

# **Positive East Side Survey**

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Conducted on behalf of  
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*This report (NPCR 1304) is also available on the CURA website:  
[www.cura.umn.edu/search/index.php](http://www.cura.umn.edu/search/index.php)*

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

In recent years, the reputation of Saint Paul's East Side has suffered too often as a result of its constant association with predominantly negative stories in the media. The comprehensive East Side community represents over 1/3 of St. Paul but is frequently mistaken as one neighborhood instead of several. This harmful notion - along with the redistricting that has left several legislators, commissioners, and city council members with a “piece of the East Side” - contributes to the stigmatization of an entire group when the actions of a few make media headlines. In an effort to counter the growth of these negative notions, *Positive East Side* subsequently emerged as both a mentality and a community research project in cooperation with Merrick Community Services (MCS) and the Center for Urban Research and Affairs at the University of Minnesota. By using a survey-based research tool to directly evaluate and analyze responses from a diverse group of East-Siders, a considerably positive perspective on public safety in their community has become apparent in the findings of this report.

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## **I. BACKGROUND**

The Positive East Side project originated from a series of community meetings between urban partnerships in the East Side. In an effort to balance the amount of attention focused on negative factors when proposing new community direction – these discussions addressed the imminent need to embrace and publicize the positives in a changing East Side. Longstanding links between Merrick Community Services and local Metro State University helped to support and influence the idea of collaborating with an educational institution to achieve such goals – and before long the application process for a student internship grant had begun. CURA’s Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR) program presented the ideal opportunity for MCS to carry out its objectives with the help of an undergraduate research assistant – and the Positive East Side project was subsequently underway.

## **II. “POSITIVE EAST SIDE” SURVEY**

During the early stages of prioritizing the means of research for this project, the idea to survey the community had not yet come to the forefront of our goals. A brief 3-page survey, drafted and edited with the help of University of Minnesota staff, was initially created to evaluate feedback from basic questions pertaining to the sense of security in the East Side community:

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**1) How many Years have you lived on the East Side?**

*(check one)*

- Less than 1 year*
- 1-3 years*
- 4-6 years*
- 7-9 years*
- 10 or more years*

**2) How many Years have you lived on the East Side?**

*(check one)*

- Less than 1 year*
- 1-3 years*
- 4-6 years*
- 7-9 years*
- 10 or more years*

**3) What are the positive things about the East Side community?**

*(check all that apply)*

- Police Presence*
- Cultural Diversity*
- Parks/Green Spaces*
- Educational Institutions*
- Commercial Developments*

**4) What is the name of your particular neighborhood?**

- SE St. Paul (District 1)*
- Greater East Side (District 2)*

\_\_\_ Dayton's Bluff (District 4)

\_\_\_ Payne-Phalen (District 5)

5) How safe do you feel in your East Side neighborhood?

(circle one)

Very Safe

Somewhat Safe

Somewhat Unsafe

Very Unsafe

6) How would you rate the frequency at which you observe the following on the East Side?

(mark in chart)

<i><u>ISSUE</u></i>	<i>Daily</i>	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>Monthly</i>	<i>Every 3 Months</i>	<i>Every 6 Months</i>
<i>Drug Dealing</i>					
<i>Graffiti/Vandalism</i>					
<i>Gun Possession</i>					
<i>Theft</i>					
<i>Youth Gangs</i>					

7) How often do you feel less safe in public as a result of the following issues?

(mark in chart)

<i><u>ISSUE</u></i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Very Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
<i>Drug Dealing</i>					
<i>Graffiti/Vandalism</i>					
<i>Gun Possession</i>					

<i>Theft</i>					
<i>Youth Gangs</i>					

*Additional Comments:*

*Thank you for participating in this survey.*

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A set of copies of the above survey were first experimented with at a Community Block Club meeting in District 2 which focused on Youth Gangs, with a presentation from the Saint Paul Gang Unit. Though the turnout was much smaller than anticipated, there was little to complain about, with those in attendance filling out the survey with great enthusiasm at the end of the presentation. While reviewing the responses of this small group, the great effectiveness of the survey became realized for a few key reasons:

- \* As a fast and simple way to collect demographic data as well as detailed opinions from residents, it was the ideal tool for getting the most up-to-date perspective on the East Side’s public safety image in the eyes of its own residents.

