

POLICE PROTECTION

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Police protection services in the study area are provided by the Seattle Police Department's (SPD) West Precinct west of Interstate 5 and the East Precinct east of Interstate 5. The study area is located within five patrol district beats. Approximately 40 to 45 officers are allocated to serve the study area vicinity. This estimate of staffing is based on the call volumes served in the study area, and includes bicycle officers, community police team, anti-crime team and 9-1-1 response staff. This number may vary at any given time depending on call patterns and personnel-related issues (Quinn, SPD, 2007).

SPD does not have an official level-of-service policy for officers-per-thousand population. The current citywide ratio is approximately 2.2 officers per thousand population. SPD evaluates service coverage based on three elements: maintaining a seven-minute average emergency response standard; increasing the amount of time patrols engage in proactive work on issues that generate repeated calls for service; and having ten cars free citywide (two per precinct) at any time for proactive work and backup response. The average response time for emergency service calls citywide varies throughout the day and week and by precinct, but on average is approximately six minutes. For many emergency situations, officers often arrive in less than five minutes.

SPD's "Neighborhood Policing Staffing Plan, 2008-2012" provides an overview of call frequency, variability in call volumes throughout the day and week, and geographic differences in demands for service among the five precincts. Calls are highest during the daytime hours. The staffing plan describes why additional officers are needed so that calls for service can be handled more effectively and additional time can be spent on "proactive" crime prevention activities. The department's proposal also includes adjusting patrol beat geography across the city to even out workload in precincts, revising patrol deployments, and adding 105 new patrol officer positions (154 since 2005). If this occurs, authorized patrol strength will increase by approximately 25% over 2005 levels.

Data analysis by SPD indicates that the department annually received approximately 32,000-34,000 dispatched calls for service in the Livable South Downtown study area over each of the past six years (Adams, SPD, 2007). The trend in call volume in this area has been stable for the past six years, but volumes during this time were somewhat higher than experienced in the late 1990s. Projected trends are for an increase in call volumes over the next few years (Adams, SPD, 2007). Narcotics-related calls are the most common type of call received, with theft, assault and auto theft also common incidents reported.

Community representatives have identified public safety as a key priority to improve the neighborhoods' quality of life. In Pioneer Square, this particularly relates to maintaining orderly and civil on-street behavior throughout the day and night, including addressing public drug use and dealing, and public inebriation (Montgomery, 2007). In Chinatown/I.D. the representatives' key priorities for public safety are similar to those for Pioneer Square, also with an interest in improving lighting in targeted low-lit areas where late-night drinking, prostitution and drug dealing activity occurs (Kurimura, Im, 2007). Criminal activity in the Hing Hay Park vicinity is also a concern. Community stakeholders also have identified the division of precincts on either side of Interstate 5 as a factor that decreases the perceived coordination and effectiveness of police protection in the Chinatown/I.D. neighborhood (Johnson, Im, 2007).

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Future projected population and employment growth in the study area, with or without zoning changes, will gradually increase the demands for police protection over time. Compared to existing zoning, Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 would increase the probable density of employment and residential presence. This would likely increase the overall volume of calls for service and need for proactive police work as additional growth occurs in the area. An increasing residential presence would likely increase call volumes related to domestic disputes, burglaries, vandalism and auto theft. Commercial uses would likely increase call volumes related to crimes such as shoplifting, robbery and graffiti.

This programmatic EIS does not predict growth-related increases in call volumes, or a potential demand for additional police officers. SPD does not rely on these kinds of formulas, and they may not be accurate or representative of future call volumes or needs for proactive work (Quinn, SPD, 2007). Experience suggests that common unlawful activity in these neighborhoods—loitering, drug dealing, public inebriation and disorderly conduct—arise due to a combination of “environmental” factors rather than the number of residents or employees in the neighborhood. An example of an “environmental” factor is a combination of vacant and low-lit areas in proximity to establishments selling alcohol. To the extent that residential uses fill in vacant areas over time, increase lighting, put more pedestrians and “eyes on the street”, and establish a more continuous pattern of street-level uses, there would be fewer dark areas where unlawful activity could occur. At the same time, an increasing presence of pedestrians and an increasing density of uses attracting night-time customers—such as restaurants and nightclubs—might also contribute to increased call volumes.

Gradual increases in call volumes would most likely cause SPD to dedicate more officer resources to respond to the range of calls generated by future growth. The overall level of police coverage would be a function of total call volumes, the frequency of overlapping emergency calls and the availability of police staffing to provide backup response as well as proactive crime prevention work. Changes that would affect shift start/end times and officer duty cycles, which determine the pattern of days on and off, are currently being considered, and any changes in these factors also would impact the availability of officers. SPD’s proposed staffing increases through 2012 should allow increased patrol strength that could address much of the potential increase in demand over the next decade (Adams, SPD, 2007). Further staffing increases over time would be dependent upon future City budgeting decisions as well as precinct commanders’ assignment of patrol officers in response to call volumes and the perceived need for proactive work.

Other activities beneficial to public safety would include: an active neighborhood/block watch program, close links between neighborhood groups and SPD Precinct commanders, continued partnership with human service providers, and a commitment to address public safety by implementing “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” (CPTED) principles. The CPTED approach would be able to address a number of the “environmental” factors noted above by minimizing the number of unsafe places in the community’s environment. These strategies would make a difference over time in improving public safety.

SPD acknowledges that public safety should be maintained through effective best practice approaches to policing that will address the specific issues relevant to the study area. Recent programs and actions undertaken by SPD in the study area include frequent and regular contact with businesses and residents throughout the area, emphasis patrols occasioned by events at Qwest Field and Exhibition Center, and a special program to address problems associated with abandoned vehicles (Quinn, SPD, 2007).

In addition to the benefits of additional residential and street-level commercial presence, Livable South Downtown planning endorses a number of measures to be undertaken to improve public safety in the

neighborhoods, including: lighting improvements in under-illuminated areas, continuation of multi-agency efforts to clean up homeless encampment areas, and redrawing precinct boundaries to include Little Saigon in the West Precinct thereby consolidating the neighborhood's police coverage. This analysis suggests that future growth would result in a combination of positive and negative influences on public safety, SPD call volumes, and needs for proactive work. The overall effect of growth trends and probable increases in calls for service would represent an adverse impact on SPD, but growth would also bring additional opportunities to improve the area's public safety.

MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Due to a lack of identified significant adverse impacts, no mitigation strategies are required. See the public safety strategies suggested in the Impact discussion above.

SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

None are identified.