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Perceptions Regarding Public Safety in Portland's King Neighborhood

Kris R. Henning

Portland State University, khenning@pdx.edu

Greg Stewart

Portland Police Bureau

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Perceptions Regarding Public Safety in Portland's King Neighborhood

Research Brief

Kris Henning, Portland State University

Greg Stewart, Portland Police Bureau



King Neighborhood, Portland Oregon

Key Findings

- Respondents to this survey demonstrated a high degree of agreement on the areas within the King neighborhood that have public safety concerns. This includes the area surrounding King School Park and the corridor surrounding NE MLK Jr. Boulevard.
- People rated guns/gun crimes and gangs as the leading concerns for the King neighborhood.
- Residents expressed a strong desire to see more foot patrols by the police, while expressing far less support for efforts aimed at enforcing juvenile curfew ordinances.
- Many respondents expressed concerns around traffic safety in the King neighborhood. There was broad support for efforts to improve street design and lighting. There was less support for increased traffic enforcement.

Introduction

The Portland Police Bureau ([PPB](#)) is partnering with Portland State University ([PSU](#)) and neighborhood groups to develop new strategies for improving police-community relations and reducing crime. Our most recent initiative seeks to provide residents with greater voice in where PPB officers work in their neighborhood and what steps the City takes there to address public safety concerns.

The [King neighborhood](#) in Northeast Portland was chosen as the starting point for this work following a recent gang related shooting at King School Park. Officers from North Precinct had already begun outreach to the community and they wanted additional input from the residents on how to best address public safety issues in the area.

In October and November (2015) all known households in the King neighborhood were mailed a letter inviting the adult occupants to participate in an online survey. The survey covered three main topics: First, residents were asked to identify their top public safety concerns and locate these concerns on a map of the King neighborhood. Second, residents were asked whether they supported or opposed various actions the city might take in responding to these issues. A third set of questions were asked to establish baseline measurements for PPB's ongoing efforts to reduce the fear of crime and improve police-community relationships.

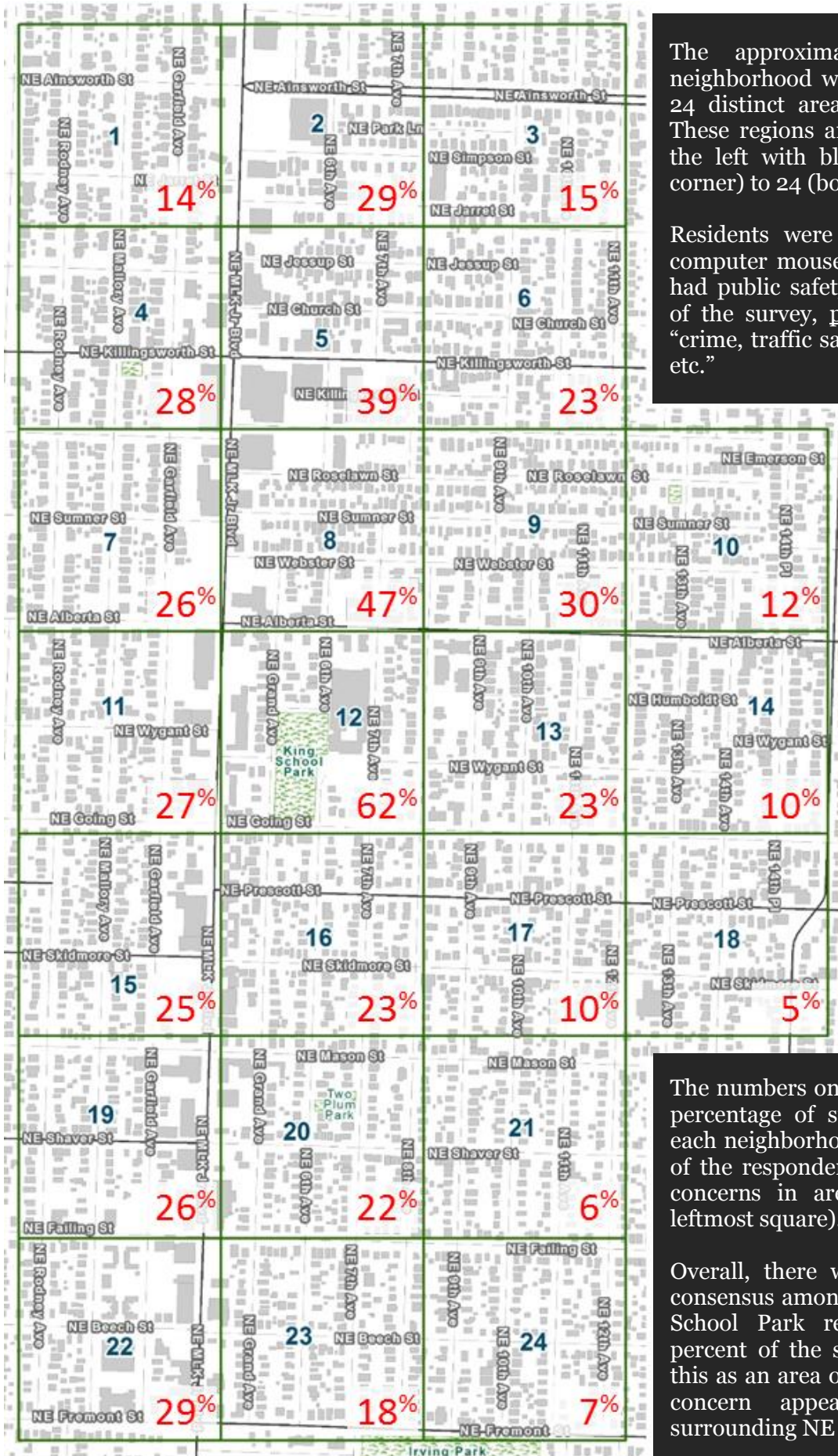
This report provides the findings from the King survey. The results will be used by PPB and other agencies to develop tailored community safety initiatives for the neighborhood.



