

April 29, 2014

Dear Fellow East Siders:

This week’s Ward letter discusses the issue of crime and crime prevention, covering (1) the level of property crime on the East Side, (2) the Police Department resources available to address crime, (3) my work in the City Council on this issue and (4) a community meeting I will hold on May 21 to promote the formation of neighborhood crime watch groups.

1. Crime level

The Police Department maintains crime statistics by district and type of crime. The East Side (from North Main Street east to the river) is contained in Districts 8 and 9. The two districts run east-west, with a boundary line around Olney Street. The Police Department tracks four categories of property crime, namely burglary (house theft), larceny (shoplifting, purse snatching, etc.), motor vehicle theft and motor vehicle larceny (theft of motor vehicle parts, etc.). You can review the Police Department’s annual tabulations for Districts 8 and 9 in recent years by clicking here: [Police Data](#).

From these reports, I have prepared the following table that looks at the overall property crime rate in Districts 8 and 9 combined for 2010 (the year before the current administration took office) and 2013 (the most recent full year of data). The comparison is as follows:

Districts 8/9 Combined	2010	2013	Change	%
Crime				
Burglary	314	264	-50	-16%
Larceny	435	395	-40	-9%
MV Theft	129	103	-26	-20%
MV Larceny	372	466	+92	+25%
Total	1250	1228	-22	-2%

As you can see, the overall rate has remained stable (declining 2%), but has shifted within categories. Motor vehicle larceny is up 25%, while the other three categories (burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft) are down 16%, 9% and 20%, respectively.

Through the first four months of this year (April 20), there have been some improvements over last year when one compares number of property crimes to date. Total property crimes are down 23%, including a 7% decrease in the category of motor vehicle larcenies. A chart of year to date data follows:

Districts 8/9 Combined	YTD through 4/20			
	2013	2014	Change	%
Crime				
Burglary	79	78	-1	-1%
Larceny	137	69	-68	-50%
MV Theft	25	20	-5	-20%
MV Larceny	112	104	-8	-7%
Total	353	271	-82	-23%

2. Police resources

The Police Department has seen reductions in the size of the force since 2009, losing approximately 80 officers (or around 17% of the total force) during that time. The City's total cost per police officer (including salary, overtime, benefits and pension) varies with seniority, but a rough average of \$120,000 per officer is a fair approximation. The additional 80 officers therefore represented a cost of around \$10 million per year.

The City did not have the money to pay for these additional police officers during 2008-10. Instead, the City ran multimillion budget deficits each year, spending down reserve funds to pay bills. From June 30, 2007 to June 30, 2010, the City's general fund balance declined from \$22 million to \$3 million, and the total governmental fund balance declined from \$158 million to \$69 million. When the current administration took office in January, 2011, the Mayor formed a municipal fiscal review panel to assess the City's financial position. In its [Report](#), the Municipal Finance Review panel found that the City's structural deficit was \$70 million for the current year and \$110 million projected for the following year. The fiscal crisis that resulted from years of unpaid bills required the City to take several dramatic measures during 2011-12 to avoid bankruptcy. One such measure was to find approximately \$60 million in annual budgetary savings, including a target of 10% reductions in every City department, including the Police Department. Had the City declared bankruptcy, the City would have lost control over its budget, and the bankruptcy trustee could have imposed even larger reductions in the police force to satisfy creditors. This has been the experience in other bankrupt cities, including but not limited to Stockton, California.

Since that time, the City has maintained a true balanced budget. As a result, expansion of several budget line items, including police officers, has been constrained in order to avoid bankruptcy.

As a result of the force reductions, the Police Department discontinued foot patrols, and instead officers travel about the neighborhood in their vehicles. When major incidents occur in other neighborhoods (such as robberies or night club disturbances), the Police Department pulls resources from other neighborhoods as needed. When determining the base allocation of officers per district, the Police Department looks at the overall crime rate and the seriousness of the crimes committed. Thankfully, the East Side is not a major site for violent crimes (homicides and robberies). As a result, the allocation of police officers on the East Side to combat property crime is less than it was when the overall force was larger in size. Last year, the City received a federal grant to pay for the first three years of an increase of 45 officers to the police force. Once fully on board, this increase will support the restoration of foot patrols to the East Side and other neighborhoods. There is a Police Academy currently training with this number of recruits. They will graduate this Fall, and add to the force. The net gain of police will be reduced by retirements. As a result, the Police Department plans to hold a second Police Academy following the conclusion of the current one. This will allow the full benefits of the federal grant to be realized next year.

3. My work on the police issue

I have held two community meetings (in January, 2012 and January, 2013) which the Police Department has attended to listen and respond to community concerns on the crime issue. At those meetings, the Police Department has offered crime prevention suggestions to those in attendance, outlining some simple common-sense ways (such as telling merchants not to deliver packages unattended to one's front door) to reduce exposure to property crime. I also have had two private meetings with the Police Department to advocate for greater attention our neighborhood's crime concerns in response to particular incidents that have occurred in our neighborhood. I also conducted a series of meetings with the Police Department, the Traffic Engineer and neighborhood residents concerning the incidence of speeding on Blackstone Boulevard. Due to the City's financial difficulties resulting from the 2011 crisis, it has not been possible to increase the size of the police budget. With that said, I have protected our neighborhood's group of police officers from being reduced to serve other priorities. For example, the City Council concluded a major study of night clubs, preparing a report that recommended reassigning some police officers from neighborhood duties to club inspection and compliance enforcement. While we would benefit from a greater police presence at clubs, I helped advocate against a reduction of neighborhood police. Instead, I supported changes in the City's licensing rules so that night clubs that fail to keep the peace have to pay for additional police officers out of their own funds.

4. Community Meeting

Several Providence neighborhoods (including Elmwood and West Broadway) have organized successful neighborhood watch groups. These groups develop working relationships with the police to respond to actual crimes and to investigate potential crimes. In these neighborhoods, crime watch groups have helped to reduce crime and increase a neighborhood's sense of security. With the increased awareness and concern about crime that we have seen in our neighborhood, I would like to invite you to consider the benefits of forming one or more crime watch groups on the East Side. I have invited Lieutenant Ryan and Captain Stamatakos of the Providence Police Department to join me at a community meeting to discuss ways for concerned neighbors on the East Side to form a crime watch group. The meeting will take place on **Wednesday, May 21 at 6:00 p.m. at the Nathan Bishop Middle School cafeteria**. You are invited to attend.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Samuel D. Junior". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'S' and 'J'.