RIVER TO RAIL 2013 REPORT

prepared by the city of huntington office of communications

RIVER TO RAIL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The River to Rail initiative is a multi-disciplinary approach to improve a stagnant and crime-plagued area of Huntington's West End. The targeted area stretches from the Ohio River to the rail line along Van Buren Avenue between 8th Street West and 17th Street West.

When looking at crime data from the River to Rail area, one can see how it would benefit from an increase in resources. A disproportionate amount of crime has occurred in the targeted area in recent years. From Jan. 1, 2011, to Dec. 3, 2012, 11.7 percent of all violent crimes and 11.1 percent of all drug offenses occurred there. The targeted area represents approximately 5.5 percent of Huntington's geographic size.

Residential streets also have been hampered by slum and blight conditions. According to the 2010 Census, there were 1,243 residential properties in the targeted area, but 16.7 percent were vacant. More than 54 percent were rental properties.

The River to Rail area, however, holds vast potential with its flat land, a long-established commercial district, easy access to Interstate 64 and vacant homes, buildings and warehouses that could be put back to productive use.

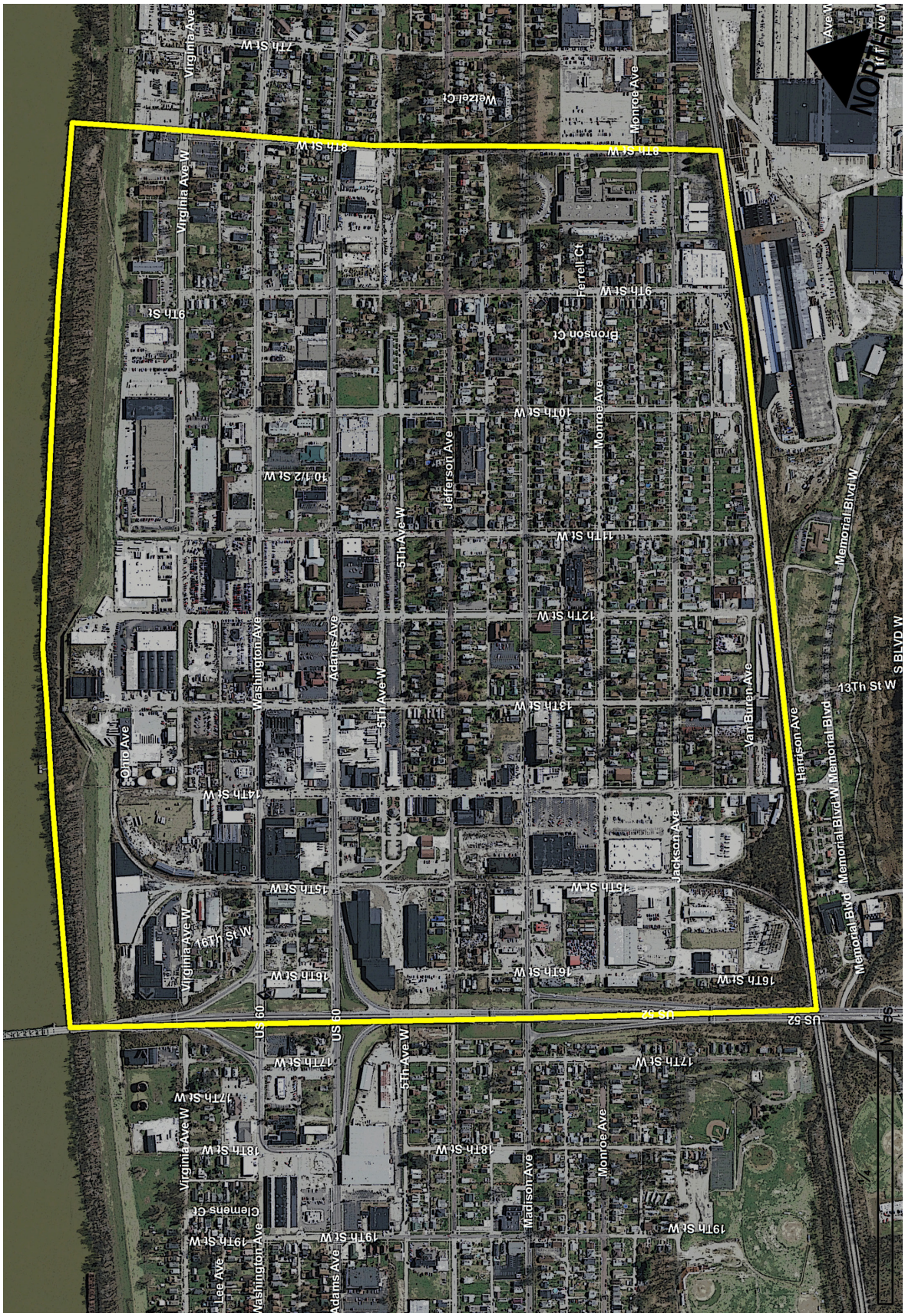
The success of this initiative relies on law enforcement officers using crime data and various partnerships to develop innovative strategies to fighting crime; code enforcement officers issuing citations to irresponsible property owners; city officials working with business owners to revitalize the Old Central City Commercial District on 14th Street West; and residents and places of worship taking a more active role.

