

Notes from SPD Focus Group

4 SPD officers + 5 Task Force Members

February 12th 2014

Where specifically does youth crime happen in the 5 hotspots?

Rainier and Henderson

- Has a history of crime and incidents
- There are a lot of distractions and attractions at this intersection
- Crime statistics have been on the rise at Rainier Beach Community Center since last year
- More youth hanging out there without a specific purpose (they are not there for a program or activity and usually smell of marijuana)
- Parents have started to forbid their kids from going to RBCC
- Sometimes teens get crowded off the courts and recreation areas by others
 - Some are being very disrespectful to staff
 - Staff is overwhelmed
 - There is a general atmosphere of fear
- The community center may have become a disputed turf for gang activities
 - Some kids are wearing what's perceived to be "gang colors" (bandanas, hats, etc...)
 - Many students have been trespassed from RBCC
- When off duty police were present at RBCC (around December) it was much more pleasant, felt safer for users and staff
 - Officers would engage with youth and build rapport
- There will be more youth foot traffic on Rainier and Henderson once the weather gets better. This will probably result in increased crime. School release times are a factor in tensions and fighting, as youth know when/where to find each other:
 - Southshore k-8: 3:30 elementary/ 3:40 middle schoolers
 - RB High School: 2:10
 - Aki-Kurose Middle School: 2:15
 - Asa Mercer Middle School: 2:15
 - Southlake: staggered release times but all students out by 2:30
- Bus shelters tolerate certain kinds of illegal activities, site of recent day-light purse snatch incident
(<http://spdblotter.seattle.gov/2014/02/11/cops-chase-down-bb-gun-carrying-purse-snatcher-in-south-seattle/>)
 - Bus stop on NW corner of Henderson is especially problematic
 - This bus shelter is heavily used
- Cloverdale field (behind Community Center, SouthShore & Southlake Schools) is a shortcut for suspects after a crime is committed

- The public restroom on the Parks property “the hill” there offers shelter and a hideout
 - The bathroom remains open at night and the area is badly lit
 - This is a worrisome location because it’s out of the way from everything else and provides easy place for youth to escape, evade police or other authority figures
 - There have been incidents related to drugs and prostitution there in the past
- The tennis courts could be a “gathering place for new crews on the streets”
 - The Tennis Squad
 - The South End Boys
 - Down with the Crew Hoovers
- Teachers often report crimes in this area but seldom follow up when more information is needed. There’s a disconnect between teachers and the police.
- The plaza (NW corner of R&H) is problematic and is known by youth as a place to gather to fight, called “the fight circle”
 - The plaza area is busy place with youth coming and going from area schools and other school like Asa Mercer, Aki Kurose Middle Schools. Property lines are not clearly delineated leading to confusion about what is Parks & schools property with implications
 - This area also attracts a lot of marijuana related transactions

Safeway:

- People deliberately go to the Safeway area to commit crimes because of the amount of people in the area
- Mapes Creek walkway is troublesome because it provides easy access and escape routes
- A lot of the action from R&H spillover onto Safeway -- especially after school is out.
- Safeway gas station a popular spot for theft or robbery

Light Rail:

- Suitable targets are drawn to this area because of the convenience of transportation
- Cell phone snatch is very common

What address is used for the Mapes Creek Walkway (aka the cut)?

- 9000 Rainier
- The Path
- 54th and Fletcher
- The Walkway

How often do you suspect that youth are under the influence of drugs or alcohol? Does any of the 5 hotspots have more drug activity than others? which one?

- There's a noticeable increase in marijuana use among youth - more than ever
- Rainier and Henderson and especially Rainier & Cloverdale is the most notorious spot for drug activities
 - The bathroom in the middle of Cloverdale field is often used for drug use because of multiple escape routes
- Barbershop by Safeway seems like a favorable place for these activities as well
 - too many people hang out in front of the barbershop
- It seems like marijuana use is more common than alcohol use (due the great number of medical marijuana shops along Rainier Ave)
- More students the influence of marijuana than ever before
 - All schools in the area are having problems with marijuana use
- Officers can only see and respond to so much; they are often caught up in computer work during patrols and paperwork after incidents.
 - Officers don't have a chance to walk around enough and engage people -- not as much as before the change in paperwork mandates
 - Pro-active police work is hardly seen nowadays
 - while officers are busy filing paperwork the community remains wide open for potential criminals to do as they please
 - The result is that the connection with the community suffers or may be even lost

Have you received official calls to respond to “fight club” activities? how would such incidents be coded? where do these incidents typically occur?

- Fight club boundaries are difficult to discern
- There have been some reports but the fight clubs are really unofficial
- Fighting is not a crime if both parties are willingly engaged
- These are not highly organized activities
 - The fight club refers mostly to a place where kids gather to beat someone up
 - If it is planned and coordinated, that happens between the assailants but the victim wouldn't know
- These reports get coded as “disturbance calls”
- Parents typically refuse to press charges

What is the prevalence of youths involved in suspicious activities in Rainier Beach who are NOT from the neighborhood? Is there a prevalence of incidents involving these out-of-the area individuals in any of the 5 hotspots? What kinds of incidents?

- The RB community center attracts a lot of kids from various parts of the surrounding area

- We don't exactly know if all the kids involved in illegitimate activities are from RB or from outside of the neighborhood, but a lot of the kids involved in incidents are actually from RB schools
- Some youth are coming from Renton/Cleveland high school areas

What kinds of items are most often taken from stores? From individuals? How are these items fenced? Is there a connection between stolen goods and drug activity?

- There is a large number of pawnshops all along Rainier Ave and some of these places offer kids quick money for stolen goods, including cell phones, other electronics
 - It is believed that shop owners blatantly engage with youth in order to buy stolen goods
- A preponderance of medical marijuana shops in the area appear to be a nexus between drug activities and theft:
 - Kids may be stealing in order to afford to buy weed
- Cell phones and other electronics are the most commonly stolen item from individuals
- Business owners do not call about loitering or illegal activity