

Downtown St. Louis Safety and Security

Understanding the Level of Police Presence

June 2023



About Citizens for a Greater Downtown St. Louis:

The mission of Citizens for a Greater Downtown St. Louis is to mobilize residents, businesses, property owners, developers, and anyone with a passionate interest in downtown St. Louis to advocate for effective planning and action to make downtown the premier neighborhood in the St. Louis region to live, work, and play. We advocate for changes in governance, finances, policy, and strategy as needed to make downtown better.

Our network currently consists of a diverse group of members and affiliated “friends”, representing Downtown residents, businesses, developers, and investors. Most of our members live in Downtown and the remaining members are long-term investors and property owners Downtown. We are all volunteers, and we have no consultants or employees. There are no vested interests or hidden agendas.

*While we all love our downtown and choose to live, work, and invest here, we know that there are problems that must be addressed if downtown is going to thrive. So, we often focus on calling attention to those problems. But we are not just about pointing out problems and complaining about the state of downtown. We develop and advocate for solutions. The [*Five-Point Safety Proposal*](#), developed in partnership with the Downtown Economic Development Council and the Downtown Neighborhood Association for example, addresses ongoing security issues. We have drafted city ordinances to address problems with [*surface parking lots*](#) and [*short-term rentals*](#).*

The opinions and positions of our group are developed based on our combined decades-long experience of living, working, and investing in Downtown. Our sole interest collectively and individually is in improving the neighborhood where we live, work, and invest.

Understanding the Level of Police Presence in Downtown St. Louis

I. Summary

Among the greatest concerns of people living, working, visiting, and investing in Downtown St. Louis is public safety. Over the last decade, the character of Downtown has come to be defined not by its great architecture, live sporting events, or conventions, but by a litany of headlines describing crime, violence, and disruptive behavior. To respond to those headlines, city and civic leaders have suggested several explanations: that the recent pandemic created a vacuum of empty streets and diminished law enforcement; that increases in criminal activity are not reflected in data and are only a “perception”; and, that this is a nationwide phenomenon with other cities across the country experiencing the same problems.

Some have suggested that complaints about security are a product of racism. First, the facts are undeniable; six homicides downtown in the first five months of 2023 (10 in 2022), numerous violent events, hundreds of car break-ins etc. Second, downtown residents and businesses make a choice to live or locate in a racially and culturally diverse neighborhood. That’s part of what makes Downtown special and a great place to live and work. Concerns about security are shared by neighbors of all races.

As this report shows, none of those explanations are credible or helpful. While some of our public safety problems were exacerbated by the pandemic, the trends of rising crime and disorder were present years before. And as the pandemic abated, the same trends continued. Similarly, the suggestion that it is only “perception” that Downtown has become less safe is not confirmed either by data or by the lived experience of those who spend most of their time here and witness firsthand the deterioration of our neighborhood. Lastly, the experience of other cities may be instructive, but it not universal and is not determinative of our fate in St. Louis. We know that there are strategies to address our safety and security of issues and that Downtown can be better – a lot better.

This report addresses what we believe are the false narratives that suggest either that problems are not as bad as we believe and will soon be behind us, or that we are simply the victims of changing national conditions and there is little that we can do to counter those headwinds. We examine the way that inadequate police presence may contribute to diminished public safety.

While we know that policing is not the sole answer to improve public safety, effective law enforcement plays an important role in addressing public disorder and interrupting violence. This report presents two independent assessments of the relationship between police workload and police staffing. Both assessments reach a common conclusion – that the 4th District that contains Downtown is significantly understaffed by police. In addition, our own analysis notably suggests that the downtown area is short-staffed by police.

II. Introduction

Downtown crime, violence, and disorder create bad headlines on a near daily basis. The reputational damage to the City of St. Louis (“City”), and to our neighborhood is clear, as is the trauma to the victims of crime and violence. If Downtown St. Louis is to grow and prosper it is essential that city government help create the essential conditions for economic growth to happen. One of those conditions, perhaps the most important one, is providing safety and security for residents, employees, visitors, convention-goers, and special event attendees.

To those who insist that concerns about safety downtown are overblown and just a matter of perception, just a partial list of troubling incidents in recent months include:

- 3/1/2023 - execution style homicide on Tucker Blvd. at 10am in the morning that became national news (which originated at the Tucker Shell gas station)
- 5/3/2023 - daytime homicide of a woman at the Marriott parking garage at 9th and Washington by an apparently homeless man (who later shot two others in a separate incident)
- 4/27/2023 - afternoon homicide at Kiener Plaza
- 5/21/2023 - late night homicide at a hotel north of the Horseshoe.
- 5/24/2023 - afternoon gun battle at the Tucker Shell gas station.
- 5/29/2023 - late night homicide of a homeless man on the Downtown riverfront
- 6/1/2023 - homicide at 13th and Chestnut Streets.

