.

Forty percent of crime victims in Vallejo are children. Most are under 14 years old. The current facility at 111 Amador Street does not have adequate space to deal with traumatized victims, nor does it have an environment that meets the needs of a physically or sexually abused child or one who has witnessed trauma.

The Community Assistance Resource & Engagement (CARE) Center has been established at the 400 Mare Island Way building and is currently used to counsel and treat crime victims and witnesses. Although the Center is part of the Police Department, there is a collaboration with other community services. This facility is located downstairs and is separate from the proposed Police facility. The Center offers space, counselors, psychological and other specialists with specific training in dealing with assault victims. Interviews of crime victims, both children, and adults are performed by one interviewer while other advocates listen to the interaction. The District Attorney, social workers, and other advocates can witness the interaction with the victim and interviewer through audio and visual means.

## **II. INTRODUCTION**

The Solano County Civil Grand Jury began its journey into investigating the police department by looking at the newly established CARE Center. It is an area within the police department in which investigators and various local social agencies have an opportunity to interact with victims of crime not only to address their needs but also to gather information about the crime. Some community members were unhappy about the location of the Center saying that its proximity to the police department will make crime victims uncomfortable. With this in mind, the Civil Grand Jury toured both the proposed police department facility (400 Mare Island Way) and the current police department location (111 Amador Street). Both tours included the victim interview areas. The contrast between the two facilities emphasized the need to relocate the Vallejo Police Department to a better facility. The Amador location which was built in the 1960s shows every one of its sixty plus years especially since the years since Vallejo declared bankruptcy have been marked with a lack of building maintenance. Meanwhile, the Mare Island Way location displays an atmosphere of a work in progress as the Vallejo City Council delays decisions on how to go forward with the relocation plan.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

### **Toured**

400 Mare Island Way (proposed site for Vallejo Police Department)  
111 Amador Street (current Vallejo Police Department site)

### **Attended**

Vallejo City Council meetings  
March 8, 2022  
March 22 zoom  
April 12 zoom and in person  
Public meeting sponsored by the city inviting location recommendations from the public  
(March 27, 2022)

### **Interviewed**

Vallejo City Council Members  
Vallejo Police Department Administrators  
Vallejo City Administrators  
Vallejo City staff  
Environmental Consulting Companies

### **Reviewed**

Environmental Testing Reports  
Cardno 2014  
RGA 2015-2017  
ATC 2015-2016  
TRC 2018 - 2020  
OIR (Office of Independent Review) Group Report  
Solano County Library Facilities Master Plan

#### Newspaper articles

Vallejo Times-Herald – February 11, 2022  
Vallejo Times-Herald – February 19, 2022  
Vallejo Times-Herald – February 27, 2022  
Vallejo Times Herald – March 8, 2022  
Vallejo Times Herald – March 10, 2022  
Vallejo Times Herald – March 16, 2022  
Vallejo Times Herald – March 22, 2022  
Vallejo Times Herald – March 23, 2022  
Vallejo Times Herald – April 12, 2022  
Vallejo Times Herald – April 14, 2022

#### Reviewed Websites

City of Vallejo web site

<https://www.visitvallejo.com/about-vallejo/mare-island-history>

<https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2022/04/15/vallejo-police-headquarters-council-pivots-library-site-not-waterfront/>

<https://localnewsmatters.org/2022/04/16/vallejos-search-for-new-police-headquarters-shifts-from-waterfront-site-to-library-building/>

<https://localnewsmatters.org/2022/03/04/edifice-to-dysfunction-vallejo-polarized-over-proposed-waterfront-police-station/>

<https://www.vallejosun.com/protest-planned-over-proposed-30m-loan-for-new-vallejo-police-department-hq/>

<https://www.vallejosun.com/vallejo-city-council-eyes-alternate-locations-away-from-waterfront-for-new-police-hq/>

<https://openvallejo.org/2020/07/28/for-vallejos-problem-officers-a-pattern-of-public-accolades/>

<https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/nbc-bay-area-investigation-links-group-of-vallejo-police-officers-to-majority-of-use-of-force-incidents/2201307/>

<https://www.commercialcafe.com/commercial-property/us/ca/vallejo/400-mare-island-way/>

<http://www.areavibes.com/vallejo-ca/demographics>

<https://biggestuscities.com/vallejo-california>

[www.NeighborhoodScout.com/CA/ca/vallejo](http://www.NeighborhoodScout.com/CA/ca/vallejo)

<http://www.census.gov/quickfacts>

<https://www.kron4.com/nes/bay-area/Vallejo Police Officer's Association concerned over 'unprecedented rate' of officers leaving force>

[www.solanohistory.org](http://www.solanohistory.org)

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=vallejo+police+department+defunding&view>

<https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ca/vallejo/crime>

[https://icma.org/sites/default/files/305747\\_Analysis%20of%20Police%20Department%20Staffing%20-%20McCabe.pdf](https://icma.org/sites/default/files/305747_Analysis%20of%20Police%20Department%20Staffing%20-%20McCabe.pdf)

#### IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS

The Vallejo Police Department facility, located at 111 Amador Street, Vallejo, was built in 1961 when the Vallejo population was approximately 60,000. Currently it is just over 121,000.