Neighborhood Map & Areas of Concern

The approximate region of the King neighborhood was mapped and divided into 24 distinct areas that are 1,000' x 1,000'. These regions are numbered on the map to the left with blue text, from 1 (upper left corner) to 24 (bottom right).

Residents were asked to 'click' with their computer mouse all of the areas where they had public safety concerns. For the purpose of the survey, public safety was defined as "crime, traffic safety, environmental hazards, etc."



The numbers on the map in red text give the percentage of survey respondents 'clicking' each neighborhood region. For example, 14% of the respondents reported they had safety concerns in area #1 on the map (upper leftmost square).

Overall, there was a fairly high degree of consensus among citizens regarding the King School Park region (are #12). Sixty-two percent of the survey respondents reported this as an area of concern. Another region of concern appears to be the corridor surrounding NE MLK Jr. Blvd.

Public Safety Concerns & Problems Reported

Area	% Respondants Saying Area has Safety Concerns	% Respondants Selecting Area as Top 3 Concern	Five Most Common Problems Reported (# Respondants)
12	62%	50%	Guns (115); Gangs (93); Alcohol & Drugs (63); Violent Crime (53); Social Disorder (24)
8	47%	28%	Guns (43); Gangs (40); Alcohol & Drugs (29); Violent Crime (23); Social Disorder (18)
5	39%	16%	Guns (25); Alcohol & Drugs (19); Gangs (17); Physical Disorder (13); Traffic (11)
9	30%	15%	Guns (27); Gangs (18); Alcohol & Drugs (17); Violent Crime (11); Property Crime (10)
22	29%	13%	Alcohol & Drugs (17); Social Disorder (17); Property Crime (14); Gangs (9); Traffic (9)
2	29%	11%	Alcohol & Drugs (15); Guns (12); Social Disorder (12); Traffic (11); Physical Disorder (10)
4	28%	9%	Guns (13); Gangs (10); Alcohol & Drugs (9); Traffic (9); Social Disorder (7)
11	27%	7%	Gangs (11); Guns (10); Property Crime (8); Alcohol & Drugs (7); Traffic (7)
19	26%	11%	Alcohol & Drugs (16); Property Crime (12); Traffic (12); Guns (11); Physical Disorder (11)
7	26%	5%	Traffic (10); Property Crime (5); Social Disorder (5); Guns (5); Violent Crime (4)
15	25%	5%	Alcohol & Drugs (7); Property Crime (5); Social Disorder (5); Other (5); Gangs (4)
6	23%	5%	Traffic (7); Guns (6); Physical Disorder (5); Gangs (5); Violent Crime (5)
13	23%	11%	Guns (18); Alcohol & Drugs (16); Gangs (15); Property Crime (11); Social Disorder (8)
16	23%	9%	Guns (11); Traffic (11); Alcohol & Drugs (8); Gangs (8); Property Crime (6)
20	22%	11%	Property Crime (20); Traffic (14); Alcohol & Drugs (12); Social Disorder (11); Violent Crime (7)
23	18%	6%	Physical Disorder (11); Alcohol & Drugs (8); Traffic (8); Social Disorder (6); Property Crime (5)
3	15%	3%	Property Crime (6); Alcohol & Drugs (4); Traffic (4); Violent Crime (3); Guns (3)
1	14%	1%	Gangs (3); Property Crime (2); Guns (2); Alcohol & Drugs (1); Physical Disorder (1)
10	12%	4%	Guns (5); Violent Crime (5); Social Disorder (4); Gangs (4); Traffic (4)
14	10%	2%	Social Disorder (3); Property Crime (2); Traffic (2); Guns (1); Other (2)
17	10%	3%	Traffic (8); Other (3); Property Crime (1); Social Disorder (1); Physical Disorder (1)
24	7%	2%	Property Crime (3); Physical Disorder (3); Traffic (3); Alcohol & Drugs (1); Social Disorder (1)
21	6%	1%	Traffic (3); Property Crime (2); Physical Disorder (2); Alcohol & Drugs (1); Social Disorder (1)
18	5%	2%	Traffic (3); Violent Crime (2); Guns (2); Property Crime (1); Gangs (1)
All Areas Combined			Guns (326); Gangs (267); Alcohol & Drugs (257); Traffic (190); Violent Crime (172)