The list does not include less dramatic incidents, such as fights, gunfire, or disorderly conduct that often do not result in an arrest.

If that isn’t convincing enough, the recent decision by Dot Foods to move its annual meeting from St. Louis to Denver because of security concerns should set off alarm bells. This is a demonstration that the City and the region will pay a high price for continuing to dismiss the problem as “perception” or deny that there are effective responses. That price will be paid in lost conventions, lost tourism, lost business activity, lower property values, lost tax revenues etc.

What will it take to decrease the pattern of crime, violence, and their precursor behaviors that seems to keep getting worse? This report focuses on whether insufficient police presence may be a factor that contributes to the problem.

Downtown has long had a dedicated bike unit as its primary police force. This has allowed most of the more mobile 4th District officers in motor vehicles to patrol the remainder of the district, which extends far west and north (Vandeventer to the west, Grand and 70 to the north). The bike unit has long had an authorized strength of roughly 28 officers and had been close to that number in the recent past. However, based on several reports, the bike unit currently has 7 officers, only a quarter of their authorized staffing, leaving many shifts unstaffed and all shifts understaffed.

This prompts several questions: 1) why has the Downtown bike unit been so short-staffed and whether this contributes to the incidence of violent crime Downtown; and 2) whether there is a mismatch between demand for and supply of policing manpower in Downtown and the 4th District as it compares to the other five police districts (acknowledging the staffing shortages in SLMPD generally). More specifically, whether the normal justification for removing officers from Downtown, because there is a greater need in “high crime” neighborhoods is at all accurate. Based

on the analysis that follows in this report, we do not believe that justification is supported by data. Data confirm that Downtown and Downtown West are indeed uniquely high crime areas from a statistical standpoint, making decisions to divert officers from Downtown questionable.

This report presents two separate and independent analyses of crime data and police manpower:

- SLMPD data ([SLMPD NIBRS Crime Statistics](#)). This analysis considers only 2022 data and is detailed in the spreadsheet shown in Figures 2 and 3.
- A recently completed (April, 2022) study commissioned by St. Louis Mayor Jones done by the Center for Policing Equity ([policingequity.org](#)).

III. Geography of Downtown and Current Police Districts

Per US Census data Downtown and Downtown West (collectively referred to as “Downtown”) are roughly 1 mile from north to south (Chouteau to Cole) by 2 miles east to west (River to Jefferson), or right at 2.15 square miles. The entire City of St. Louis is 66 square miles. So, Downtown constitutes about 3% of the total area of the City.

There are six police districts in the City (see Figure 1). The 4th District, which contains Downtown, is about average in total area, and constitutes approximately 10.6 square miles. Downtown thus is about 20% of the land area of the 4th District.

IV. Downtown Crime Rates

Figures 2 and 3 describe Downtown crime statistics for 2022 and provide some useful comparisons with other police districts and neighborhoods.

The 4th District has, by a significant margin, the greatest level of crime of any of the six districts. 25% of all citywide crime happens in the 4th. This is almost twice as much crime as the farthest south and north districts, the 1st and 6th.

Moreover, while only being 20% of the land area of the 4th District, Downtown experiences 53% of the crime in the 4th District. And, while Downtown is only 3% of the land area of the City, it experiences 13.2% of citywide crime (including 11.6% of person crime), over 4 times the crime density of the average City neighborhood (on a geographic basis). Downtown experiences 3,808 crimes per square mile compared to a City average of 885 (and .73 crimes per resident versus .20 crimes per resident citywide, based upon a City population of 290,000).

The neighborhood that is most like Downtown is the Central West End (“CWE”), given its mixed-use nature, significant daytime population, and similar land area (2.14 square miles for Downtown vs. 1.89 for the CWE). Downtown has almost 3 times the total crime per square mile (3,808) as the CWE (1,496), as well as 3 times the crimes against persons (see Figure 3). Downtown also has over 4 times the crime per resident, .73 versus .17 crimes per resident in the CWE.

Another important comparison is between Downtown and an acknowledged high crime neighborhood. Kingsway East, in the heart of the City’s northside, led the City with 12 homicides in 2022. It is in the middle of “Hayden’s Triangle”, the high crime area that was a focus of the former Chief of Police. While Kingsway East had a higher homicide rate (12 homicides for Kingsway East vs. 12 for both Downtown and Downtown West), Downtown experienced much higher rates of crime generally, including crimes against persons. Downtown had 3,595 crimes per square mile versus 496 for Kingsway East, and .73 crimes per resident versus .24 for Kingsway East.

