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WHITEWATER POLICE DEPARTMENT  
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

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TO: City Manager and Police & Fire Commission

FROM: Chief Coan

SUBJECT: Public Safety Report/Annual Review and Update

DATE: March 18, 2008

CC: District Attorney, Sheriff, UW-Whitewater Police Chief, School Superintendent

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**INTRODUCTION:**

This document is intended to provide a review and update of certain public safety concerns, police service delivery issues, and social problems impacting the City of Whitewater and the Whitewater Police Department. It is important that the Police Department be a source of clear and accurate information on the range of public safety issues confronting our community. The information provided in this document is intended to encourage that review.

**CRIME AND CRIMINALITY/2007 IN REVIEW:**

The Office of Justice Assistance recently released the 2007 Uniform Crime Report for the State of Wisconsin. The report reflects an increase of 10% in Total Index Crime for the City of Whitewater (primarily due to an increase in property crime). Index Crime includes the full realm of violent and property offenses, e.g. assault, burglary, robbery, theft, arson, etc.

The rash of burglaries and car break-ins we experienced last fall contributed to a disproportionate spike in our property crime statistics for the year. Fortunately, those crimes were solved with the perpetrators arrested and most of the stolen property recovered.

Theft from motor vehicles (46), theft from buildings (44), and criminal damage to property (200) accounted for the largest number of property crimes in Whitewater last year. Most thefts were from unlocked vehicles, garages, and homes. There were 53 residential and 21 non-residential or business related burglaries last year. Property offenses continue to make up a significant portion of crime reported in Whitewater.

Three motor vehicles were reported stolen during 2007. Most of the incidents involved keys left in the vehicle. All of the stolen vehicles were recovered and one of the thefts resulted in arrest.

Of the 26 simple assaults reported in 2007, 24 were cleared by arrest. There were no assaults on police officers last year. Most of our more violent offenses, including sexual assaults (20) and aggravated assaults (nine), were situations where the victim knew the assailant. Many of these cases involved alcohol.

Our officers remain very diligent in their attention to matters of law enforcement and public safety. There were 2,571 total adult arrests in 2007. The most common categories of arrests made by Whitewater Police Officers were for liquor law violations (591) and disorderly conduct (285). Our officers also completed 39 emergency detentions/protective custodies in 2007.

Officers made 39 arrests for vandalism and 60 arrests for theft. Five subjects were arrested on various weapons related offenses. The 71 adult arrests for drug violations included eight for sale/manufacture and 63 for possession. Our Department also cleared 470 warrants in 2007.

In addition, there were 529 juvenile arrests in 2007. The most common categories of juvenile arrests were for disorderly conduct (76) and burglary (61). Forty four juveniles were arrested for curfew violation, 14 for drug violations, and 45 juveniles were arrested for truancy. Thirty five juveniles were arrested for cigarette/tobacco violations and 29 for underage drinking.

In the area of traffic law enforcement our officers wrote 787 traffic citations last year. This figure reflects our focus on traffic safety operations and in particular the problem of speeding on West Main Street. In addition, Whitewater police officers made 171 drunk driving arrests in 2007.

There were 294 motor vehicle accidents in the City of Whitewater last year. Of those accidents, 41 involved personal injury. There were no traffic fatalities in 2007.

### **CRIME TRENDS:**

There are a variety of complex variables which contribute to the rate of crime. Economic, geographic, and demographic factors are just a few examples. Historically, there also exists a strong correlation between the number of young people in their most crime prone years (teens and early twenties) and the crime rate. Continuing local growth through residential development, annexations, increasing birth rates, continuing immigration, and urban sprawl may result in higher crime rates in the future.

Major challenges facing our Department and community in the area of crime and criminality include the control of juvenile crime and gang activity, combating drug and alcohol related offenses, addressing quality of life concerns, and effectively dealing with sensitive crimes (sexual assaults and crimes against children and the elderly).

## **NON-CRIMINAL ASPECTS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT:**

Last year our officers responded to 7,531 calls for service. We also responded to 564 emergency medical calls, conducted 2,159 traffic stops, and engaged in 684 self-initiated activities. Police officers, together with community service officers, wrote 8,270 parking tickets in 2007. These statistics do not reflect the multitude of telephone calls and walk-in inquires that come into our station and communications center.