- \* The thoroughness in which respondents were able to quickly detail their specific concerns in the survey’s charts (Q#5 and Q#6) was proved to great effect in the initial small group – despite how quickly surveys were completed. This created the foundation for our intentions to do a post-survey analysis – one that summarized the

sense of security, experience with danger, and perception of crime held by the residents we surveyed.

\* The use of the survey data as a primary research source very much represented the best opportunity for a first-hand ‘Positive East Side’ effort of our own – as we aimed to revitalize the public image of the community through the positive and encouraging findings of our research and support our notion that Saint Paul’s East Side residents enjoy a considerably safe and healthy community environment.

### **III. SURVEY DISTRIBUTION AND RECOLLECTION**

The mass distribution of the survey subsequently became an issue of great importance and vital decision-making. Our survey questions offered great room for demographic diversity, and we hoped to maximize that potential while still retaining the prerequisite that respondents live in one of the four East Side districts. We made strong efforts to keep the hand-out of surveys fairly proportional across Districts 1, 2, 4, and 5 as we attended community events and gatherings, and worked with District planning councils to get our survey out to East Side residents. The events at which surveys were distributed were diverse as well. These exchanges took place at the likes of MCS picnics, East Side community workshops, the Dayton’s Bluff Recreation Center, District Council board meetings, MCS staff and their family members, and even neighbor-to-neighbor forms of distribution helped to slowly publicize the survey. In addition, copies of the survey were translated and drafted into Hmong and Spanish versions by MCS employees.



These additional surveys helped to broaden opportunities to survey residents, and they were distributed and completed with the help and coordination of Hmong American Partnership and MCS-sponsored, Spanish-translated workshops.

During the process of organizing and tabulating the completed surveys, our optimism that the survey data would support our project goals increased – as the amount of positive feedback continued to impress. Those respondents who had indicated on the survey a status of “very unsafe” were found very scarce as we reached the closing point of our distribution and collection. The same enthusiasm observed in the surveys completed by our first respondents from the Block Club meeting continued throughout the remaining distribution process, with results indicating that respondents were clearly either looking to emphasize their sense of security – or intending to stress their safety concerns. Both clearly specified in the charts of the survey, the nature of their experiences, or lack of encounters with, threats to their safety in the community. By tracking the tendencies of such responses, it became increasingly evident that there would be an interesting relationship between the experiences of respondents with crime, and their subsequent perceptions of danger. This notion about the interesting link between Q#5 and Q#6 would go on to become the focal point of our overall objective to find the causes of either a positive or negative perception of one’s East Side community.

#### **IV. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS: SUMMARY**

Before beginning the filtering and cross-tabulation of responses to highlight our interesting findings, the completed survey data was formatted into an electronic

summary, to give residents a visual representation of the community group that was questioned. A breakdown of respondents' choices and their percent of the total responses for questions 1-5 are displayed below:

### **QUESTION 1)**

<b>What is your age range?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
18-25	11.3%	16
25-30	9.9%	14
30-40	<b>23.2%</b>	33
40-55	<b>20.4%</b>	29
55 and above	<b>35.9%</b>	51
<i>answered question</i>		<b>142</b>

- **The majority of respondents surveyed were adults over the age of 30, with a significant amount of senior citizen respondents.**

### **QUESTION 2)**

<b>How many Years have you lived on the East Side?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Less than 1 year	12.7%	18
1-3 years	<b>16.2%</b>	23
4-6 years	9.9%	14
7-9 years	8.5%	12
10 or more years	<b>53.5%</b>	76
<i>answered question</i>		<b>142</b>

- **The majority of respondents surveyed represent a mix of those who have lived for both considerably short and long periods of residency.**

**QUESTION 3)**

What are the positive things about the East Side community?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Police Presence	46.3%	62
Cultural Diversity	68.7%	92
Parks/Green Spaces	72.4%	97
Educational Institutions	43.3%	58
Commercial Developments	11.2%	15
<i>answered question</i>		<b>134</b>