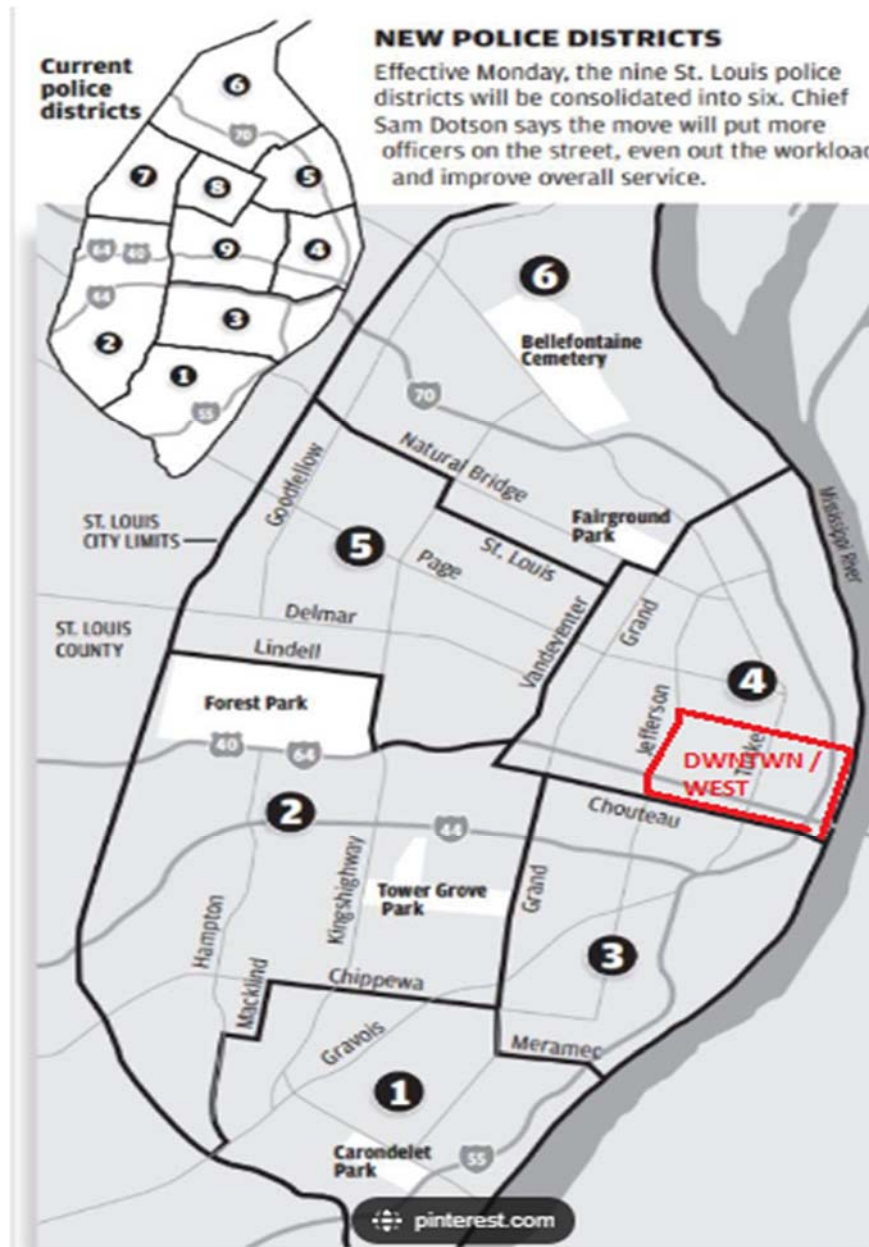


Figure 1 – City of St. Louis Police Districts

V. Our Analysis of Police Staffing Downtown

Given the above, if police resources are allocated based upon where crime is happening, Downtown should have at least 11.6% (crimes against persons rate) of patrol officers citywide. If there are roughly 400 patrol officers citywide today (See Figure 4), then Downtown should have almost 50 officers. Instead, it has 7 bike officers plus supplemental help from other 4th District officers, which are patrolling the rest of the 4th District, which (not counting Downtown), has more crime against persons (1,171) than the 1st (933), 2nd (742) and 3rd (1,095) Districts – so the officers in cruisers have their hands full without Downtown.

And it is not just Downtown that is disproportionately understaffed – it is the entire 4th District, which is a policing district largely populated by a minority population with disproportionate levels of poverty and thus greater needs for police services. Based upon information from City sponsored study from the Center for Policing Equity discussed above, there are fewer police officers assigned to the 4th District (62 of 390) than any District other than the south side 1st (59), which has barely half of the crime experienced in the 4th.