We continue to place a high priority on a full range of order-maintenance related issues. Because we are a college town, we tend to deal with an inordinate number of ordinance related complaints and violations, e.g. underage drinking, vandalism, parking violations, loud noise, petty theft, disorderly conduct, etc.

The major challenges to our Department in the years to come, in the non-criminal area, will be to continue to find economical and creative ways to meet reasonable expectations by our citizens, maintain a feeling of stability and security in our neighborhoods, while at the same time seeking to reduce or minimize unreasonable demand for police service. We are a growing community and managing calls for service will continue to present a challenge to us into the foreseeable future.

## **UNIVERSITY ISSUES/CONCERNS:**

Since Whitewater is home to the 10,500 students of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater the welfare and safety of our student population is of significant concern. One of the most important issues confronting us is the threat of a school or campus related shooting. Unfortunately, these incidents have been occurring more frequently around the country.

The recent shooting spree at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb is just one more sobering reminder that these types of things can happen anywhere and at anytime. No campus, school, or community is immune from the threat of a deranged subject bent on committing an act of extreme violence.

In recent years we have been planning, training, and equipping ourselves to confront and mitigate the threat of an "active shooter" if it should ever happen here. We have conducted training exercises at our high school and on the UW-Whitewater campus. Our mutual aid agreement with the University Police, our joint training efforts, and our acquisition of state of the art weapons and equipment, have built a sound tactical base with which to continue to build on.

At the same time, we continue to be very good about ensuring intervention and assistance for those young people who we identify as in need of treatment for psychiatric and/or substance abuse problems. For example, last year we initiated 39 emergency detentions in order to ensure such treatment. We are also urging the University to enhance its campus alerting capabilities. Intervention, early warning, and rapid response by well trained and well armed police officers provide an integrated approach to this problem.

## **MINORITY COMMUNITY/CULTURAL ISSUES:**

Hispanics are the fastest growing minority population in Whitewater. It is expected that the Hispanic population will become an even bigger economic and social force in the future and that they will further contribute to the cultural diversity of our community. At the same time, Hispanic residents of Whitewater are an underserved population because of language barriers and cultural misperceptions. In addition, crime in the Hispanic community sometimes goes unreported.

Over the years our Department has been very sensitive to minority victimization, cultural issues, and community concerns. We value diversity and have long reflected minority representation on our Police and Fire Commission, in our Police – Citizen Academies, and within our Department as police officers and community service officers. We have conducted cultural diversity and Spanish speaking training for our personnel, made available bi-lingual interpreters, and have hosted a variety of formal and informal outreach sessions in the Hispanic community. It is anticipated that minority community issues and concerns will continue to be of importance to us and to our City Government for years to come.

## **JUVENILE CRIME/GANG ACTIVITY:**

Juvenile crime represents one of the most important issues in law enforcement here and across the country. Although there has been a general decline in the overall crime rate in the United States in recent years, juvenile crime remains steady. There is a disturbing trend in which young people seek to settle problems, real or perceived, with violence. In addition, we sometimes see disenfranchised or “at-risk” youths seeking to associate themselves with street gangs.

The issue of gang activity is, appropriately, an issue of concern to our Department and to our community. We believe that it is still safe to characterize most of our local juvenile “gang” members as relatively unsophisticated by contemporary standards, few in number, loose-knit in organization, and less violent than gang members in more urban areas. Local gang members have engaged in occasional acts of vandalism (graffiti), intimidation, threats, drug abuse, and disorderly conduct.

Local “gangsters” have primarily been affiliated with the Tres Puentes (3P’s) and to a lesser extent the Original White Gangsters (OWG’s). There are also some young adults who have been tied to the Latin King organization. So far, these gangs have not seriously challenged each other. Therefore, we have not yet had to contend with any violent turf battles in our area.

Although relatively few in number, some of these gang members support themselves and their gangs through the sale of drugs. By way of a number of key arrests, search warrants, close surveillance and intelligence gathering, and through a variety of other aggressive policing tactics we have been very successful, thus far, in preventing gangs from gaining a stronghold here in Whitewater.

The most common categories of juvenile related violations are disorderly conduct, truancy, theft, vandalism, and the consumption of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. It is our belief that we need to continue to work closely with our schools, courts, social services, and with parents in an effort to address juvenile crime and disorder.