In addition to reporting all areas of public safety concern (the ‘clicking’ referred to previously), residents were asked to identify up to three regions on the map that were of greatest concern (see third column in table above). For each of these areas residents could then identify up to three specific problems (e.g., guns, gangs, violent crime, traffic offenses, environmental hazards).

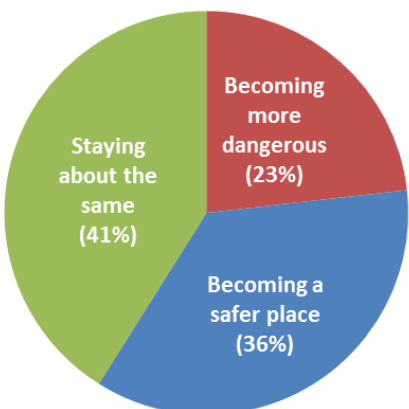
Region #12 on the map (i.e., King School Park) was identified as a concern by 62% of residents and it was also listed as a “top 3” pick by one-half (50%) of the survey respondents. The specific concerns residents listed for this region included: Guns (115 residents indicated this as a concern), gangs (93), alcohol & drugs (63), and violent crime (53).

Region #8 on the map directly north of area #12 was selected as an area of concern by 47% of residents, and was selected as a “top 3” pick by one-quarter (28%) of the respondents. The specific concerns listed for this region included: Guns (43), gangs (40), alcohol & drugs (29), and violent crime (23).

Looking at the neighborhood as a whole, residents selected guns as the #1 public safety concern followed by gangs, alcohol & drugs, and traffic offenses.

Perceived Safety in King Neighborhood

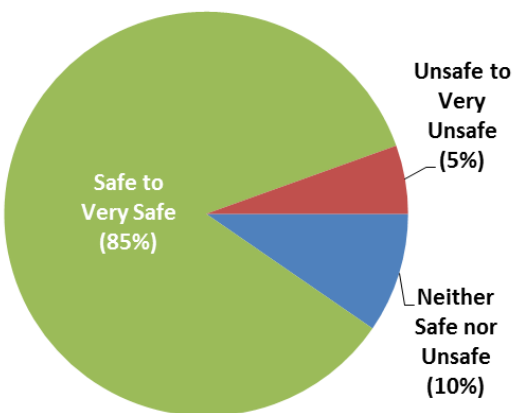
Perceived Safety in the Neighborhood Over time



The survey distributed to King households asked several questions about perceived safety. Public perceptions about safety may be just as important as actual criminal events in that excess fear can result in residents withdrawing from community life and the deterioration of neighborhood businesses. Hence, the PPB's stated mission is to, "reduce crime and the fear of crime."

Despite several recent high profile offenses, most respondents felt that public safety in the King neighborhood was either staying about the same (41%) or the area was actually becoming safer (36%). The remaining residents, nearly one-quarter of respondents (23%), felt the area was becoming a more dangerous place to live.

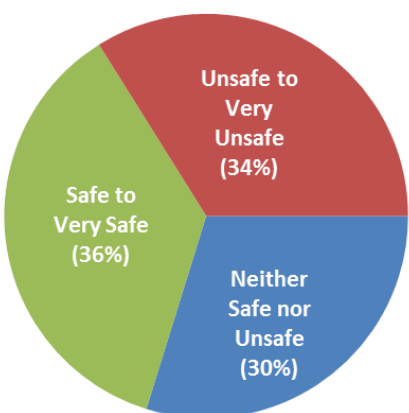
Perceived Safety Walking Alone: Daytime



The vast majority of respondents (85%) felt "safe" or "very safe" walking alone in the King neighborhood during the daytime. Unfortunately, not everyone felt safe at this time of day: 5% of respondents felt unsafe (5%) and 10% felt "neither safe nor unsafe".