The above situation is unsustainable and seemingly unreasonable (ignoring political factors). The last two administrations have justified reduced police resources Downtown (and the largely low-income residents of the 4th District generally) based upon the narrative that “high crime” neighborhoods need to be saturated with additional police officers. However, there are no neighborhoods in the City with higher crime rates than Downtown, and it is not even close.

Moreover, the imbalance in police officer demand and supply is exacerbated by the fact that Downtown’s officers have major responsibilities for managing events (e.g., sporting events, runs, parades, protests, concerts, etc.) that police in other districts don’t have, thus depriving Downtown of police resources when events are not happening. For instance, on the day of the 4th of July parade in Downtown, typically the entire bike unit is assigned to parade duties, leaving no bike officers available to manage what is often one of the most chaotic nights Downtown, later that evening.

VI. The Center for Policing Equity Analysis of Police Staffing

In April, 2022, the Center the Policing Equity delivered a report to Mayor Jones on policing in the City¹ (policingequity.org). The focus of the report was improving equity in policing and staffing in the City. This report includes a revealing analysis of law enforcement staffing per District that results in a very similar conclusion to the foregoing analysis.

The general conclusion is that the 4th District is treated a lot like the 5th and 6th Districts, which are the two main northside (majority African American, low income) Districts that are seriously under-resourced with police officers compared to the two most affluent (majority white) Districts, the 2nd and 3rd. However, the situation in the 4th is much worse than that in the 5th and 6th Districts.

¹ Reimagining Public Safety in The City of St. Louis: *A Vision for Change*. The Center for Policing Equity. April 2022.

				SLMPD Crime Categories				Total Crime		
District	Location	Sq. Miles (Est.)	% of Sq. Miles (Est.)	Person	Property	Society	Unspec'd	Total # of Crimes	%	Crimes / Sq. Mile
1	Far south	9.2	14%	933	5,096	1,110	1,255	8,394	14%	908
2	Southwest	13.9	21%	742	6,761	492	1,171	9,166	16%	661
3	Central (SE)	9.2	14%	1,095	5,239	923	1,362	8,619	15%	933
4	Central (NE)	10.6	16%	2,055	8,249	2,028	2,142	14,474	25%	1,371
5	Northwest	10.6	16%	1,466	5,776	1,265	1,412	9,919	17%	939
6	Far north	12.5	19%	1,326	3,426	1,242	1,827	7,821	13%	624
Citywide		66.0	100%	7,617	34,547	7,060	9,169	58,393	100%	885
Downtown		1.01	1.5%	478	2,738	742	511	4,469	58%	
Downtown West		1.14	1.7%	406	2,145	380	330	3,261	42%	
Downtown/Downtown West		2.15	3.3%	884	4,883	1,122	841	7,730	100%	3,595
Comparison of Downtown / West to the Rest of the City of St. Louis										
Downtown/Downtown West		2.15	3.2%	884	4,883	1,122	841	7,730	13%	3,595
Citywide		66.00	100.0%	7,617	34,547	7,060	9,169	58,393	100%	885
% of citywide crime				11.6%	14.1%	15.9%	9.2%	13.2%		
Comparison of Downtown / West to the Rest of the 4th District										
Downtown/Downtown West		2.15	20.4%	884	4,883	1,122	841	7,730	53%	3,595
Non Downtown 4th		8.41	79.6%	1,171	3,366	906	1,301	6,744	47%	802
Downtown / West % of 4th District crime				43.0%	59.2%	55.3%	39.3%	53.4%		

Figure 2 - 2022 Downtown Crime vs. City and 4th District²

			SLMPD Crime Categories				Total Crime			
District	Sq. Miles (Est.)	Residential Population	Person	Property	Society	Unspec'd	Total # of Crimes	%	Crimes / Sq. Mile	Crimes / Resident
Comparison of Downtown / West to CWE										
Downtown/Downtown West		2.15	884	4,883	1,122	841	7,730	73%	3,595	0.73
CWE		1.89	302	2,103	173	250	2,828	27%	1,496	0.17
Comparison of Downtown / West to Kingsway East										
Downtown/Downtown West		2.15	884	4,883	1,122	841	7,730	93%	3,595	0.73
Kingsway East		0.49	115	260	106	113	594	7%	1,212	0.24

Figure 3 - 2022 Downtown Crime Neighborhood Comparison

² National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) from the Uniform Crime Reporting – Summary Reporting System. St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department. (https://www.slmpd.org/crime_stats.shtml). 2022

Figure 4 shows the CPE calculated number of patrol units by District^{3,4}. Figure 5 shows workload by District as measured by calls for service (CFS) per capita⁵. The 4th District has far and away more CFS than any other District.