- **An overwhelming amount of residents indicated that existing community positives in the East Side include Cultural Diversity and Parks/Green Spaces.**
- **Secondly, nearly half of respondents indicated their perception of a positive Police presence – with another sizeable portion indicating positive Educational Institutions.**

**QUESTION 4)**

What is the name of your particular neighborhood?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
SE St. Paul (District 1)	22.0%	31
Greater East Side (District 2)	20.6%	29
Dayton's Bluff (District 4)	34.0%	48
Payne-Phalen (District 5)	23.4%	33
<i>answered question</i>		<b>141</b>

- **A decently proportional survey of the 4 East Side districts was desired.**
- **That was nearly achieved, with Dayton's Bluff (D4) a mildly disproportional percentage of responses.**

**QUESTION 5)**

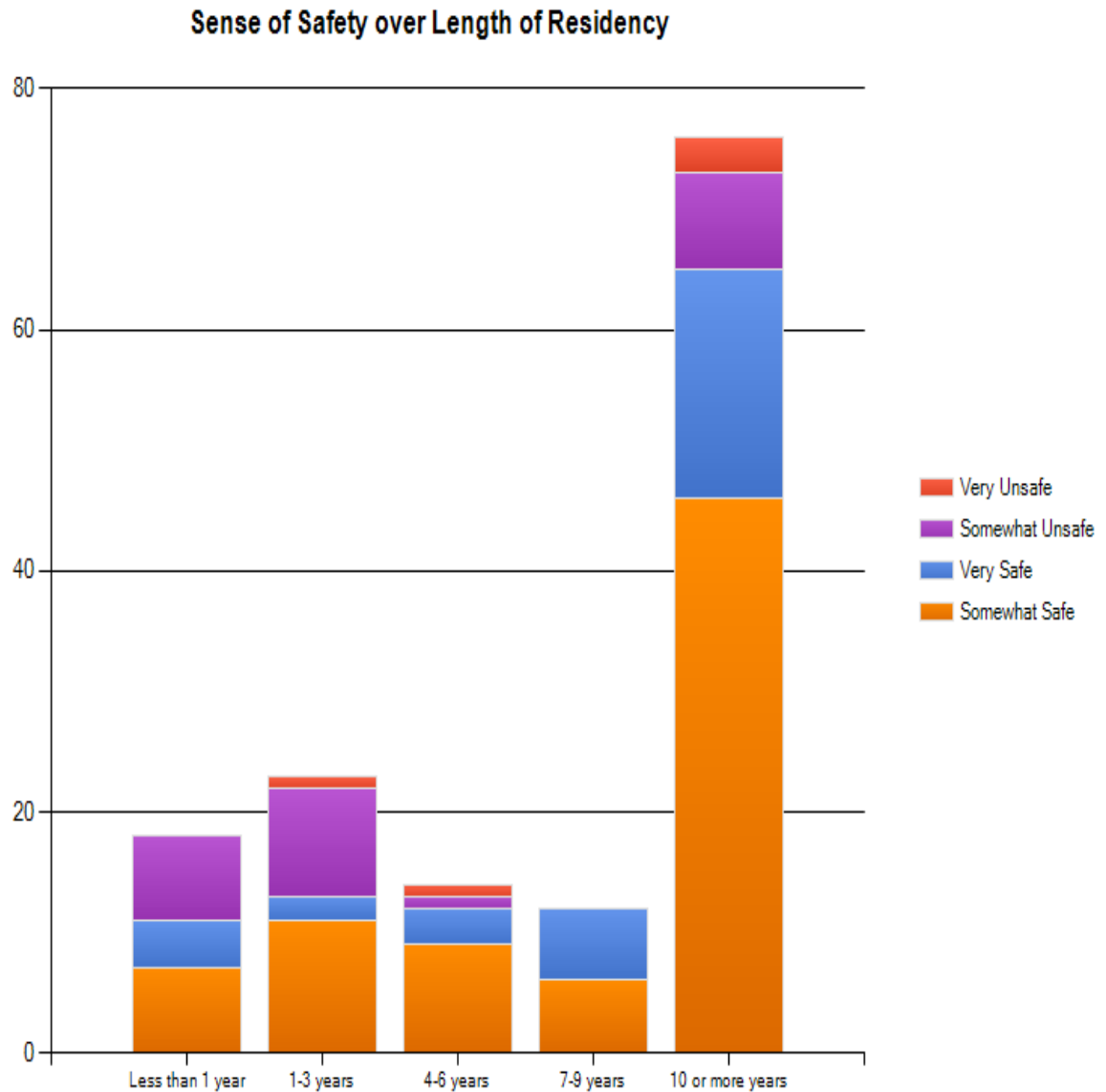
<b>How safe do you feel in your East Side neighborhood?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Very Safe	23.9%	34
Somewhat Safe	<b>55.6%</b>	79
Somewhat Unsafe	16.9%	24
Very Unsafe	<b>3.5%</b>	5
<i>answered question</i>		<b>142</b>