Many of those efforts began to take shape in 2013. The Huntington Police Department received federal grants to dedicate more resources to the targeted area through directed patrols, bike patrols and undercover drug operations. Working with informants and using a plethora of anonymous tips from the public, the Police Department executed 14 search warrants resulting in 22 arrests and the seizure of illegal narcotics, cash and firearms in the targeted area.

The Police Department also assumed control of code enforcement and increased the number of code enforcement officers from 1 to 3 with additional monies from grants and the city's general fund. These code enforcement officers have made a significant dent in the slum and blight conditions of the targeted area, using new tools such as the on-the-spot citation ordinance that Huntington City Council approved in the spring of 2013.

City officials also set in motion a new vision for the Old Central City commercial district by restructuring the management and operations contract for the Central City Market, which is viewed as the anchor of the revitalization effort on 14th Street West. The facility will be the future home of the Wild Ramp, and it will partner with the Cabell County Tailgate Farmer's Market to continue the outdoor Central City Market from late June through late October.

Lastly, there were a number of community-based projects in the targeted area in 2013. Volunteers painted a new mural on the 14th Street West underpass, the Paul Ambrose Trail for Health opened two new trail sections and places of worship joined forces to provide activities for youths, just to name a few.



RIVER TO RAIL AREA

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: a new vision for old central city

CENTRAL CITY MARKET

One of the primary directives of the River to Rail initiative is using a community-driven approach to rejuvenate the Old Central City commercial district on 14th Street West. Known for its quaint antique shops that have brought thousands of visitors to the area, community members believe this area is ripe for commercial growth because of its proximity to Interstate 64. No other neighborhood-commercial district in the city is as close to an interstate exit as Old Central City.

The Heartland Intermodal Gateway at Prichard in Wayne County also could have a residual impact on the West End when it opens later this year. The facility will be a place where goods can be transferred between rail and roadways, or even river and airways with the proximity of the Big Sandy River and Huntington Tri-State Airport. The facility could spark redevelopment of vacant industrial sites in the River to Rail area to be used as warehouses and distribution centers.

The city-owned Central City Market on 14th Street West is another critical economic development asset in the River to Rail area and is viewed as the anchor of revitalization efforts in the Old Central City commercial district.

Maximizing the market's potential began in April 2013 when the city notified the Central City Market Corp. that it would only renew its 5-year management contract through the end of the year. At the time, the 2,500 square feet of space inside the market was being used as a senior center, while the outdoor space behind the market was used on a seasonal basis by 18 vendors who belong to the Cabell County Tailgate Farmer's Market.

The Cabell County Tailgate Farmer's Market is open at the Central City Market from late June through late October.

Working with the city, the Cabell County Community Services Organization relocated the senior center to Madison Manor, an assisted-living facility at 1329 Madison Ave. The CCCSO Board of Directors unanimously approved the move in October 2013, as it allowed more residents of the high-rise to access the agency's services and resulted in a significant cost savings.

Also in October, the city's vision for the market was spelled out in its request for qualifications for the operations and management contract. The document said the city wanted an entity that would focus on local food, arts and crafts; develop a business model that generated foot traffic; maintain a small tourism information center; and continue to partner with the Cabell County Tailgate Farmer's Market.

The city received proposals from the Wild Ramp, a year-round market at Heritage Station in downtown Huntington that focuses on selling locally-produced food, and Ackenpucky, a business on 14th Street West that offers custom interior design work with an emphasis on repurposed materials.

A five-person subcommittee of the River to Rail steering committee evaluated the proposals from the Wild Ramp and Ackenpucky based on their qualifications and experience; quality of the business plan; sensitivity to the community's history and assets; budget and feasibility of the proposal; and past performance. Out of 100 possible points, the subcommittee gave The Wild Ramp a score of 84 to Ackenpucky's 73. The subcommittee's recommendation was approved by the steering committee on Oct. 31, and the new management contract was ultimately approved by City Council on Nov. 25.