Figure 6 compares demand for services to available policing resources⁶, with the 4th District having the greatest mismatch between demand and supply.

District	# Officers Allocated	# Officers in Patrol Roles	Modeled # Patrol Cars
First	72	59	42
Second	76	62	45
Third	84	69	50
Fourth	76	62	45
Fifth	83	68	49
Sixth	84	69	50
Total	475	390	281

Figure 4 - Deployed Patrol Units by District (2019)

As CPE explicitly noted:

“CPE analysis confirms this community perception and finds that response-time inequities may be driven by staffing imbalances between districts. CPE partnered with Matrix Consulting Group (Matrix) to conduct a comprehensive analysis of patrol workload and staffing in St. Louis, finding that staffing by district was not aligned with workload levels. Currently, patrol staffing is relatively equal across districts, with all districts within plus-or-minus 10% of the average staffing level. However, workload (calculated as hours needed to handle calls for service) is not equal between districts, with the highest workloads in districts 4, 5, and 6 (representing the north part of the City)”⁷

³ excludes details, detachments, long-term injury and leave, or any other reason that would take an officer away from normal patrol duties.

⁴ Ibid. p. 42

⁵ Ibid. p. 17

⁶ Ibid. p. 16

⁷ Ibid. p. 16

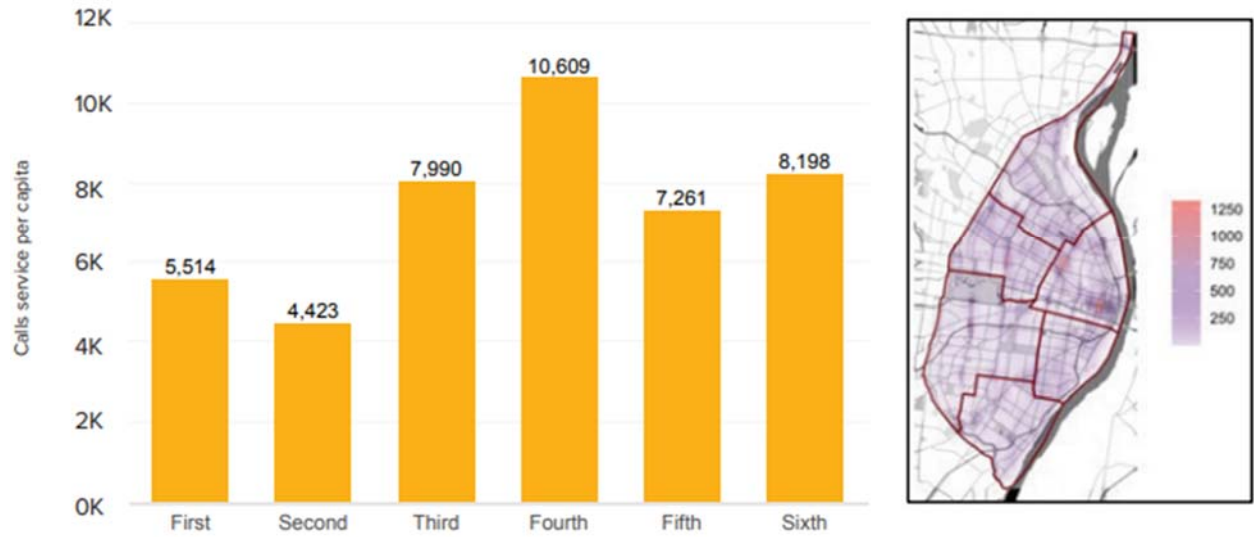


Figure 5 - Workload by District (2019)