- **A significantly small percentage of residents indicated that they felt “very unsafe” – with nearly 1/5 suggesting they were “somewhat unsafe”.**
- **The number of respondents who claimed they felt “somewhat safe” exceeded the number of those feeling “somewhat unsafe” by nearly 3 times.**

*Source: Public Safety Evaluation Surveys of East Saint Paul Residents*

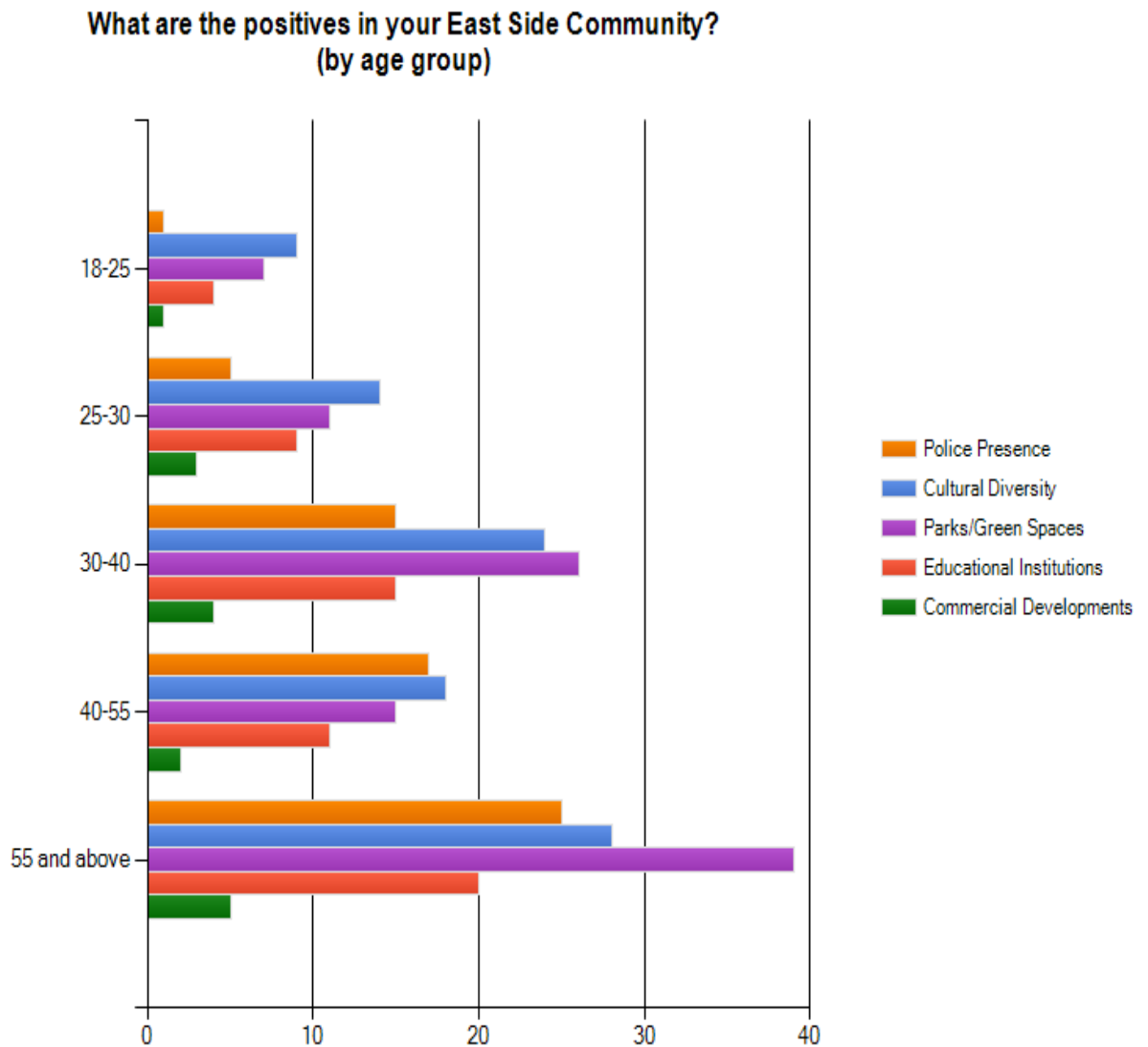
## **V. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS: CROSS-TABULATION**

