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TO: The Honorable Detroit City Council

FROM: David Whitaker, Director 
Legislative Policy Division Staff

DATE: October 15, 2024

RE: MICRO-POLICING AND ITS USE IN SENIOR BUILDINGS

Council Member Coleman A. Young II, requested the Legislative Policy Division (LPD) provide a report on Micro Policing and its use in senior buildings in Detroit. Please accept the following as our response.

Micro Policing is a community policing strategy in which law enforcement monitors special areas where data shows the majority of crimes occur as compared to other areas. Targeted criminal activities in a designated area can range from property crimes like car break-ins to more violence crimes like shootings, and robberies. These areas identified for heightened police efforts are sometimes referred to as “Micro Places” or “Hot Spots”.

Community policing strategies go back decades, and many experts believe these concepts are ripe for reintroduction. Increasingly, this is being done in communities to combat gun violence which spiked during the pandemic and other forms of crime that plague our urban areas. According to David Weisburd, a criminologist at George Mason University, there have been a large number of studies suggesting hotspot policing is effective.¹

One very important piece of community policing is the development of a partnership between the community and law enforcement, which does not amount to a police deployment and occupation. There should be additional training for police officers and ideally the police assigned to such activities should

¹ Hotspot Policing Can Be Effective, But Needs Changes | TIME

have familiarity with the community and its residents.

Denver, Colorado

The Denver Police Department announced a program in May 2021 to identify “hot spots” in the city where most of the shootings were being reported. The five hotspots identified by Denver police covered a very small portion of the city but made up a quarter of the violence reported in Denver in 2020. The Denver program involved more patrols by officers, including cops “walking the beat” and attempting to build relationships with residents in the area. One year later, violence was reduced at three out of five of the hotspot zones.²

Seattle, Washington

In 2014, Micro Community Policing Plans (MCPPs) were introduced in Seattle. The MCPPs were implemented in 2015 when 59 micro communities were identified and determined based on conversations between Seattle precinct command, community groups, and focus groups of community members using survey data and pre-existing geographic boundaries. Annually, Seattle University conducts an independent public safety survey of each neighborhood. This captures the concerns of each neighborhood and gives the Seattle Police Department clear areas of focus. These surveys helped the precinct captains, for each of the micro communities see where there is a difference between the public’s perception of crime and the reality of the crime based upon the numbers. In the 5 years from (2015-2019), Car Prowls and the Lack of Police Capacity remained the #1 or #2 issues, citywide.³

Baltimore, Maryland

In 2019, Baltimore’s Police Commissioner, Michael Harrison announced a plan that carved out micro zones throughout the city which accounted for just five percent of the city's geography but thirty three percent of the gun violence over the previous five-year period. Under this program, patrol officers were required to spend part of their shift in micro zones, checking in on businesses and known gun offenders. The plan called for "knock and talks" with paroled gun offenders, similar to efforts known as "call-ins" with offenders. This move amounted to a more data-driven approach to when and where crimes were committed. According to Commissioner Harrison, other areas of the city were not neglected and the patrol strategy accounted for every area of the city.⁴

As stated earlier, micro-policing crime prevention strategies have been in existence for decades and it may be time for some of these programs to be reintroduced. Specifically, police mini stations, the idea of housing mini stations in senior citizen buildings, was actually discussed briefly during last year’s budget deliberations.

First introduced in the 1970’s, mini stations aimed to provide 24-hour police staffing in high-crime areas, low-income areas, and other targeted areas. But, the shifting of police officers from station to station and little use of mini stations during late night hours led to the conclusion that the original concept was not effective.⁵

² Hotspot Policing Can Be Effective, But Needs Changes | TIME

³ Micro-Community Policing Plans - Police | seattle.gov

⁴ <https://www.wbaltv.com/article/baltimore-police-commissioner-crime-plan/28433643>

⁵ Police and the Community - The Detroit Mini Station Experience | Office of Justice Programs (ojp.gov)

In the 1980's, police mini stations were staffed by trained civilian volunteers from 9am-9pm, with assigned police officers regularly contacting and dropping into the stations. Officers assigned to the mini-stations were usually familiar with the community and the residents. The goal was to bring the police presence back to the neighborhoods. The following criteria was used to prioritize and select sites for mini stations.

- Areas which house large numbers of senior citizens will receive high priority
- Areas which consistently experience a disproportionate amount of crime, specifically street crime;
- Business districts which experience undue crime victimization either to place of business or to citizens who patronize these business
- Areas housing large number of low-income persons, such as public housing projects and
- Sites which sustain high use patterns or pedestrian traffic

As stated in the “mini station handbook” “... it is deemed critical to the effectiveness of mini stations that they can be situated where substantial citizen support has been expressed and can be maintained.”⁶

Unfortunately, in today's Detroit, the 1970's description of areas where mini stations would serve the community best, now describes a large portion of our city. Areas housing a large number of low-income persons, business districts which experience undue crime victimization, and sites with high use patterns or pedestrian traffic. However, one must note, looking at the priorities used in the site selection process for mini stations, in the 1970's as it should be now, there was a clear commitment to prioritize the safety and well-being of our senior citizens.

Our senior citizen buildings and the tenants who reside in them face a myriad of challenges. Including but not limited to crime, improper building maintenance, and lack of accessibility to needed social services. LPD cannot say with any certainty that the senior citizen buildings in our city amount to the level of “hot spots” or “micro places”, this would be for the Detroit Police Department to determine. However, there is a definite need to provide some form of assistance to this vulnerable population that is both dependable and accessible.

The facilities and residents could benefit greatly from some stepped-up law enforcement presence, infrastructure improvements, increased interaction with city departments, or some combination thereof. Further, the introduction of new technological advances can assist, as they provide for advanced surveillance systems, emergency response technologies, and smart home solutions that can significantly contribute to the sense of security among the elderly. For instance, Internet of Things (IoT) enabled devices in homes or senior apartments can detect falls or unusual activity, triggering alerts to emergency services and family members.⁷

As we found from looking at other urban areas, micro policing strategies come in many different varieties. Generally, they appear to be an effective aid in the reduction of crime. However, a very important component of any community policing program is the ability of law enforcement to review the results and survey the public to determine the actual effectiveness of the program on crime statistics, the effect the program has on public interaction with law enforcement, and how it influences the public's perception on crime. Therefore, regular program review with ongoing community input should be part of any strategy.

The deployment of police personnel and introduction of public safety initiatives, falls squarely upon the shoulders of the Mayor, Detroit Police Department (DPD) and Board of Police Commissioners. We suggest this matter be taken up in upcoming budget deliberations, and at that time, DPD should be

⁶ Police and the Community - The Detroit Mini Station Experience | Office of Justice Programs (ojp.gov)

⁷ Smart Cities for Aging populations; Tailoring Technologies for Senior Friendly Urban Living, Santosh Kumar Bhoda, March 11, 2024

prepared to inform Council and the public of the department's community policing plans. If we can be of further assistance, please let us know.