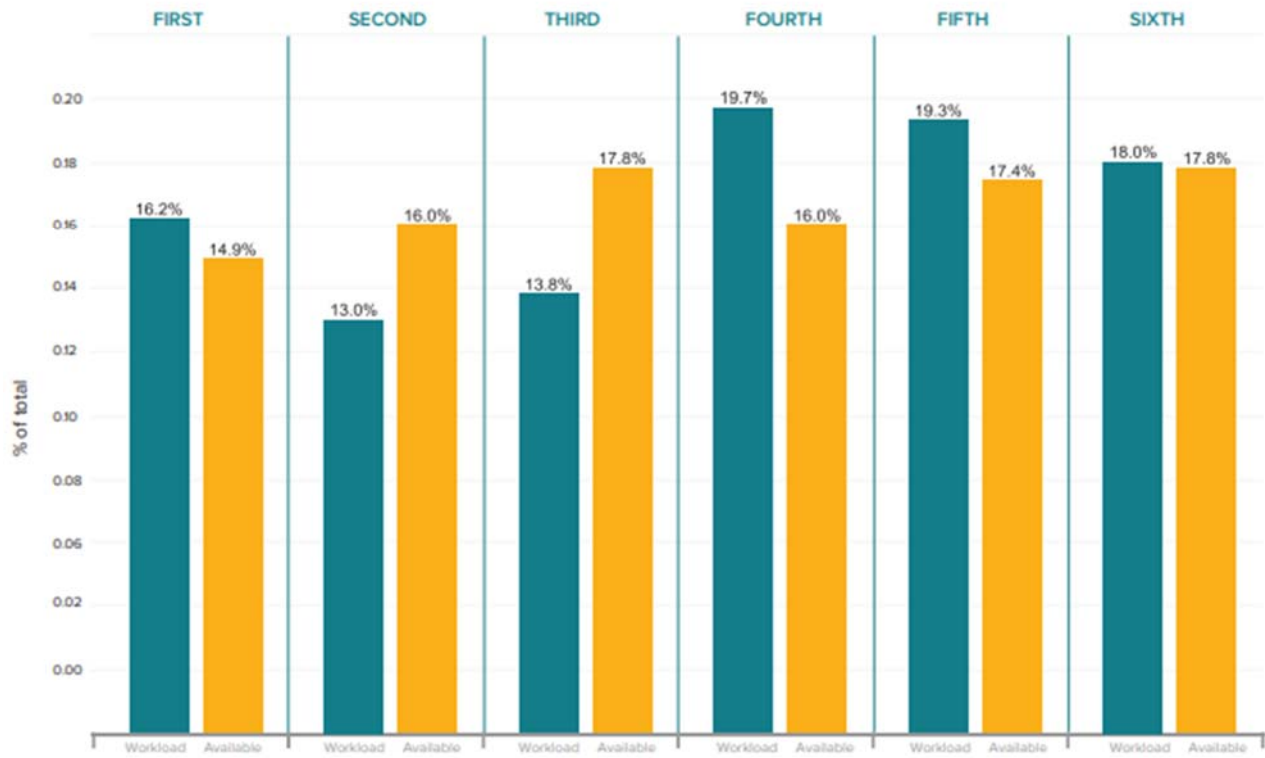


Figure 6 - Workload and Available Staffing by District (2019)

Figure 7 enumerates the available hours per District for the patrol officers to engage in proactive (self-initiated) activities⁸. The officers of the 4th District were significantly less proactive, not due to any lack of initiative or professionalism, but owing primarily to the relative demand for and supply of patrol officers. In other words, officers in the 4th District were primarily engaged in responding to calls for service, leaving little time or opportunity for proactive policing.

District	Net Available Hours	Total Workload Hours	Uncommitted Hours	% Proactive Time
First	62,778	43,484	19,294	30.7%
Second	67,263	34,997	32,265	48.0%
Third	74,736	37,100	37,637	50.4%
Fourth	67,263	52,867	14,395	21.4%
Fifth	73,242	51,919	21,322	29.1%
Sixth	74,736	48,302	26,434	35.4%
Total	420,018	268,671	151,347	36.0%

Figure 7 - Calculation of Proactive Time by District (2019)

Figure 8 represents a calculation of the adjustment in patrol officer staffing levels necessary to allow patrol officers to spend 40% of their time being proactive^{9,10}. Not surprisingly, the 4th District requires the greatest increase in staffing to meet this target.

⁸ Report on the Field Services Analysis, St. Louis, Missouri. Matrix Consulting Group. January 2022. p. 44.

⁹ Ibid. p. 49

¹⁰ As the CPE report describes: "Staffing needs can be calculated for each district based on the overall staffing analysis, which demonstrates that 438 officer positions should be assigned to regular patrol roles in order to reach the target level of 40% proactive time. If a total of 438 officers are assigned proportionally based on each district's share of 2019 workload, then each district will have approximately 40% proactive time... these figures are inclusive only of officers assigned to regular patrol roles. Current 2022 staffing figures, which were developed through an internal staffing analysis and department watch sheets, show that 380 are officers are assigned to regular patrol roles out of the 463 that are formally allocated."

District	% of Workload Hours (2019)	Req. Officers @ 40% Proactivity	+/- Officers From Current (2022)
First	16%	70	+18
Second	13%	57	-2
Third	14%	61	-7
Fourth	20%	87	+21
Fifth	19%	83	+16
Sixth	18%	78	+10
Total	100%	436	+56

Figure 8 - Calculation of District Staffing Needs

Figure 9 shows decreases over time in the 4th District in both calls for service and self-initiated incidents from 2016 to 2020 (5 years)¹¹, reflecting likely continued declines in both manpower and morale (discussed below). The situation is much worse than any other District.

