

Thursday » September
13 » 2007

Revitalization called key to cutting crime

More police is not the solution, says survey

Sarah Chapman

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As the city prepares to send another 35 police and bylaw officers onto inner-city streets, community leaders and experts say revitalization is more important than added law enforcement.

Results of a survey released Wednesday show that Ramsay and Inglewood residents believe rejuvenation is key to improving their communities.

The survey of a small number of residents in the two communities was done in May 2006, and its results contained in a report done by Community Life Improvement Council, a group dedicated to reducing crime in the core.

The report was done in conjunction with urban planning firm Lyons, Venini and Associates Ltd.

According to the report, 82 per cent of residents in the up-and-coming neighbourhoods on the city's east side said they don't feel unsafe in their community.

A majority of those people, according to the report, believe revitalization is the key to reducing crime.

Only six per cent believed adding more police is the answer to improving community safety.

Marilyn Arber, executive director of the Community Life Improvement Council, said she believes an additional 25 bylaw officers, also referred to as community support officers, will make a "huge" difference in the inner city.

Arber pointed out, however, that despite a spike in crime in the downtown and neighbouring communities last month, the crime rate is declining.

"When something negative is reported or occurs, that's what stays in your mind -- not all the positive things that are happening around or arising from it to try to correct it," she said.

"It's not an easy fix," admitted Insp. Bob Ritchie of the Calgary Police Service at the Wednesday news conference releasing the Safe Streets -- Safe City reports on Inglewood and Ramsay.

"Putting an officer on every corner might have a very strong visible presence, but it might not address that perception of safety," Ritchie said.

"It's a long-term combination of an increased uniformed presence and successful conclusion of cases."

Ritchie said crime downtown may affect the public perception of safety because it affects residents and commuters, as well those heading to the core for entertainment.

Inglewood Community Association president Gian-Carlo Carra said affordability is a bigger concern than crime.

"We need a place where the full range of society can live shoulder-to-shoulder in a sustainable way."

Carra said the community wants to address the broader social issues, including homelessness.

"You need to have a community that takes personal responsibility for issues of social order and policing itself."

The report made recommendations to establish community safety councils in both Inglewood and Ramsay and to create community support officer patrols.

Increased pathway security, increased patrols of the CPR land, beautification efforts and mixed use redevelopment of the Shamrock Hotel were included recommendations.

On Monday, city council approved additional officers as a way to combat crime in the core and asked staff to look into surveillance cameras.

schapman@theherald.canwest.com

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