Perceptions of safety during the daytime also varied to some degree by age. People age 45 and older felt less safe than people under age 45. No other demographic differences were found in perceived daytime safety when race/ethnicity, gender, or parental status were considered.

Perceived Safety Walking Alone: Nighttime



Perceived safety while walking alone was considerably lower for nighttime hours. Whereas 85% of the respondents felt "safe" to "very safe" during the day, only 36% felt this way about walking at night. The percentage of people feeling "unsafe" to "very unsafe" walking alone at night (34%) actually exceeded the percent of people who answered "neither safe nor unsafe" (30%).

Age did not make any difference in perceived safety at night, but gender did. Women reported feeling significantly less safe than men. Race/ethnicity and parental status were not associated with any differences in perceived safety.

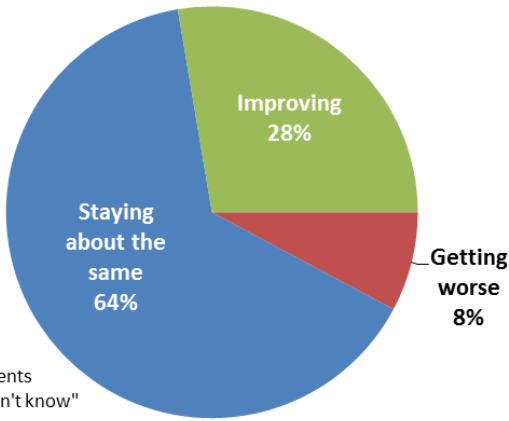
Taken together, these findings indicate that a fairly high proportion of residents in King perceive that their neighborhood is unsafe. Almost half of the respondents (41%) believed the area was becoming more dangerous and/or they felt unsafe walking alone, particularly at night. Tailored efforts to address these concerns are clearly warranted, above and beyond efforts to directly prevent criminal activity.

Residents' Perceptions About Portland Police

	% Don't Know	% Agree*
The police make decisions that are right for the King neighborhood.....	46%	62%
I have confidence in Portland's police.....	15%	66%
The police treat people in the King neighborhood with respect.....	39%	76%
The police are working to build trust with residents in King.....	47%	72%
The police are addressing problems that concern residents in King.....	44%	56%

*Combines "agree" and "strongly agree". Excludes people answering "don't know"

Communication Between PPB & King Residents

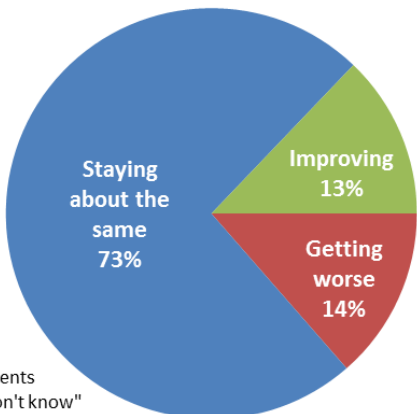


Excludes residents answering "don't know"

Several questions in the survey explored residents' opinions about the PPB. These questions help us evaluate the current relationship between the police and King's residents, as well as track changes in the relationship over time.

One of our first findings is that many residents appear to be unaware of PPB's activities in the King neighborhood. Participants were given the opportunity to "opt out" of the questions if they did not know enough to answer and this occurred much more frequently than we expected. For example, 47% of the respondents answered "don't know" when asked whether they agree or disagree that, the police are working to build trust with residents in King. Similarly, 51% of respondents answered "don't know" when asked if communication and trust between the PPB and King residents was getting better or worse.