In the spring of 1996, Vallejo experienced a devastating financial blow. After a 142-year relationship with the City, the United States Navy officially closed the Mare Island shipyard. The financial shortfall created by the Navy's withdrawal came to a head in 2008 when the City declared bankruptcy. The belt-tightening that Vallejo put into place meant deep cuts in the ranks of sworn police officers and cuts in pay for those who stayed with the department and those who joined their ranks later. Staffing in the police department dropped from 150 officers to 77 at its lowest point. Ultimately, the smaller police force is in a position of having to prioritize calls. According to the ICMA Center for Public Safety Management, the ideal ratio of full-time officers per 1,000 residents ranges from 2.6 per 1,000 to 1.8 per 1,000, with an average ratio of 2.5 full-time officers per 1,000 residents. The Vallejo force currently functions with 0.8 police officers per one thousand citizens.

The public has experienced the effect of the bankruptcy cutbacks in the form of fewer available officers and less effective policing. Another impact manifests itself in the lack of maintenance of city buildings. Over the years, the police facility has deteriorated due to age and deferred maintenance. This deterioration has led to concern about the safety of the building.

The City of Vallejo began hiring environmental health consultants to conduct testing for toxicity in the Amador location of the Police Department in 2014. The early studies found both asbestos and lead contaminants in the building. The testing has continued, although the companies conducting the tests have changed. The constant is that areas on the first floor contain unhealthy levels of lead and asbestos.

In March of 2016, acting on the test results and professional recommendations of an environmental health and safety firm, the Public Works Department engaged its on-call design and construction-management consulting company. The firm started project management services for the generation of construction documents to combine the building asbestos and lead abatement with the pending earthquake repair and renovation work. The project strategy involved the temporary relocation of police department staff to portable buildings at the adjacent employee parking lot for approximately one year. At that point, the abatement and renovation project would be complete.

In July 2016, Vallejo re-prioritized the project to suspend building abatement and renovation efforts. The new plan was to relocate police department staff to portable buildings where they would be housed for approximately five to ten years until the city could establish a permanent facility. Staff worked with the on-call consultant from August 2016 through February 2017 to finalize the design of the interim facility improvements, giving the city time to negotiate a new scope of services to produce bid documents for the long-term portable buildings. However, that plan never came to fruition.

According to the May 2, 2017 RGA Environmental, Inc. (RGA) report, "Surface contamination due to the presence of lead and cadmium, as well as damaged friable ACMs (*asbestos-containing materials*) are known conditions within the building and represent potentials for exposures to

known hazardous agents. There are a number of building maintenance activities and sampling strategies which should be considered to mitigate known hazards to reduce risks of adverse effects.” RGA found lead contamination, which they surmised resulted from the use as an indoor firing range. The firing range area was later remodeled and turned into a cardio room and the SWAT locker room.

Early in 2018, city staff identified two locations as plausible sites for relocation of the Vallejo Police Department: Southern Waterfront (Solano Avenue and Sonoma Boulevard) and Rollingwood Drive (which is no longer available). Later that year, the former State Farm building at 400 Mare Island Way was up for sale and the city purchased it for the police department.

In 2019, Vallejo Public Works contracted with TRC, a company that identifies industrial and residential contamination and provides solutions to mitigate hazardous issues. Contaminants identified in the building were primarily lead and asbestos. There were areas of the facility that had to be deemed “off limits” to personnel. TRC cleaned the contaminated areas, but subsequent testing of the same locations three months later showed the reappearance of those same contaminants. Continued cleaning costs the city thousands of dollars each quarter and will continue as long as the hazardous materials are present and the building is occupied.

The building, in its current condition, needs extensive repairs and changes to address:

- Sewage and flooding problems
- Lack of interview rooms,
- Lack of backup generator
- Inadequate locker and shower facilities
- Failing HVAC system
- Insufficient space for required staffing

On February 26, 2019, the Vallejo City Council voted five to two in favor of purchasing the Mare Island Way property as the relocation site of the Vallejo Police Department. Funding for the purchase came from the General Fund, reserves, and CIP (Capital Improvement Project funds). Once the city purchased the building, it needed a general plan amendment to change the zoning. In addition to the zoning issue, a vocal community group opposed the waterfront location and made its views clear to the city. Reasons for the opposition ran from feelings that the police force did not deserve a nice new location to concerns that a police presence on the waterfront would scare away tourists. The zoning issue and the vocal opposition both contributed to the delay in the plan moving forward.

