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Working with the Wayne State University Police Department to Improve Public Safety
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Since 2000, Detroit’s Midtown neighborhood has experienced a tremendous increase in residential, institutional and commercial development. With more than $2 billion invested in area projects and more than 2,000 new housing units since 2006, and 130 new businesses since just 2013, the neighborhood has begun to be regarded nationally as a model for neighborhood revitalization (Midtown Detroit Midtown Detroit Inc. 2016 Community Development Briefing).

At the heart of this success is an innovative collaboration between the Wayne State University Police Department (WSUPD) and several university and community partners. WSUPD comprises 59 officers who are all commissioned as Detroit Police officers. In 2009, WSUPD received funding to implement a data-driven, collaborative crime reduction strategy known as CompStat, a strategic management process that uses information technology, operational strategy, and managerial accountability to guide police operations. Midtown CompStat relies heavily on collaboration, a relatively unique feature among other CompStat efforts nationally. Participants in Midtown CompStat include other local law enforcement agencies, several medical centers, the College for Creative Studies and the Detroit Public Library. Agencies meet every two weeks at WSUPD to review crime maps and statistics, make adjustments to police deployment and develop collaborative crime prevention tactics. Efforts focus on addressing persistent crime hot spots and emerging crime patterns in Midtown. The evaluation of tactics is supported by a set of real-time crime mapping and analytical tools developed by WSU’s Center for Urban Studies. CompStat is now being used in several other neighborhoods throughout Detroit. The Center for Urban Studies provides the data and analysis for the neighborhood CompStat meetings, and they also provide the data to the City of Detroit Police Department for their bi-weekly citywide CompStat meeting. CompStat has enabled WSUPD to shift its model from a reactive to proactive approach, targeting hot spots to deter crime before it starts. WSU’s Center for Urban Studies reports that WSUPD’s proactive runs are up from 7% in 2009 to 49% in 2015.

In addition, WSUPD has expanded its service area beyond its campus borders to reduce crime and enhance the quality of life, incorporating several residential neighborhoods, business districts and the nearby College for Creative Studies. In 2008, only 30% of WSUPD time was spent on neighborhood policing efforts. Today, WSU police officers spend 70% of their time on policing efforts in the greater Midtown neighborhood, without any decrease in service to the immediate campus area.

WSUPD convenes regular meetings with community members to discuss any public safety challenges that the neighborhood is facing. And the Center for Urban Studies’ AmeriCorps Urban Safety Program conducts bike patrols, organizes residents in hot-spot crime buildings, and distributes information on current crime statistics and how to stay safe throughout WSUPD’s service area. The program also conducts Safe Pathways to Schools, which improves walkways frequented by students, by boarding up abandoned houses and improving lighting. Funding to support these efforts comes from WSU’s general fund and nearly $2 million in grant funds raised with support from the university’s Office of Economic Development. As a result of these efforts,
the Center for Urban Studies reports that overall crime in Midtown is down 59% since 2009. In that same time frame, predatory crime is down 88% across campus and 68% across Midtown. These efforts are being recognized nationally. In 2015, BestColleges.com named Wayne State one of the 50 safest college campuses in the country, based on an analysis of Clery Act data. As important as the numbers is WSUPD’s reputation as a community-focused organization, where students and staff, local residents and business owners know and trust their officers. Testimonials and media reports routinely cite the work of WSUPD in residents’ decisions to live in Midtown and business’ decisions to locate there—and to stay. A recent New York Times article notes the tremendous impact WSUPD has had on local business development. “We couldn’t operate here without them,” one local business owner declared. A fellow business owner noted WSUPD’s people-centered approach. “We’re African-American. Historically, our interaction with the police has been pretty different,” this business owner said. “Here, they’re part of the community. They’re involved. We know each other by name.”

WSUPD’s efforts have clearly made a significant contribution to the economic prosperity of Midtown, which today boasts 98% residential occupancy and has welcomed 130 new businesses and nonprofits since 2013. Christina Lovio George has owned and operated Lovio George, a boutique advertising firm with clients across the US, in Midtown for 30 years. Ms. Lovio George recently shared via email sentiments that she also shared at a 50th anniversary celebration for WSUPD: “Over the past 30 years, it is not an exaggeration to say that I could not have started a business, or stayed in business, without the Wayne State Police. The safety of a largely female workforce, the security of our building and surrounding perimeter, the safety of our clients and vendors – all translate into business success. The Wayne State Police, and most especially Chief Holt, ensure that late-night deadlines are met without fear. It doesn’t matter whether it is 8:00 in the morning or 11:00 at night, they give us a sense that they are part of the community, part of the reason the community works, and that they care about our safety. As a business in the community since 1982, we know the absolute importance of this kind of police-community effort and the effect it has on our employees, our clients, our budgets and our peace of mind.” (Email from Christina Lovio George, August 4, 2016)

Ms. Lovio George’s sentiments were echoed by numerous callers to public radio station WDET during a recent interview with WSUPD Chief Tony Holt. Said one business owner, “We rely on the Wayne State police, and they do a fabulous job. They do respond quickly, they’re polite, they’re efficient, and they’ve made all of Midtown a much safer place and we are thrilled to have them.” Added a female student who lives just off campus: “I feel super safe, I feel comfortable walking at night, and there is no way I would live there if it weren’t for the Wayne State police. Thank you so much. I have no intention of moving anywhere.”