Trust Between PPB & King Residents



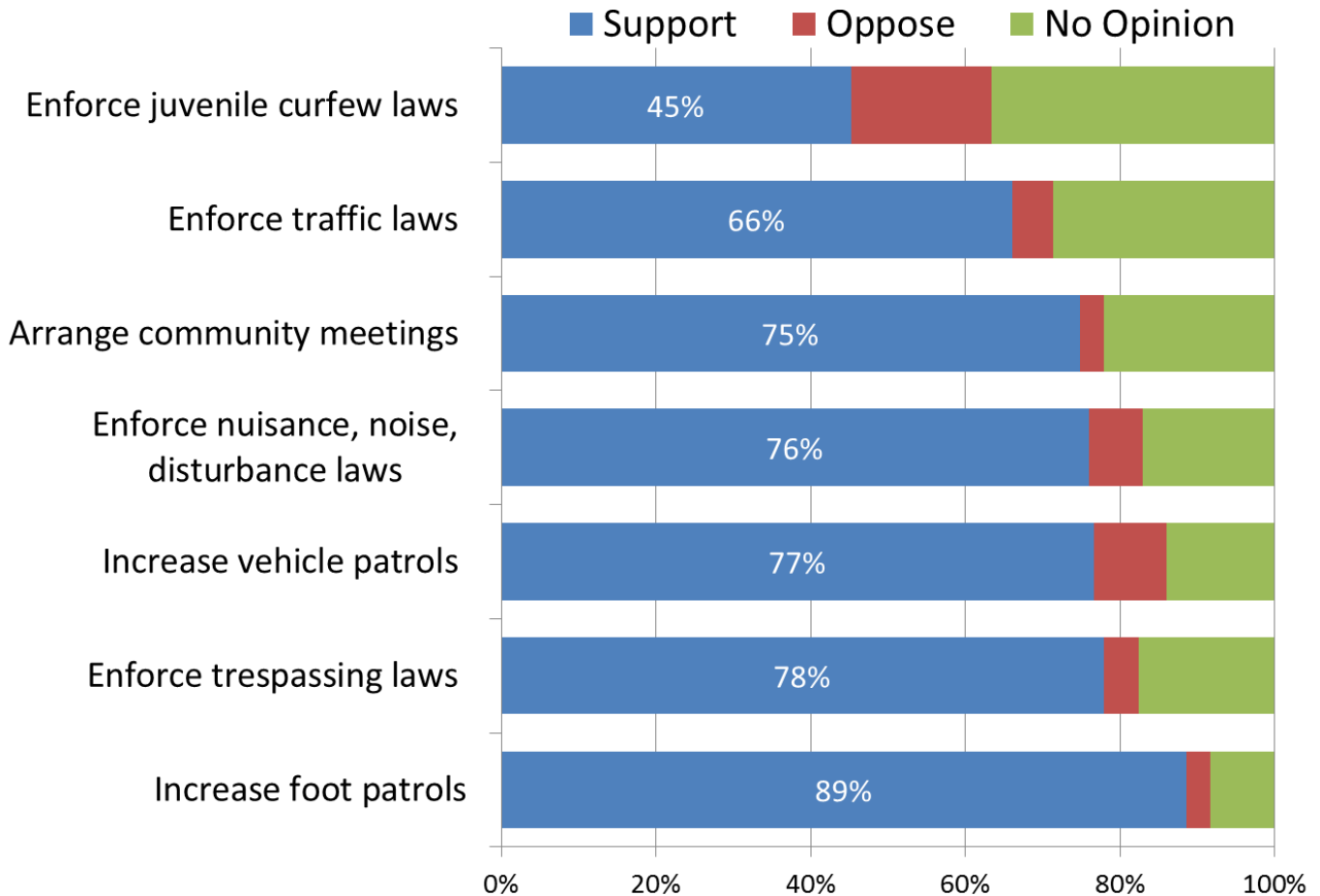
Excludes residents answering "don't know"

Looking at just the residents who felt informed enough to answer these questions, 62% believe that police make decisions that are "right" for their neighborhood, 66% reported confidence in the Portland police, 72% think the police are working with residents to build trust, and 76% believe the police treat people in the King neighborhood with respect. Fewer people (56%) reported that the police are addressing problems that concern residents in King.

Among those residents expressing an opinion, only one quarter (28%) believed that communication was improving between police and residents in King. Similarly, just one in ten (13%) respondents perceived that trust between King's residents and the police was improving.

Our findings regarding public attitudes about the PPB and law enforcement point to the need for policing strategies to improve communication and build trust with residents in the King neighborhood.

Policing Strategies to Address Public Safety



Respondents were asked whether they supported or opposed seven distinct police activities that might be used to address public safety in the King neighborhood. Use of strategies that are supported by a large proportion of residents may increase the perceived legitimacy of PPB's crime prevention efforts.