By cross-tabulating the responses from Question 2 (length of residency) with those of Question 5 (sense of security), we were able to suggest a supportive link between the two – ultimately making the argument that one’s sense of security in the East Side very much tended to increase with one’s length of residency in the community. This trend is best illustrated by the expressions made in the chart found below:



- *It is evident that the three columns representing residents of Less than 1 year and 1-3 years have retained concerns for danger much more readily than those who have been in the community for at least a decade.*
- *We can see that, amongst the obviously larger column of our older, longstanding East Side residents, only 12 out of 76 residents felt very or somewhat unsafe. This can be compared in proportion with those still relatively new to the East Side community, where we see that 17 out of 41 residents felt very or somewhat unsafe (Jalali).*

In Question 3, residents were asked to choose from a list of “community positives” which contained options of Police Presence, Cultural Diversity, Parks/Green Spaces, Educational Institutions, and Commercial Developments - prior to any inquiries about their views on public safety. A breakdown of what each age group viewed as existing “positives” in the East Side can be effectively observed in the chart below:

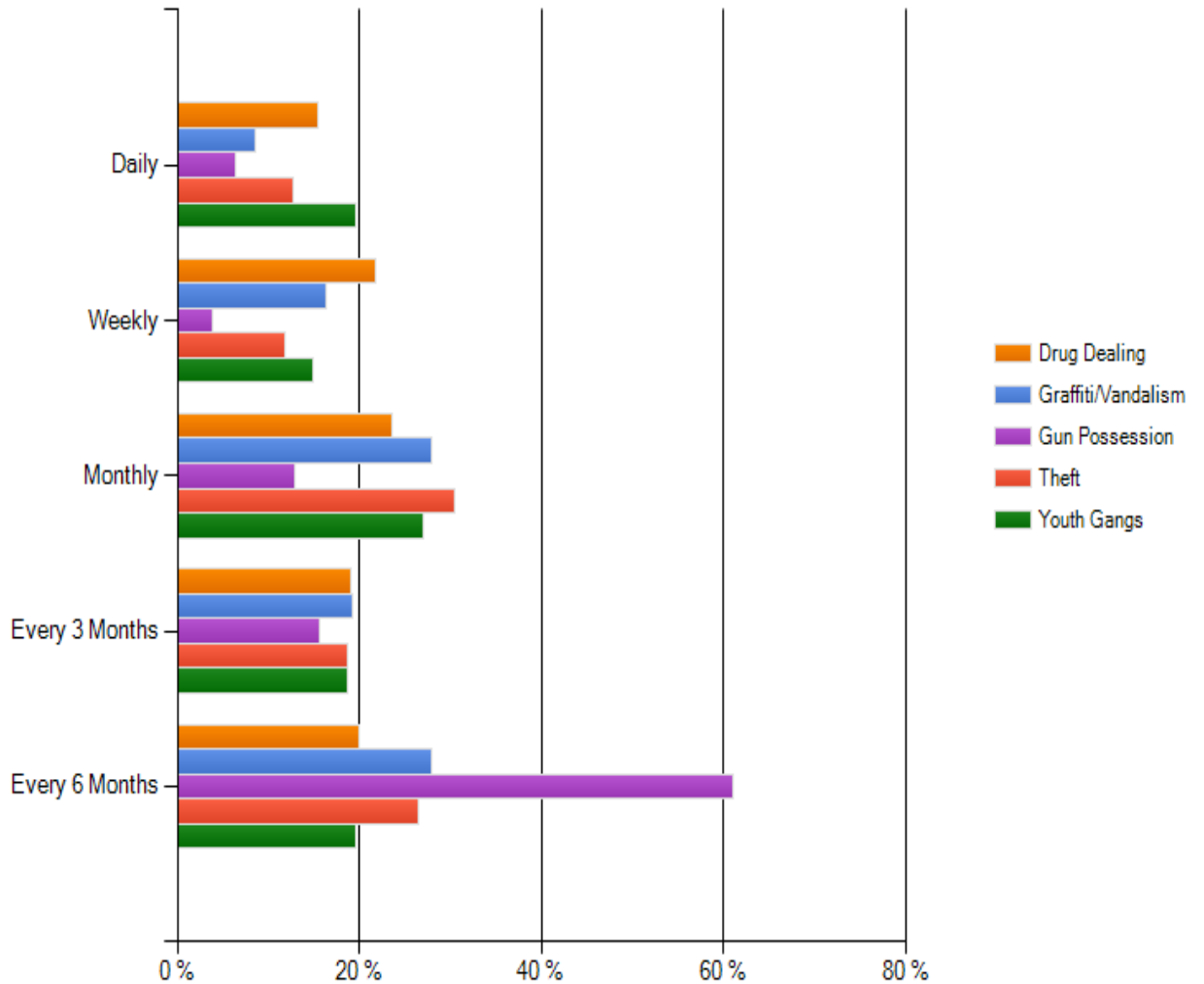


- *It is clear across the proportions of each age group that the most frequently indicated community positives were found in Cultural Diversity, with 98, and Parks/Green Spaces with 102, of the 142 total number of respondents (Jalali).*
- *Contrastingly, we can see that the least indicated positive across each age group was Commercial Developments – which received very little selection (16 out of 142 respondents) across all groups (Jalali).*