Our Juvenile Officer/School Liaison is specifically tasked with these responsibilities. She conducts investigations involving juvenile perpetrators or victims, delivers educational presentations to young people and their parents, and works closely with the schools and with various components of the Criminal Justice system.

From an education/prevention standpoint, our Department provides classroom drug and alcohol prevention and anti-gang education through the CounterACT program conducted in our elementary schools. Our officers also place a significant emphasis upon juvenile related enforcement, interaction, and referrals.

We must send a strong message to our young people that there are consequences associated with their actions. At the same time we must continue to seek treatment for those with alcohol, drug, and psychiatric problems. We believe that punishment and treatment are not necessarily inconsistent with one another.

#### **ALCOHOL AND DRUG OFFENSES:**

Drugs continue to be a problem in Whitewater just as they are throughout the county, the state, and across the country. The drug of choice here in Whitewater continues to be alcohol. To an overwhelming extent, the problems caused by alcohol far out pace those caused by any other drug. The fact that alcohol is legal (at least for those people over the age of 21) does not in any way reduce its impact on our community. More accidents, more suicide, more family dysfunction, more domestic violence, more crime, more disorderly conduct, and more health problems are caused by alcohol than all of the illegal drugs combined.

Let me now provide an assessment of the illegal drugs in our community. After alcohol, marijuana ranks a far distant second in terms of use and abuse. Far more arrests are made for possession and sale of marijuana than for any other illegal drug. This suggests, and other evidence seems to confirm, that marijuana is the illegal drug used most locally.

Intelligence information, search warrants, and drug related arrests confirm that cocaine is a drug that is also relatively available. We have seen more crimes committed by individuals attempting to support their cocaine addiction. Compared to alcohol and marijuana though, there is far less cocaine use among high school and college age young people in our area.

We are seeing a disturbing increase in the abuse of over the counter medications. It appears that this trend is particularly acute among some teenagers. Although alcohol and marijuana use by minors has been dropping it may only reflect a change in the drug choice.

The sale and abuse of Oxycontin is an example of a prescription medication that is a growing problem nationally, as well as here in the Whitewater area. Oxycontin and heroin have similar effects; therefore, both drugs are attractive to the same abuser population. Sometimes referred to as “poor man’s heroin”, Oxycontin is abused for its opiate-like effects. Some Oxycontin abusers have been known to resort to theft and prescription fraud to support their habit.

Although we have seen some methamphetamine (METH) used and sold in our area, we are very fortunate that the drug has not taken hold here the way it has in other parts of the state. Methamphetamine is relatively easy to make, highly addictive, and can make the user both combative and paranoid.

This overview is not meant to suggest that any other illegal drug cannot be brought into Whitewater from local metropolitan areas. A study by the Wisconsin Department of Justice notes that street gangs continue to be heavily involved in drug trafficking activities. As such, our attempts to control and suppress the drug problem will continue to parallel our anti-gang efforts. One of our detectives is specifically assigned to work drug related cases and we work in close cooperation with our county-wide drug enforcement units.

We continue to be vigilant in our efforts to prevent and/or intervene in underage drinking parties. Several times a year we conduct special operations aimed at identifying and suppressing large scale drinking parties. We also work closely with our local taverns in addressing alcohol related offenses and our officers are very diligent in their arrest of drunk drivers.

In addition, one of our sergeants serves as a member of the University-City AODA (Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse) Committee which proactively addresses such problems as drunk driving, binge drinking, drug abuse, and underage drinking. Last year we worked with the AODA in creating an instructional video which was distributed to all of our local taverns. The video addresses such issues as false identification, over-serving of alcohol, and control of disorderly patrons.

#### **SENSITIVE CRIMES:**

Sensitive crimes, as defined by Wisconsin Statutes, are criminal offenses relating to child and elder abuse and neglect, and sexual assaults of adults or children. There were 20 sexual assaults of varying degrees reported to our Department in 2007 (a slight increase from 18 in 2006). Recognizing the intense and painful psychological and social pressure placed on victims of sensitive crimes, the Whitewater Police Department approaches this issue with great sensitivity for the victim and with the unique skill afforded by a specialized Sensitive Crimes Investigative Team.