In the 4th District, self-initiated incidents went from roughly 27,000 per year to 12,000 per year, a decline of almost 60%. The three southern police districts were largely stable in terms of self-initiated incidents (reflecting a static level of proactivity). The other two northern districts also showed decreases in self-initiated incidents, though not at the same level as shown in the 4th District.

The declines in calls for service shown in Figure 9, from roughly 57,000 to 40,000, might be seen as a positive sign for crime trends in the 4th District. But a review of SLMPD data strongly suggests this simply reflects a public that is discouraged to call for service because of dysfunction in the 911 system and slow or non-existent police response due to understaffing and competing priorities.

For instance, Figure 10 shows trendlines for aggravated assaults with guns (the crime hardest to ignore or obscure) in Downtown from 2008 to 2022, which is truly horrific and fully reflects the experience of those who call Downtown home and the reporting in the media.

¹¹ Ibid. p.50

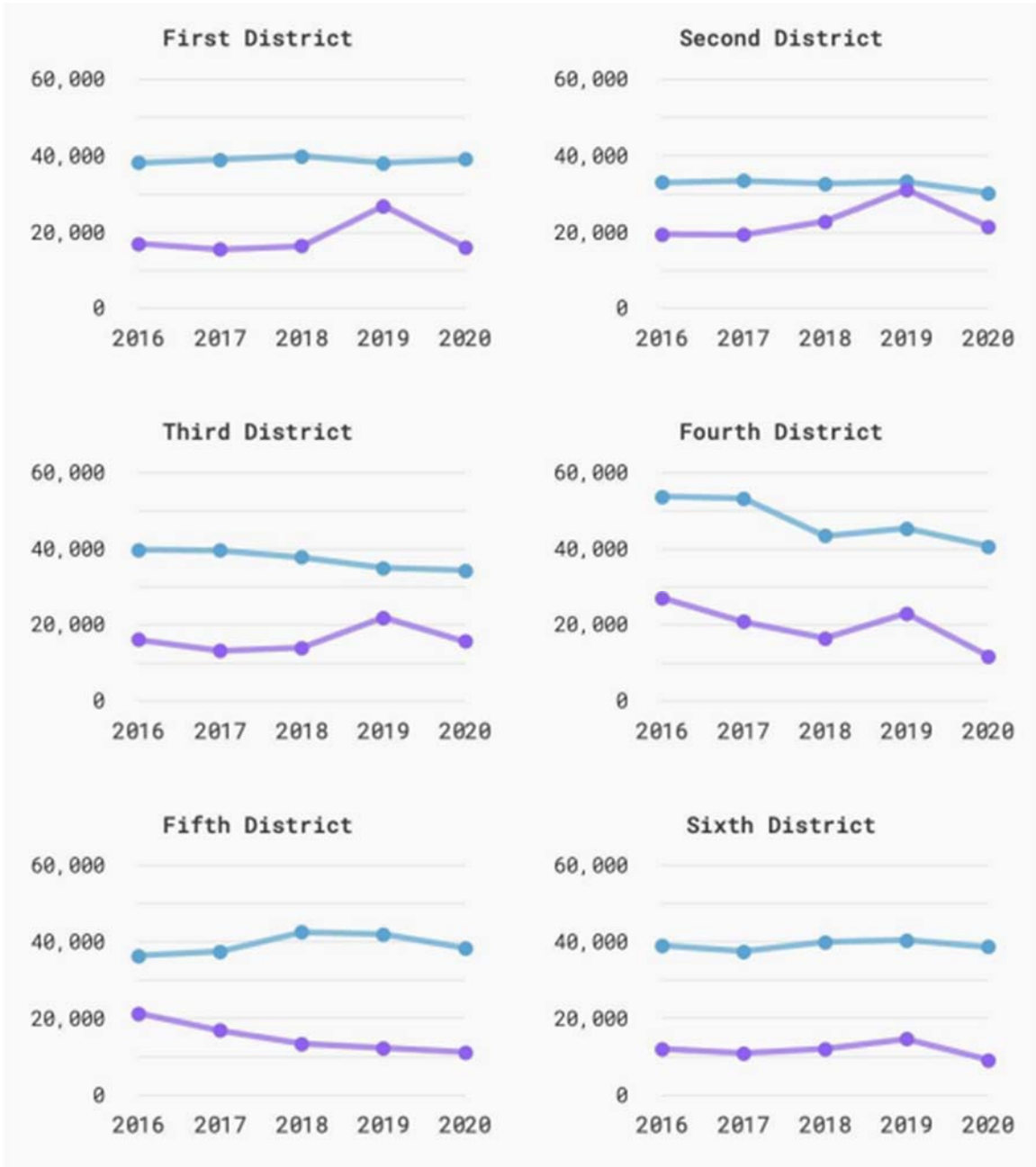


Figure 9 - Calls for Service vs. Self-Initiated Incidents by District (2016-2020)