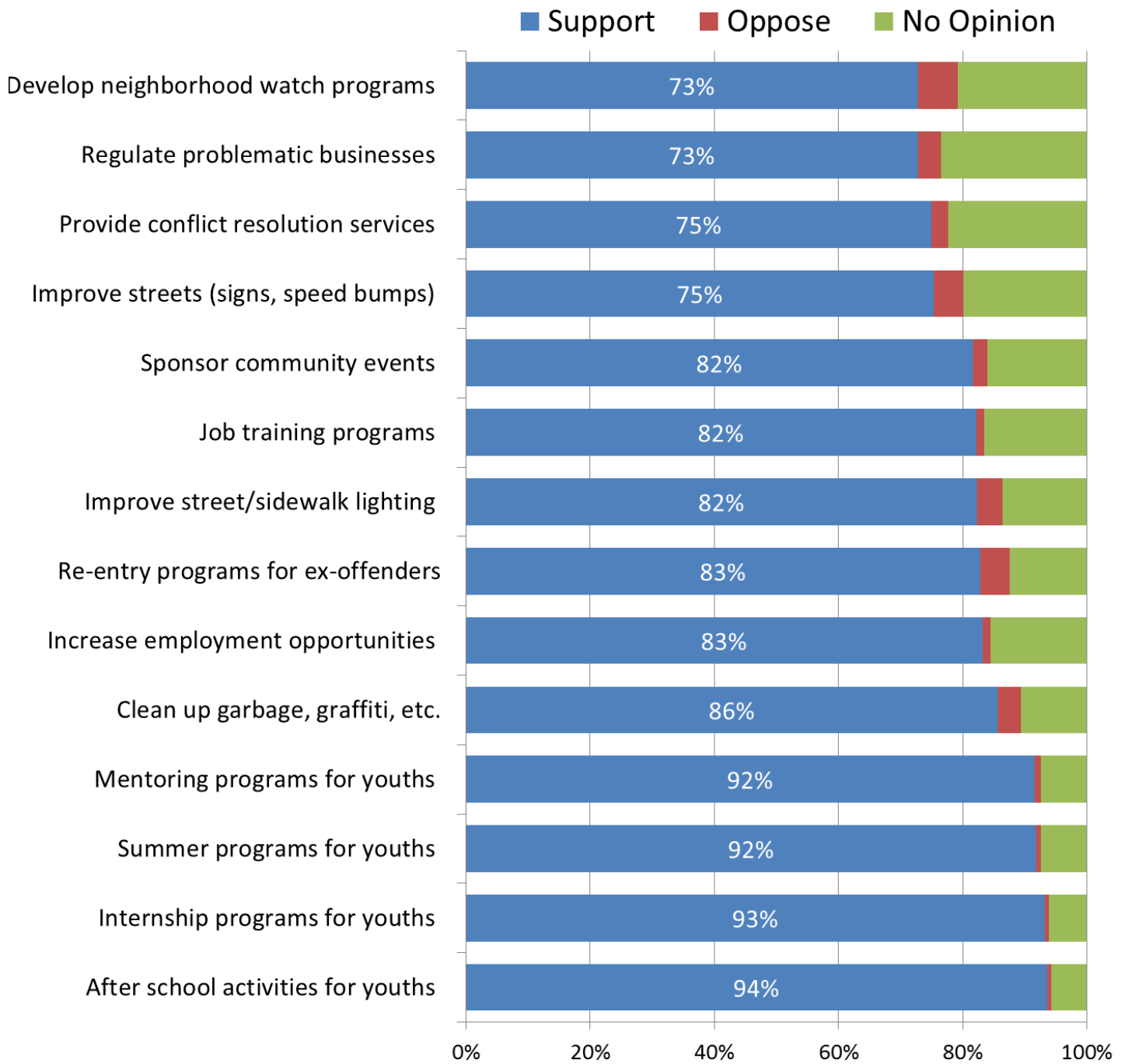
The policing practice that residents endorsed in greatest numbers was foot patrols. Nine out of 10 people supported increasing this practice (89%) and just 3% of respondents opposed this measure. Support for foot patrols appears to be driven in part by the belief that they will increase positive interactions between police officers and residents in the area. One person wrote on the survey: "Seeing police walking their beat, talking with residents, and establishing relationships is absolutely the best thing they could do."

Another police action supported by three-fourths of the survey respondents was enforcing trespassing laws along with nuisance, noise, and disturbance laws. Comments on the survey suggest that these efforts are needed to address social and physical disorder in the area including garbage, noise, illegal camping, drug dealing/use, and abandoned or illegally parked vehicles. The complex factors contributing to some of these problems (e.g., homelessness, mental illness, addiction) make it unlikely that policing strategies alone will be sufficient when developing a response. Broader coordination and effort by a wide range of governmental and community organizations is required.

Other strategies suggested for improving public safety included the use of cameras (one respondent offered the use of his/her property for a police camera to observe drug deals), automated license plate readers to deter drive-by shootings, and undercover drug stings.

Finally, traffic enforcement received the second lowest level of support (66%), but traffic safety was among the most frequently cited concerns in open-ended survey prompts. This included poorly designed intersections, inadequate cross-walks and dangerous driving/biking behavior. Residents appear to prefer alternative strategies for dealing with these concerns (e.g., speed bumps, improved lighting, street design).