Using some of the $20,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds that were appropriated for the market, the city formed a partnership with Ackenpucky to make repairs and build shelving and other fixtures that the Wild Ramp needed at its new home.

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture provided financial security for both the Wild Ramp and the Cabell County Tailgate Farmer's Market when it committed $43,000 annually to each entity in early 2014.

Under the direction of Commissioner Walt Helmick, the Department of Agriculture has a plan to more than double the output of farms in the state within five years by growing the poultry and beef industries and by encouraging farm-to-table initiatives that connect growers directly with consumers.

Helmick believes the latter could be accomplished by establishing regional supply systems with cooling and storage facilities that serve several counties. The facilities would give local growers the equipment they need to supply fresh, healthy food to school districts, regional jails, state prisons, colleges and universities.

OLD CENTRAL CITY GAZEBO

The gazebo, located on 14th Street West, had been bundled in the management contract with the Central City Market.

Management of the Central City Gazebo was turned over to the Old Central City Association in 2013.

However, residents began to express concerns that the gazebo had been underutilized in recent years. According to 2013 records, it was rented once and netted $200.

The Old Central City Association approached the city about leasing the gazebo for $1 a year. In return, the Old Central City Association agreed to maintain the facility, pay for utilities and provide liability insurance. Huntington City Council approved the agreement on Nov. 25.

Because the Old Central City Association is largely comprised of shop owners on 14th Street West, it has a vested interest in ensuring that the gazebo generates foot traffic and becomes a focal point for community-based events.

The Old Central City Association, Bulldog Creative Services and a few businesses in the River to Rail Area also spearheaded the face lift that the 14th Street West underpass received in the spring of 2013. A new mural on the underpass pays homage to Duncan Box and Lumber and The J. Taylor Auto Museum, two mainstays of the commercial district.

14TH STREET WEST UNDERPASS MURAL

The Old Central City Association received federal Community Development Block Grant funds to pay for the mural as well as new way-finder signs that were placed in the

Volunteers gave the 14th Street West underpass a face lift by painting a mural during the spring of 2013.

commercial district and near the 17th Street West Exit off Interstate 64.

The mural design features a continuation of the Duncan Box and Lumber mill on the west wall and an antique car heading in the direction of the J Taylor Auto Museum on the east wall. A colorful quilt, a tribute to the 10 quilt squares painted on buildings in Old Central City, serves as the backdrop for the east wall mural.

The murals also include signs pointing to key attractions, such as Heritage Farm Museum and Village, the Museum of Radio and Technology and the Central City Farmer's Market. The signs are fitting considering a few months later, the route from 14th Street West to Harveytown and out Harvey Road to Heritage Farm Museum and Village was designated as the Mike and Henriella Perry Heritage Trail to recognize the couple for their work to build Heritage Farm and preserve Appalachian heritage.

PAUL AMBROSE TRAIL FOR HEALTH

Construction on a growing bicycle and pedestrian trail system that provides active transportation and is a tool to fight obesity made progress in 2013. Two sections of the Paul Ambrose Trail for Health in or near the River to Rail area were either completed or almost completed.

A three-mile section of crushed limestone path that runs on top of the earthen levee along the Ohio River from 3rd Street West to Vinson Road in Westmoreland is almost finished. The trail head at 3rd Street West includes a rain garden and kiosk.

In Harveytown, a half-mile crushed limestone and paved pathway was completed, linking Harveytown Park to the western end of the walking trail at Ritter Park. A paved loop at St. Cloud Commons that is just shy of a mile was completed in late 2012.

The network of pathways and share-the-road routes will eventually connect all of Huntington's parks and major employers from Westmoreland to Altizer. It is named for Dr. Paul Ambrose, a Huntington native and promising physician whose life ended in the terrorist attack at the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001.

The PATH system, funded by the West Virginia Department of Transportation and private donations through

the Rahall Transportation Institute Foundation, will have a positive impact on the health of the community for generations to come.

CONGRESSMAN RAHALL TOURS RIVER TO RAIL AREA

Rep. Nick J. Rahall, D-W.Va., got a first-hand look at the River to Rail area in August 2013 when he was joined by city and county officials during a tour of the West End on a Tri-State Transit Authority trolley.

Rahall visited with business owners in the Old Central City commercial district and with residents living on streets that are hampered by slum and blight conditions such as 9th Street West and Jefferson Avenue to get input on what their community needs to thrive.

"With the plans (the City of Huntington) has in place, I have the greatest deal of confidence that this area will be rejuvenated and come back alive with a force and vigor not seen before," Rahall told The Herald-Dispatch after the tour.

U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall, D-W.Va., toured the River to Rail area in August 2013. Photo courtesy of The Herald-Dispatch.