In the summer of 2019, Vallejo City officials hired OIR (Office of Independent Review) Group to analyze and assess the operation of the Vallejo Police Department. A veteran former federal civil rights prosecutor leads OIR, which includes experienced police practices and oversight professionals. The OIR Group describes the Amador facility: “The headquarters building itself has deteriorated and is plagued with asbestos and faulty plumbing; its sub-optimal status as a facility makes it emblematic in the staff’s eyes of the challenging circumstances that perpetually confront them. Equipment is notoriously old and faulty.”

Controversy and divisiveness among the City's elected officials have led to delays, and in 2021 the City Council halted further plans to relocate the police station. The City Council has been delaying action while members are divided on the issue and unclear as to their power to approve or deny the move. Fielding public comments and protests, time spent attempting to find other locations, and the costs involved in delaying a relocation have resulted in no decisions.

In March 2022, the Vallejo Police Department presented an updated work plan for the Vallejo Police Department Transformation Initiative based on the 2020 OIR recommendations. It states that "Progress will be monitored internally as well as in collaboration with the California Department of Justice." It includes the recommendation of the OIR Group report that the City of Vallejo and the Vallejo Police Department "develop the proposed new headquarters facility (400 Mare Island Way)" as the current facility is deteriorated and inadequate.

OIR also found that the poor working conditions in the Amador building have led to "burn out, discouragement and a pervasive sense of being underappreciated by city officials as well as outsiders. Working conditions fostered an 'us against the world mindset.'" Other than the issue of understaffing, salaries are below the market average; the workload is highly demanding, and forced overtime is routine. All these factors make it challenging to attract and retain the appropriate staffing. Included in its recommendations were:

"The Department should persevere with the City in its efforts to develop the proposed new headquarters facility and look for ways to enhance community access and engagement. The City should ensure that VPD has sufficient resources to properly maintain and audit its retained stores of evidence and property."

Vallejo City staff conducted a cost study to compare the cost of building a new facility at a different site versus retrofitting the Mare Island Way building. The staff determined that the cost to build a new facility would be approximately \$100 million at that time. Retrofitting Mare Island Way would cost \$30-\$35 million. The original cost of the building was \$13.45 million. Public Works determined that tearing down the current 111 Amador Street facility and rebuilding in the same location would not be a good investment for the City.

City Council meetings have been open to discussing alternative options for relocating the Vallejo Police Department. However, meetings designed to discuss building options became chaotic as members of the audience engaged in shouting matches with city council members, knocked computers to the floor and slammed their fists into plastic protective barriers in front of council members subsequently no progress has been made to date to move the project forward.

Complicating the issue of inadequate housing for the police department are community allegations of excessive use of force, homicide, and badge bending to "celebrate" violence by police officers. While the anger and frustration of family members and activists are understandable, their determination to stop the relocation of the police department is counterproductive and is aimed at the wrong people. The new Police Chief Shawny Williams, previously from the San Jose Police Department, was brought in with the mandate that he would change the culture of the police department. One of the most significant changes he has made



since taking over the department is the mandatory requirement that officers have their body cameras on whenever they are in contact with the general public. In addition, police officers have to undergo training in accountability, leadership, de-escalation, and community relations. Moreover, the department is creating a matrix to show the consequences for failure to follow policy requirements. In addition, the police department administration is working to improve community communication and transparency.

Vallejo City Council's efforts to discuss the relocation of the police department have been met with resistance. Many of the protesters' comments indicated that the police department does not deserve a good facility because of previous alleged wrongdoing. This attitude is taken to heart by the council since there are several factors at play. The most prominent seems to be the adage "you get what you pay for." As long as the Vallejo community accepts a building, often described as "deplorable," the risk is an inability to hire an experienced, professional staff. The status of the building and the below-market pay scale make recruiting high-end police professionals difficult at best.

At their meeting on April 12, 2022, the City Council turned away from the building bought specifically to serve as the new Vallejo Police Department building. They asked city staff to look into moving the department to the current John F. Kennedy (JFK) library at 505 Santa Clara Street. The March 7, 2021 Solano County Library Facilities Master Plan (Master Plan) describes the library as "a dark, aging building beset with maintenance issues." The building has been updated throughout the years, including the addition of solar panels and exterior LED lighting. However, some of the more significant issues within the facility are still awaiting the City's attention. It is not ADA compliant because the main elevator has been out of service for years.

Meanwhile, according to the Master Plan, "an old second elevator also threatens to break down any day." In addition, there are persistent issues with the HVAC system and broken windows, which the Civil Grand Jury observed. While the atrium provides natural light, it also amplifies sound and causes noise issues. Most of the windows along the perimeter have decorative concrete "protrusions" which block light to those areas. The Master Plan also points out that "poor sightlines throughout the building create security challenges." JFK is "overdue for a significant renovation. The library facility has some of the same issues that plague the current police department facility.