The final step in our statistical analysis of the community's responses was performed by comparing the data in the last two questions of the survey – which prompted residents to give rankings to the frequency at which they both perceived and observed threats to their safety in the community. This idea was introduced as way to somewhat monitor the inconsistencies between residents' perception of danger and their personal experience with having their safety threatened. We hoped to reveal more about the particular influence that the East Side's reputation in the media has on the local community's immediate sense of safety.

By challenging respondents to show logical consistency between their indications of observed threats and the immediate sense of security they assume as a result – we had introduced another important factor in our survey's results. Over-reporting of crime has its roots in the sort of false perception and paranoia that has had a deep impact on the East Side community, and presented our project with the challenge of identifying where these influences have taken shape. In the figures below, we can see an overview of how often residents indicated their *observance* of specific crimes, followed by a color-coded chart representing Low (Green), Medium (Orange), and High (Red) levels of threat to the community based on the response percents for each type of threat:

**How would you rate the frequency at which you observe the following on the East Side?**



<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Daily</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Every 3 Months</b>	<b>Every 6 Months</b>
Drug Dealing	16%	22%	24%	19%	20%
Graffiti/Vandalism	9%	16%	28%	19%	28%
Gun Possession	7%	4%	13%	16%	61%
Theft	13%	12%	30%	19%	27%
Youth Gangs	20%	15%	27%	19%	20%