FAITH-BASED INVOLVEMENT

Although places of worship in the River to Rail area largely consist of membership that lives outside the area, they have become involved in the initiative.

Ford Price, the pastor at Central United Methodist Church, has channeled his efforts into giving children in the West End more things to do. His church offered a free, week-long sports camp in June that was funded by family and friends of two deceased church members, John Underwood and Ray McCoy. Various local coaches volunteered their time.

The church also partnered with Cabell County Schools to become a summer free lunch site during the month of July. The church supplemented the lunches with two hours of supervised activities each day.

Central United Methodist is one of about a half-dozen churches that belong to the West End Ministerial Association. The churches have become more active as the River to Rail initiative has taken hold.

Central United Methodist Church offered a free, week long sports camp in June 2013.

"Many of the people in our church used to live in the West End but commute in now, " Price told The Herald-Dispatch in a story that was published June 30, 2013. "There's a new population we aren't reaching. The demographics and the socioeconomic factors are different and there are a lot more rentals. The turnover in the neighborhood is frequent.

"That doesn't mean we give up if we don't succeed the first time. We're determined to stay the course."

LAW ENFORCEMENT:

using multiple strategies to deter crime

The Huntington Police Department applied for and received several grants in 2013 to assist with its strategic approach to reducing crime in the River to Rail area. These include two Edward J. Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance grants in the amount of $76,851 to fund approximately 3,000 overtime hours of bike patrols, directed patrols, undercover drug operations and attending community meetings.

In addition, the Police Department applied for and received a $625,000 COPS hiring grant to fund five new police officer positions. Although this grant was not specifically for the River to Rail area, it has made it more flexible to direct resources to the area.

The bike patrol is one of the most requested services offered to the public and is an effective tool in fighting the sale of drugs and raising a citizen's perception of security. Officers assigned to this unit are capable of moving through the River to Rail area quickly and quietly and can gain access to areas that are otherwise difficult for motor vehicles.

The aim of directed patrols — uniformed officers in police cruisers — is to greatly improve the visibility of the Police Department in the River to Rail Area. This proactive unit is given time and resources to concentrate on specific problems that need to be addressed in the community.

Undercover drug operations in the River to Rail area have been spearheaded by the Huntington Violent Crime/Drug Task Force and by the Police Department's Special Emphasis Unit. These entities use information from informants and the public as well as various interdiction methods to curtail the flow of drugs into the city.

One pound of heroin and $12,000 of cash were seized during a drug bust Dec. 31, 2013, in the 1400 block of Jefferson Ave.

The Huntington Police Department executed 14 search warrants in the River to Rail area in 2013, leading to 22 arrests. These search warrants resulted in the seizure of pills, crack cocaine, heroin and firearms.

The most significant search warrant was executed Dec. 31, 2013, at an apartment at 1416 Jefferson Ave., as part of an extensive drug investigation by the Police Department's Special Emphasis Unit with assistance from the West Virginia State Police.

Inside the apartment, police seized approximately one pound of heroin, with a street value of $80,000, as well as packaging materials, scales and $12,000 in cash. Three men from Detroit were arrested and charged with possession with intent to distribute heroin.

Like many search warrants executed in the River to Rail area in 2013, Huntington Police initiated the investigation

after officers received information from numerous concerned residents and shift patrol officers about suspicious activity in and around the apartment building.

The seizure has had a lasting effect on the River to Rail area. Informants had reported to police one month after the drug bust that they were unable to purchase heroin in the area.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

The River to Rail target area suffers from a disproportionate amount of vacant, dilapidated structures and occupied rental units in slum and blighted conditions. Prior to 2013, the Department of Public Works was largely reactive in its approach due to minimal code enforcement staffing.

The resulting minimal enforcement had a detrimental effect on the quality of life and health and safety of our neighborhoods. According to the Cabell County Assessor's Office, a neighbor with property plagued by weeds, trash or rubbish in the yard can potentially lower the sales value of a neighboring, well-kept home by $20,000 to $30,000.

In the spring of 2013, the City of Huntington launched a new code enforcement strategy aimed at eliminating the self-perpetuating cycle of blight. Through the Municipal Home Rule Pilot Program, the city gained the ability to issue on-the-spot code enforcement citations and adopted an ordinance that prohibited indoor furniture from being placed on porches and in yards.

Code enforcement also was shifted from the Division of Inspection and Compliance to the Huntington Police Department with the mindset that reducing code violations would also act as a crime deterrent.

The Huntington City Council helped bolster the new Code Enforcement Unit in the Police Department by approving funding in the 2013-2014 budget for a second code enforcement officer. The Police Department also applied for and was awarded a $28,000 state Justice Assistance Grant to pay for the salary of a third code enforcement position.