Sensitive Crimes Team members are activated for the sake of conducting thorough investigations relative to any sexual assault of an adult or crime against a child or senior citizen. Virtually all of these cases involve situations where the assailant was known to the victim. It is essential that we continue to place great emphasis on this issue.

We have sought a multi-disciplinary approach to investigating sensitive crime so as to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and sensitivity of all agencies providing services in these matters. We promote close cooperation among law enforcement, child protective services, prosecutors, educators, medical personnel, victim advocates, and other agencies in order to help guide our response to sensitive crimes.

### **CRIME PREVENTION AND CITIZEN PERCEPTION OF SAFETY:**

Our crime prevention goals are to reduce the chance for crime to happen, resolve neighborhood problems, reduce the fear of crime, and to improve community and police cooperation. In an effort to meet these goals we have initiated a variety of programs and projects.

We periodically conduct surveys of our citizens in order to gauge public opinion relative to such issues as the effectiveness of our service and the level of perceived safety in one's neighborhood. We have found such surveys to be very helpful in identifying concerns and in finding solutions to perceived problems.

We are pleased to note that a National Citizen Survey, commissioned by the City Manager and City Council, found that Whitewater was given high marks by our citizens as a very safe place to live. Residents were especially satisfied with their police, fire, and emergency medical services and feel that they receive good value for their taxes.

What was most significant for us is that the majority of respondents rated police service as good to excellent. In addition, people generally feel safe from violent crime in Whitewater, feel safe in Whitewater parks, and feel safe in their neighborhoods after dark. A high percentage rated our crime prevention and traffic enforcement efforts as either excellent or very good.

Our Citizen Police Academies have also played an integral role in our community policing/crime prevention efforts. Academy participants have been very enthused about their experience and seem to come away with a new appreciation for professional policing and public safety. Such a program serves to enhance citizen awareness of safety related issues and provides a forum for which to discuss with citizens issues of mutual concern. We intend to complete our seventh Citizen Police Academy in 2008.

Other crime prevention programs offered by the Whitewater Police Department include crime stoppers, security/safety surveys, operation ID, and a safety fair. We also publish an informational newsletter, maintain a web-site, provide crime prevention and personal safety speeches and brochures, conduct listening sessions and outreach programs, issue public service announcements, and work closely with our schools. We regard all of these programs and projects as an effective means of raising citizen awareness of crime and public safety issues and in the prevention of crime in our community.

## **MAN-MADE OR NATURAL DISASTERS:**

Whitewater is geographically fortunate from a natural disaster standpoint. Spring and early summer tornado activity is the primary threat with winter storm problems of more minor concern. Man-made disaster potential includes hazardous material spills, fires, and major transportation mishaps, e.g. rail, air, highway, etc.

Throughout most of last year, the City remained relatively safe from severe weather and other incidents requiring an Emergency Management response. Nevertheless, on November 12, 2007 an apartment fire at 1238 West Main Street (the TKE Fraternity House) resulted in the evacuation and the indefinite displacement of ten college students. On November 27th, a residential fire at 404/406 West Center Street resulted in another ten students being displaced for three weeks. In each incident, the Office of Emergency Management worked closely with the Red Cross, UW-Whitewater, and various other entities to assist with temporary housing.

The Hurricane Katrina disaster of August, 29, 2005 and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, continue to have a profound impact on the lives of most Americans, including the citizens of the City of Whitewater. Within the law enforcement community, these situations raise several significant issues, including the importance of sharing resources and information and the need to strengthen the level of cooperation among all public safety providers (police, fire, EMS, emergency government, etc.) in meeting the potential for future attacks and/or natural disasters.

Although we are very fortunate in that we already had a very good relationship with each other, in the last several years we have sought to strengthen the level of mutual support and collaboration we have with the various safety service providers in our area, namely the Whitewater Fire Department and Rescue Squad, the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Campus Police Department, Walworth and Jefferson County Sheriff's Departments, Public Health, Human Services, National Guard, and Emergency Government. From conducting table-top exercises to the sharing of information and resources we continue to strengthen these relationships.