	<i>Downtown</i>	<i>Downtown West</i>	<i>Citywide</i>
2008	26	19	2296
2009	28	23	2269
2010	29	18	2031
2011	27	12	1819
2012	58	24	1811
2013	22	41	1626
2014	31	43	1844
2015	58	32	2092
2016	45	25	2132
2017	45	62	2616
2018	53	45	2332
2019	61	46	2332
2020	101	95	2537
2021	91	46	2396
2022	102	85	2241
Increase since 2008	392%	447%	98%

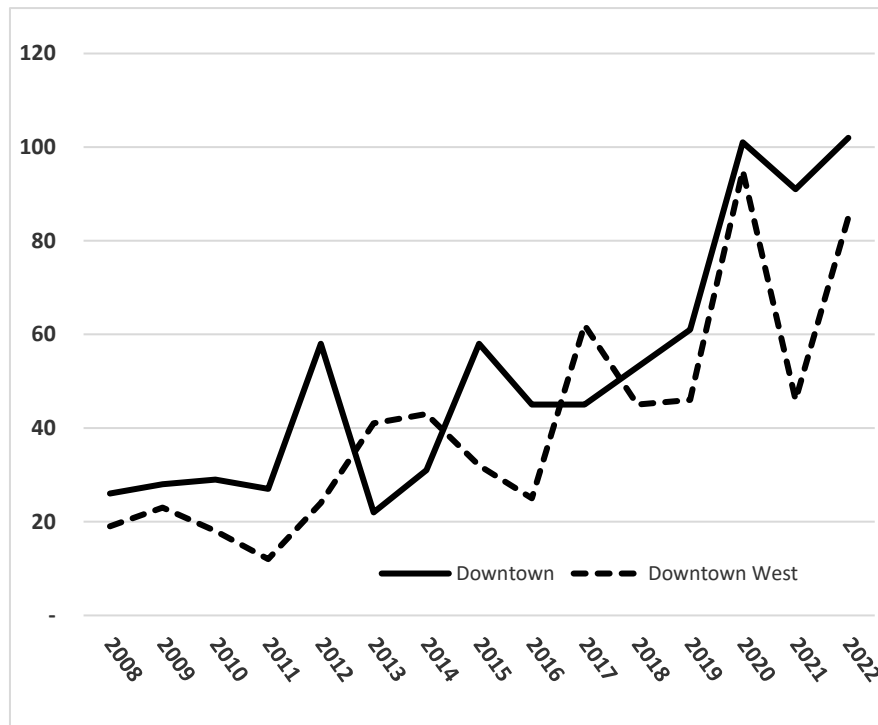


Figure 10 – Assaults with Firearms in Downtown/Downtown West 2008-2022

VII. Conclusion

The foregoing data and analysis, including that provided by an authoritative national organization commissioned by the City of St. Louis, and which is supported by our own independent review, leads to several important conclusions.

- Crime, violence, and disorder in Downtown and Downtown West are not simply a matter of “perception” as some, including SLMPD, have often contended. The data validate the lived experience of residents who spend most or all their time in the downtown neighborhood.
- Having some assurance of safety and security is a principal condition for economic growth. Unless we can approach the issue with an accepted, credible, and reliable set of data it will be hard to change the perception and reality that Downtown can be -- at some times and in some locations -- a dangerous place.
- Perpetuation of the misconception that Downtown is safer than most places in the City leads to misallocation of police resources and inhibits efforts to deal with safety and security issues Downtown. The 4th District, and Downtown in particular, is objectively one of the highest crime areas in the City.
- Given the law enforcement workload, the 4th District is seriously understaffed with police officers. That was the conclusion of the Center for Policing Equity, and it is ours as well.
- Additional police resources are necessary but insufficient to improve safety and security in the 4th District and Downtown. There are other actions that the City can and should take to reduce the police workload by addressing some of the properties and activities that typically lead to troublesome and sometime violent behavior. Some of these are outlined in the Five Point Safety Plan (<http://bit.ly/3MQgAQk>) developed jointly by the Downtown Economic Development Council, the Downtown Neighborhood Association and Citizens for a Greater Downtown St. Louis.
- We need to move beyond the rhetoric and belief that we cannot make Downtown safer because of permissive state gun laws, or the lingering consequences of the pandemic. Greater police presence and a consistent, planned, and comprehensive regulatory strategy (e.g., addressing short-term rentals, problem properties, problematic liquor licenses) will make a difference.