Other Strategies to Address Public Safety Problems



Alternative strategies for improving public safety were also covered in the survey. Many of these approaches expand responsibility for community safety beyond law enforcement's direct control. The police may still play an important role, however, in coordinating some of these activities with other governmental agencies and community organizations.

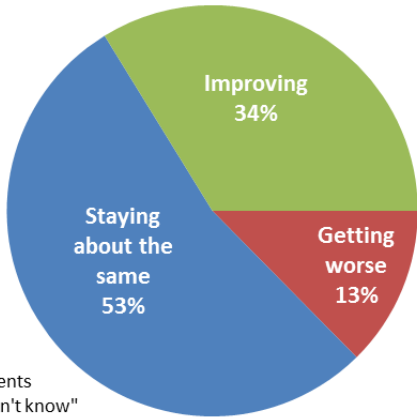
For example, respondents were extremely supportive of efforts that focus on youths (e.g., internships, mentoring, summer programs, after school activities). The PPB has previously partnered with the [Blazer's Boys and Girls Club](#) and they may want to expand this partnership to increase opportunities for youth from the King neighborhood. Likewise, the City of Portland has several youth programs such as [Teen Force](#) which is offered at the nearby Matt Dishman Community Center. PPB officers could facilitate referrals to the programs at this center.

Collective Efficacy Among King Residents

	% Don't Know	
	Know	% Agree*
Residents in King are willing to help each other.....	7%	91%
Residents in King can be trusted.....	12%	88%
Residents in King share the same values.....	24%	55%

*Combines "agree" and "strongly agree". Excludes people answering "don't know"

Relationships Between Residents in King



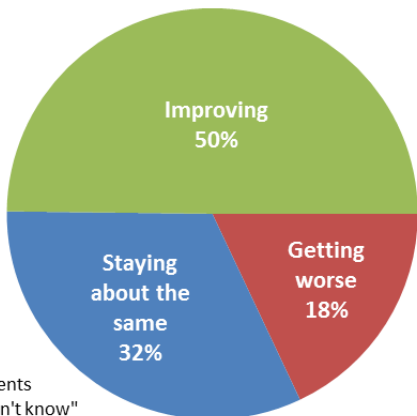
Excludes residents answering "don't know"

Public safety is greatly enhanced when neighbors look out for one another, intervene early to address problems, and share the same values. This is often referred to as “collective efficacy”, an additional topic we addressed in our survey.

Residents in King demonstrated high levels of trust in their neighbors (88% agreement) and a willingness to help each other (91%). Interestingly, there was greater uncertainty (24% “don’t know”) and less agreement (55%) that residents in King share the same values. The latter may reflect changes in the demographic composition of the King neighborhood as a result of recent gentrification. Between 2000 and 2010 the number of households in King with children under age 18 decreased 27% and Whites went from being 40% of the population to being 65% ([PSU Population Research Center](#)).

Despite possible concerns about shared values, we found that most of the survey respondents (87%) felt that relationships between residents in King were either improving or staying about the same. Only one in 10 (13%) thought that relationships were deteriorating.

The Overall Quality of Life in King



Excludes residents answering "don't know"

Likewise, the majority of respondents (82%) thought that the overall quality of life in the King neighborhood was stable or improving. Only one in five (18%) believed that quality of life was getting worse.

Based on these findings we believe there is currently a high degree of collective efficacy in the King neighborhood. Most neighbors trust one another, are willing to help each other out when needed, and most feel the neighborhood is stable or improving. This increases the likelihood that residents as a whole or subgroups within the community are ready to take an active role in partnering with the police to address public safety concerns in the neighborhood. Expanding neighborhood watch program may be a good place to start and will allow the PPB to leverage the Office of Neighborhood Involvement’s Crime Prevention Specialists.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this survey the following options may help support improved safety and livability in the King neighborhood:

1. Areas 12 (King School Park), 8, and 5 on our map generated the most complaints with regard to public safety. Gun crimes and gang activity at these locations are of particular concern. Additional research should be conducted in these areas to identify unique features that may be contributing to heightened public concern (e.g., CPTED analysis).
2. Respondents expressed strong support for increased **police foot patrols** in the neighborhood as well as more interaction with police. Research finds that geographically focused foot patrols are associated with reductions in crime and that community policing more broadly is associated with decreased fear of crime. As such, the PPB should consider expanding foot patrols in select areas of the neighborhood. Appropriate areas of focus for these patrols include the space in and around King School Park and the N.E. Martin Luther King Boulevard that borders areas 12, 8, and 5.
3. Perceived safety was considerably lower at night and may be more generalized throughout the neighborhood. One approach that is often used to address nighttime problems is youth curfews. This practice did not receive much support among King residents, however, suggesting that alternative strategies need to be considered. Due to the more generalized nature of the safety concerns at night, it may be efficient to increase vehicle patrols in the neighborhood after dark. These would both be more visible and allow for officers to cover greater territory.
4. Law enforcement efforts to address gangs and gun crimes in the King neighborhood may result in increased encounters between police and younger male residents. These actions are more likely to be perceived by the community as legitimate if they are effectively coordinated between North Precinct, the Tactical Operations Division (the Gang Unit) and community groups in the area such as 11:45 (a group of religious leaders committed to addressing gang violence). North Precinct should reach out to these potential partners as soon as possible for assistance in generating new strategies.
5. We found support for community safety initiatives that expand involvement beyond law enforcement, particularly for programs that focus on juveniles. Governmental organizations like the Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) and Multnomah County Community Corrections should be asked to explore new initiatives for the King neighborhood (e.g., trash/graffiti removal, offender re-entry services, job training etc.). Likewise, PPB and the city should expand partnerships in the King neighborhood with churches, mental health organizations, youth service providers.
6. Residents expressed considerable concern about traffic safety in the neighborhood; however there was only moderate support for addressing these threats through strict traffic enforcement. People were more supportive of efforts to regulate traffic flow (e.g., signs, cross-walks, speed bumps) and improve visibility. The PPB should advocate for such improvements and provide the City with additional data about high risk locations.
7. Respondents to the current survey were given the opportunity to provide an email address for follow-up communications. The PPB could use this list and similar resources to inform residents about: (a) the results of this survey, (b) opportunities for providing additional input (e.g., community meetings, precinct contacts), and (c) how the PPB is using the information to develop tailored public safety strategies for the neighborhood. Enhanced communication with residents may help to improve residents' trust in law enforcement and increase community participation in public safety efforts.
8. While racial/ethnic minorities make up one quarter to one-half of the residents in King, very few completed the present survey. Given the focus of improving police relationships with marginalized communities, the under-representation of minorities in our sample is concerning. Future attempts at surveying neighborhoods must find ways to improve the representation of communities of color.

Survey Methodology & Sample Characteristics

PPB analysts (Sean Sothern & Christian Peterson) used city databases to identify 2,546 distinct household addresses in the King neighborhood. They mailed each household a letter from PPB Commander Chris Uehara (October & November, 2015). The letter explained the purpose of the project (i.e., “learn more about public safety in the King neighborhood”) and requested that all adult occupants complete an anonymous online survey. People attending community meetings with PPB were also asked to take the survey and at least one person posted the survey link on NextDoor.com.

Data for the present report were downloaded from the survey site in early December. A total of 299 usable surveys were available at that time. Unfortunately it is impossible to accurately determine the response rate for the survey because we do not know the true number of people who read the mailed invitation or heard about the survey through other means.

We do know that our sample (299) represents a small proportion of the estimated 5,019 adults living in the King neighborhood. We also know that the sample is not representative of all residents in King. Whites, those 35 to 54 years of age and people with children were over-represented in the sample compared to the 2010 Census figures (see table below).

Population data for the table below was obtained from PSU’s [Population Research Center](#). For more information about the methodology used in this study please contact Dr. Kris Henning at Portland State University, (khenning@pdx.edu).

Demographics		% Survey	
		Respondants	% 2010 Census*
Gender	Male	43.0%	47.3%
	Female	57.0%	52.7%
Age	18 to 24	0.7%	11.1%
	25 to 34	26.5%	34.4%
	35 to 44	41.9%	23.6%
	45 to 54	17.5%	12.9%
	55 to 64	8.9%	9.8%
	65 or older	4.5%	8.2%
Race	White	89.4%	65.1%
	Black/AA	1.8%	29.0%
	Indian/Native Am.	0.4%	2.9%
	Asian/Pacific Isl.	1.8%	3.6%
	Other	6.7%	5.6%
Ethnicity	Hispanic	8.4%	10.7%
	Non-Hispanic	91.6%	89.3%
Children	Yes (< age 18)	39.4%	22.2%
	No	60.6%	77.8%

* Race & ethnicity based on all ages, not just adults.



Acknowledgements

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Portland SPI Team

Portland Police Bureau
Greg Stewart
Christian Peterson
Sean Sothern
Portland State University
Kris Henning
Kimberly Kahn
Yves Labissiere
Brian Renauer
Consultant
Renee Mitchell

**For Additional Data
and Maps on Crime in
Portland Visit:**

<http://www.pdx.edu/crime-data>