Of particular note is the fact that the City of Whitewater retains an Emergency Management Coordinator (a sergeant in the Police Department). The Emergency Management Coordinator works closely with the fire department, EMS, and with the county emergency government director in matters of mutual concern. He also conducts inter and intra departmental training, ensures NIMS compliance, develops policies and procedures, manages state and federal grants, ensures the readiness of our EOC (Emergency Operations Center), and engages in all other aspects of disaster preparedness. All weather and hazardous materials related incidents are reported to the county and state offices of emergency government.

Our Emergency Management Coordinator recently completed certification as an Emergency Manager for the State of Wisconsin. He is also certified as a hazardous materials technician and serves as a member of the Walworth County Level B Hazardous Materials Emergency Response Team. This multi-jurisdictional team has been trained and equipped to respond to hazardous materials related emergencies anywhere in the county.

Several years ago the City of Whitewater was recognized by the National Weather Service and the Wisconsin Department of Emergency Management as a “Weather Safe” community. This designation recognizes the planning, policies, equipment, and procedures in place to deal with severe weather events. Whitewater was only the second city in the State of Wisconsin to receive this recognition. Since that time we have continued to enhance our emergency management capabilities.

Last year, with the aid of a grant, we conducted an accelerated functional exercise in Whitewater. This exercise tested the functionality of the city’s emergency response plan and allowed all City Departments to work together in dealing with a simulated disaster. In addition, the first Citizen Emergency Response Team (CERT) for the City of Whitewater has been formed and trained. It should also be noted that in the last several years all city employees completed the required courses necessary to be certified by the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

### **OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES:**

By virtue of our relative size, operational strategies are designed to maximize the impact of available resources. We believe in an integrated approach to the delivery of police service, i.e. using a combination of traditional and contemporary techniques, technology, and tactics to address safety related problems.

We also adhere to many of the precepts of a community-oriented philosophy of policing which places emphasis on problem solving, addressing quality of life concerns, and in developing partnerships with our community such as through our Citizen Police Academy. Our supervisory staff must complete annual team goals which emphasize community policing, problem solving, traffic enforcement, and anti-crime measures. Our Community Service Officers provide additional support for this approach to policing assisting our Neighborhood Services Director in focusing on code enforcement related violations, parking problems, and general quality of life issues.

We maintain a high level enforcement posture in such areas as traffic violations, public order offenses, drug and alcohol violations, gang related offenses, and juvenile crime and misconduct. We seek to target repeat offenders, conduct special enforcement operations, complete thorough criminal investigations, conduct warrant service, and address a variety of municipal code violations. We also place great emphasis on close cooperation with our schools, courts, neighborhood services department, the city and district attorney’s offices, social services, and with fellow law enforcement agencies.

From an education/prevention standpoint, our Department has developed a variety of safety brochures, we conduct periodic outreach sessions in our Hispanic community, distribute a newsletter, conduct CounterACT programs in our schools, maintain an up to date website, and deliver a variety of other safety education and prevention programs aimed at addressing the problems of sexual assault, domestic violence, and underage drinking.

The Whitewater Police Department continues to provide quality, professional and innovative police service to the citizens of the City of Whitewater. It is our goal to maintain a feeling of stability and security in the neighborhoods of the City, to thwart the proliferation of juvenile crime and gang violence, and to be as responsive as possible to community concerns regarding issues of public safety.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Almost without exception, knowledgeable people in the field of Criminal Justice believe that any strategy which relies exclusively on the police to cope with any of the aforementioned issues is destined to fail. While clearly the police can have an impact on crime and criminality, we must also mobilize and encourage other community resources (e.g. government officials, social services, courts, clergy, school officials, parents, civic organizations, the business community, etc.) which can, over time, more significantly impact these issues.

In the meantime, it is clear that from a public safety standpoint we are doing quite well here in Whitewater, particularly when compared with other communities in our region. We do not have a high level of violent crime, property crime remains relatively low, our arrest rate is very high, we are effectively addressing sensitive crimes, attentive to quality of life concerns, preparing ourselves to cope with the full specter of man-made and natural disasters, citing traffic offenders and drunk drivers, combating drug and alcohol violations, and we have done a very good job of keeping gangs from gaining a stronghold here.

At the same time we can ill afford to be complacent or overconfident. Although our officers have been very diligent in arresting “bad guys”, we must all share in the responsibility of continuing to make Whitewater an inhospitable place for those who would engage in criminal conduct.

