

SAPD SURVEY: Residents give input on how to improve Beat 32

Fear index high for most residents

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SAN ANGELO, Texas — Although residential neighborhoods made up the majority of Beat 32, it's fastest-growing area — and one the San Angelo Police Department keeps a watchful eye on — is downtown.

On a Friday night several hundred people crowd into downtown bars, restaurants and businesses — a dramatic switch from years ago.

More traffic in the area means more people are closer to Fort Concho, the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, Kids' Kingdom and the Old Town, part of the city's historic district. It's there police have seen fights, thefts and graffiti.

Over the past several years instances of vandalism like damage to a sculpture at the museum, oil dumped on an owl statue at the Stephens Central Library and multiple broken windows at downtown businesses have been reported.

A [police satisfaction survey](#), conducted by the police department in conjunction with Angelo State University's Community Wellness, Engagement and Development program, invited citizens from the city to voice their concerns and criticisms with the department.

Responses were broken down into six categories measuring citizens' concerns, fears, their satisfaction with officers, the department, crime prevention techniques and what services they see as essential.

Beat 32, which includes downtown, takes up the east side of San Angelo from Old Ballinger Highway down to Country Club Road. It encompasses Goodfellow Air Force Base and neighborhoods north of Houston Harte.

Lt. Mike Hernandez, commander of Sector 2 which includes Beat 32, said he eventually wants a special unit assigned to the area. One of his ideas for downtown includes equipping officers with bicycles or Segways to navigate through streets.

Downtown resident and business owner Rod Bridgman likes the ideas of downtown officers parking their cars — which can be intimidating — and joining the community. He wants to see them beating the pavement and interacting with citizens.

"You see someone walk and they're people," he said. "They're not police, they're

people."

[Survey](#) respondents in Beat 32 thought crime prevention techniques — including police interaction with children and increased community group involvement — were highly important.

Over the past year the department's Crime Prevention Section reported it participated in more than 60 child-friendly or child-oriented events and programs and were in contact with more than 8,000 people. Officers have interacted with Girls and Boy Scouts, church groups, Boys' & Girls' Clubs and events like National Night Out.

Police have held fingerprinting booths at events and offer school programs that focus on bicycle safety, career programs, personal and home safety, Internet safety and gang and violence awareness. Hernandez said individual officers are also involved in events through their own families' schools, churches and community groups. Recently he spoke as a member of the department's SWAT leader at a camp in Brady held for the Cherokee Home for Children.

According to the [survey](#) respondents scored the highest overall in the fear index. The average index score was -0.19, a figure that was gauged on a scale of -1 to 1. Residents also listed school violence, traffic enforcement, burglary, drug related crime and violent crime as a significant concern and ranked them higher than the citywide average.

Hernandez recognizes people's concerns and thinks part of the solution is letting the public know what's happening in their areas through officers who are familiar with neighborhoods.

"Folks want to know more," he said. "They're more in touch (via technology) and I think we should give it to them."

Every two weeks the chief, assistant chiefs and lieutenants meet for Computer Statistics, or COMPSTAT, to look at trends in neighborhoods. From that point lieutenants form an action plan for their sectors. Information shared there goes out to patrol officers, detectives, narcotics and Special Operations.

Hernandez described the process as "a melting of the minds" where information is shared so multiple divisions in the department can operate as a single entity.

In his Beat he's met with the Downtown Bar Association, the city's economic development committee and Downtown San Angelo Inc.

"If we keep it safe and everybody's working to keep it that way for the community, it's a good thing because it's going to bring revenue to the city," Hernandez said.

Bridgman said before his businesses existed he and his wife could sit on their balcony and would see one car travel their way every five minutes and on occasion could hear what sounded like gunshots in the distance. He said with a growing population there is crime in the city, but the department is doing "a fantastic job."

"There are areas we'd like to see some change," he said, "but I think they're areas that (police) are looking at."