At the April 12, 2022 Vallejo City Council meeting, Interim Assistant City Manager Terrance Davis advised the council, "The costs for moving the library and remodeling its building to accommodate the police department exceed estimated costs for a waterfront station." That estimated cost is \$38.1 million. That would not include the added cost of relocating the library to Mare Island Way.

Another option is upgrading the current police facility on Amador Street. The cost is estimated at \$59.8 million. That does not include the cost of relocating the City's corporation yard to provide room for the expansion of the building.



A third option is using city land or private land to build a station or remodel an existing building from the ground up. According to Davis, that would be an estimated “\$56.1 million, plus any additional costs to acquire the land, if necessary.”

The fourth option that Davis presented was a \$30 million plan to retrofit the Mare Island Way building, which the City purchased for \$13.45 million. Initially, the estimated cost for retrofitting the Mare Island Way facility was \$10-20 million. The inaction by the city council has only resulted in the continuously increasing cost to establish a new police department facility. The most recent estimate in retrofitting the building has grown to \$30-35 million, with modifications which eliminate some of the original plans.

While the debate on the relocation of the Vallejo Police Department continues, most of the police force including the executive offices continues to operate out of the facility on Amador while the CARE facility and a couple of the departments have made their way to the Mare Island building.

**400 MARE ISLAND WAY FINANCING BUDGET**

<b>LINE ITEM</b>	<b>BUDGET</b>
Direct Construction	\$15,300,000
General Contractor Overhead	\$ 2,500,000
Escalation and Design Contingency	\$ 4,700,000
Indirect Costs	\$ 5,000,000
Construction Subtotal	\$27,500,000
Construction Contingency	\$ 2,500,000 (8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$30,000,000</b>

**V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**FINDING 1** – In 2019, the City of Vallejo purchased the former State Farm Insurance building at 400 Mare Island Way specifically for the new location of the Vallejo Police Department. The cost of the move continues to rise as the city continues to delay the move.

**RECOMMENDATION 1A** – Vallejo City Council take the steps they need to relocate the police department.

**RECOMMENDATION 1B** – The city seeks and applies for federal and state infrastructure grants to pay for retrofitting the chosen building to meet the needs of the police department.

**FINDING 2** –Current police headquarters has deteriorated and is inadequate for the city’s needs. The building has been neglected for too long. Continually repairing the current facility is not a fiscally responsible policy.

**RECOMMENDATION 2A** – The city needs to move the police department as soon as possible to a location that will help ensure a well-run police department in Vallejo.

**RECOMMENDATION 2B** – Since the proposed JFK Library site is not ADA compliant, the city must find a new facility that guarantees access to all.

**FINDING 3** –A significant portion of the existing Vallejo Police Department building at 111 Amador is no longer useable because of asbestos and lead contamination. The City is spending thousands of dollars quarterly to pay for testing and cleanup of areas contaminated with asbestos and lead. In addition, after each rain, the building floods and the city has to send in a crew to address water damage as well as the removal of mold.

**RECOMMENDATION 3** – Relocate the Vallejo Police Department as promptly as possible.

**FINDING 4** – In 2008, the city of Vallejo filed for bankruptcy and cut its police force by about half. The police department is still understaffed. Although the Police Chief has initiated a stronger recruiting effort, the working conditions in the Amador facility prove to be a deterrent to successful recruiting. The current building has been described as “deplorable” by city officials and others who have toured the facility. The Amador Street structure is a deterrent to the department’s ability to attract and hire new employees.

**RECOMMENDATION 4A** – Relocate the police department to provide a more attractive, healthy working environment, which will enhance recruitment efforts.

**RECOMMENDATION 4B** – In addition to moving the Police Department to a new building, Vallejo seek funding through federal and state grants to augment the pay for police officers.

**FINDING 5** – The Amador building is an inappropriate environment for the CARE Center’s work.

**RECOMMENDATION 5** – The CARE Center continue to provide services at the 400 Mare Island Building, where the environment is separate from the business of the police department. It is a trauma-centered, calming environment for victims, primarily children, seeking help.

## **COMMENTS**

The general public and those agencies investigating the Vallejo Police Department have continuously called for transparency. Frustrations mount when resistance is encountered: that resistance to providing information has exacerbated the distrust and animosity that some members of the public have toward law enforcement in Vallejo. Unfortunately, the Solano County Civil Grand Jury, while conducting investigations this term, encountered a significant amount of resistance to transparency from the Vallejo City Attorney’s Office.

## **REQUIRED RESPONSES**

Vallejo Public Works Department Administration (all)  
Vallejo City Manager (all)

Vallejo City Council (all)  
Vallejo Police Department Administration (all)

**COURTESY COPIES**

N/A