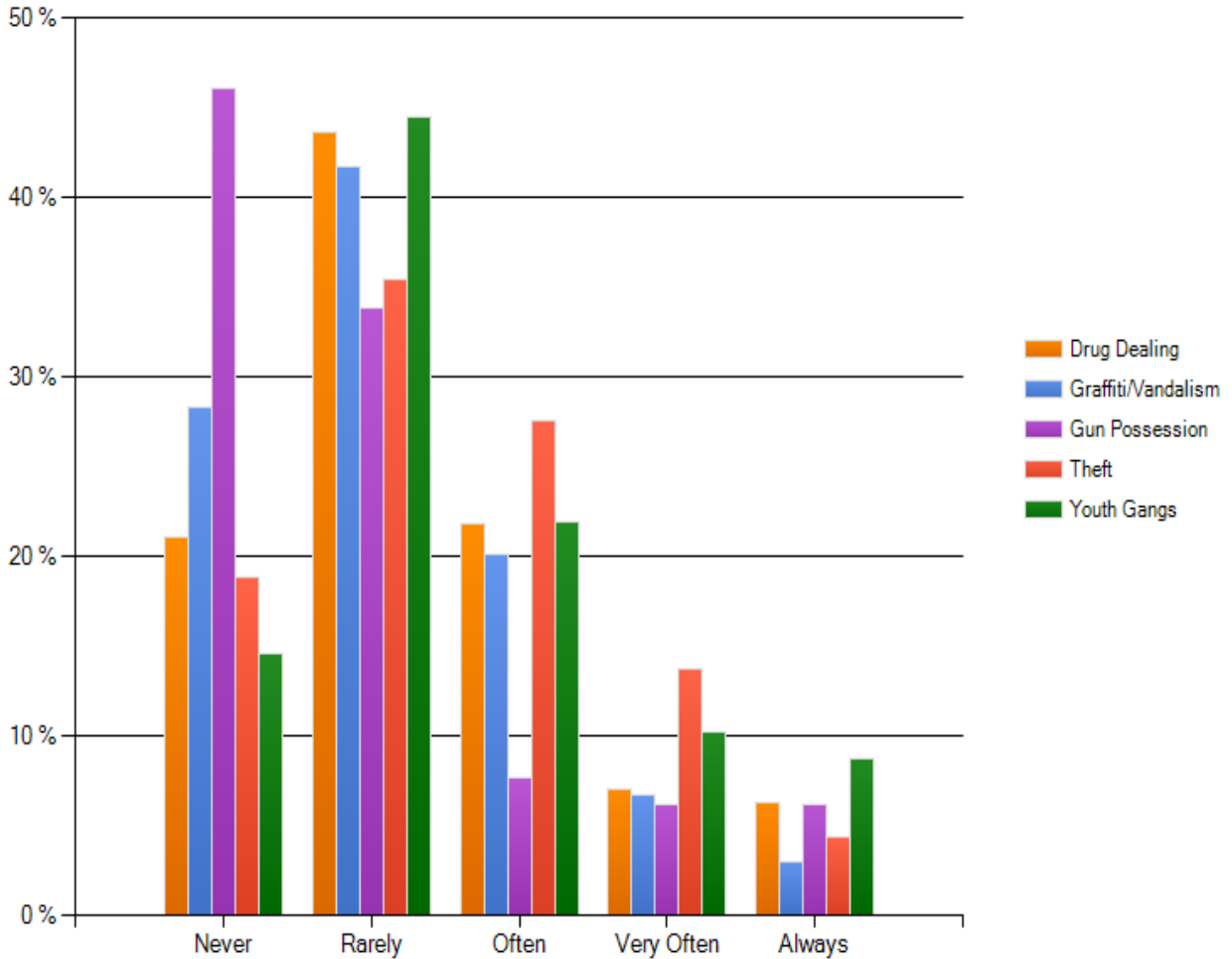
*Source: Public Safety Evaluation Surveys of East Saint Paul Residents*



We begin to see from the above figures that residents have reported the observance of crimes across a wide variety of frequencies. There is the obviously rare occurrence of Gun Possession, yet aside from that there is a mixed bag of opinions regarding the remaining options. Drug Dealing and Youth gangs represent two widely reported observances, evenly distributed across all frequencies. Then there are the choices of Graffiti/Vandalism and Theft - which have been concentrated in both the Monthly and Every 6 Months columns. In fact, the overall data summary from Question 6 would ironically go a long ways in justifying the notion that Saint Paul's East Side is a community plagued by frequent dangers. It would indeed appear easy to assume from the above figures that there is a lot to be left desired when speaking in terms of public safety on the East Side.

Such an impression, however, can be strongly argued against by the subsequent data obtained from our residents' responses to the final question of the survey. Here, in Question 7, is where residents' prior claims to observing certain dangers would be compared with their sense of security in the community on a regular basis. The rates at which residents claimed to observe danger with their own eyes subsequently appear to be exaggerated in light of the results from the survey's final question. When given the opportunity to identify specifically the issues that consistently threatened their safety, the majority of our residents responded very positively. A complete breakdown of the community's sense of security as a result of specific threatening issues can be best illustrated by the figures found below:

**How often do you feel less safe in public as a result of the following issues?**



<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Very Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
Drug Dealing	21%	44%	22%	7%	6%
Graffiti/Vandalism	28%	42%	20%	7%	3%
Gun Possession	46%	34%	8%	6%	6%
Theft	19%	36%	28%	14%	4%
Youth Gangs	15%	45%	22%	10%	9%

*Source: Public Safety Evaluation Surveys of East Saint Paul Residents*

Ultimately, it can be argued very effectively that there exists a positive overall sense of community security in the East Side – very much due to the fact that its residents have made apparent in the Positive East Side survey that their perceptions of danger do not tend to reflect what they indicated as experiences with crime, and vice versa. In other words, the sort of rates at which crime was suggested to be occurring by residents in Question 6 did not trigger a backlash of negative feedback in Question 7. Instead, the findings of the statistical analysis conclusively showed us that a) one’s sense of security appears to increase with lengthened residency, b) that a lack of commercial development represents the most “negative” aspect of the East Side, and c) that purely violent crime (Gun Possession) is by far the least frequent of incidents amongst other crimes. These key findings remain invaluable to the assessment of *where* harmful notions about the East Side have been produced and implemented, and more importantly, *how* imminent community revitalization can be best approached.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS**

It is important to primarily acknowledge that our statistical findings produced from the survey are representative of only 142 residents. It would be naïve to suggest that the logic extracted from this research project is guaranteed to carry over into a larger sample – but we had always anticipated this to be the case. We made a subsequent effort in advance to diversify the distribution of the survey, and allow for residents to indicate in relatively specific detail their concerns for individual sources of danger. In that sense, I believe the data from the Positive East Side survey remains quite useful on the scale of

impact for which it was intended. The manner in which the survey was introduced to the different neighborhoods was community-oriented, being put into the hands of those who civically identify with the East Side. This goes to echo the sort of enthusiasm that was mentioned in regards to our first distribution of a mere nine surveys. The convincing desire of respondents to communicate the importance of the issues addressed in the survey reflects that of a progressive environment of positive and forward thinking – rather than a stagnant community surrendered to the fact that they are in deterioration.

As a closing point, a summary of the Positive East Side survey results was presented to the community. A small group of local residents, political figures and community leaders were present to review both the encouraging findings of the survey, as well as the potential expansions of its lacking points. Primarily, those at the meeting shared the overall view that more detail in the survey's options could unlock more perspective into the community – citing the specific names of parks and neighborhoods (rather than districts) to be added as selectable or fill-in options on the survey. Others suggested that an indicator of race or ethnicity would also assist in putting the diverse community's priorities into a more comprehensive view. For example, one district community organizer explained the need to address the simultaneously cultural and generational differences between white, senior residents, and young racial minority groups – both of which make up large portions of the community's current population. Finally, the small group reflected as a whole on the need to continue pushing the Positive East Side project into the hands of many more community organizations beyond MCS. Residents also reiterated their desire to involve Positive East Side with the local and state

media representatives – with the sense that a genuine opportunity to revitalize the East Side’s public reputation could be arriving in the near future.

Ultimately, the human infrastructure for revitalizing the East Side’s community’s struggles is ever-present, instead it appears to be rather a lack of commercial and political resources limiting its potential to be recognized as a the safe, healthy environment which the majority of its residents consider it to be. The residual amount of residents who selected Commercial Developments as a positive tells us that perhaps it is here in the lack of economic reciprocity that community is leaving the East Side. The stigma of the East Side is one commonly shared by urban communities near and far – yet it is continually a place that has been unjustly singled out of the bigger picture. It is hoped that the beginnings of what has become the Positive East Side movement are enough to convince residents to help bring an end to the grim reputation caused by such rife “over-perception” of dangers in the East of our capitol. It is imperative that it not be allowed to gain any more momentum – as it much too easily tarnishes the image of a community truly filled with civically-minded residents that can hopefully continue to keep the East Side a safe and proper environment for many years to come.

**References:**

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