The Huntington Police Department's Code Enforcement Unit issued 144 citations in the River to Rail area in 2013.

Before the code enforcement blitz began on July 1, 2013, residents were given approximately three months to clean up their properties. The city assisted by coordinating a 10-week, citywide cleanup program that focused on specific neighborhoods in two-week segments.

There were 1,726 code enforcement citations issued across the city between July 1, 2013, and Jan. 31, 2013. Of those citations, 76 percent were resolved through compliance. Comparatively, there were 144 code enforcement citations, or 8.3 percent of the total, issued in the River to Rail area, which represents 5.5 percent of the city's geographic size. Sixty-four percent of the citations in the River to Rail area were resolved through compliance.

Additionally, there were two structures demolished in the River to Rail area in 2013. As of April 2014, 10 structures in the targeted area are on the Unsafe Building Commission's demolition list, and the Huntington Urban Renewal Authority's Land Bank owns six properties in the area.

PERCEPTION OF CRIME

In December 2013 and January 2014, the Huntington Police Department formed a partnership with JB & Associates of Huntington to conduct a door-to-door survey to gather resident perceptions and opinions of living in the West End.

The data collected in this 12-block area then was compared to data collected from the same West End neighborhoods in 2010 and 2011. Data was collected on the West End in 2010 and 2011 because it was used as a comparison area to Fairfield West during the Weed and Seed Program.

JB & Associates released detailed results of its survey in early 2014. Among the highlights:

• 27 percent of respondents in the most recent survey said their neighborhood had improved over the past year compared to only 8 percent in 2010. Only 18 percent of respondents said the neighborhood had gotten worse compared to 27 percent in 2010.

• The safety rating of the West End during the day remained the same between 2010 and 2013 (72 percent), while the feeling of safety at night increased between the two timeframes (31 percent in 2010 to 39 percent in 2011).

• The two primary crime issues — drugs and burglary/robbery — remained the same in the West End. Both demonstrated an increased presence between the 2010 and 2013 surveys (drugs increased from 65-75 percent, while burglary/robbery rose from 44 to 53 percent).

• The satisfaction rating for police response calls in the West End improved from 2010 to 2013 (2.43 to 2.61 using a four-point scale).

• Junk, garbage and litter in the West End were said to be a major problem by 24 percent of the door-to-door survey respondents. However, 42 percent of those surveyed said trash was not a problem. That is the highest rating received over the three comparison years.

CODE ENFORCEMENT DATA

Citation Category	Entire City	River to Rail	Percent Issued in River to Rail
High Weeds / Combustibles	690	52	8%
Rubbish/Garbage	261	15	6%
Dumping	5	0	0%
Junk Storage	621	48	8%
Sanitation	52	4	8%
Obstructing Sidewalk	4	0	0%
Vacant Structures and Land	52	6	12%
Obstructing Drainage Ditches	7	1	14%
Unlicensed Vehicles	4	0	0%
Decaying Substance	1	0	0%
Other	29	18	62%
Total	1726	144	8%
Total citations resolved	1058	131	12%
Number in Compliance Resolved	803	84	10%
Percentage in Compliance	76%	64%	N/A

* The River to Rail area covers approximately 5.5% of the city

CRIME IN RIVER TO RAIL AREA 2010-2013

Offenses in River to Rail Area	2010	2011	2012	2013
Sex Offense - Forcible Rape	2	3	3	3
Sex Offense - Forcible Sodomy	0	1	0	0
Sex Offense - Assault with an Object	4	4	2	0
Sex Offense - Forcible Handling	0	4	2	0
Burglary/Breaking and Entering	90	105	86	99
Larceny - Purse Snatching	1	0	0	0
Larceny - Shoplifting	1	7	7	6
Larceny - From Building	5	0	1	4
Larceny - From Vehicle/Not Parts	16	26	20	36
Larceny - Of Motor Vehicle Part/Access	1	0	3	6
Larceny - Other	116	137	121	120
Motor Vehicle Theft	16	16	9	15
Kidnapping/Abduction	0	1	0	1
Arson	5	2	3	0
Drug/Narcotics	24	25	25	16
Drug Equipment	0	0	0	3
Embezzlement	0	0	3	2
Fraud - False Pretenses/Games	16	10	8	9
Fraud - Credit Card/ATM	1	4	0	4
Fraud - Impersonation	0	4	1	4
Counterfeit/Forgery	9	7	4	7
Prostitution	2	2	7	0
Stolen Property	0	1	0	2
Aggravated Assault	6	9	4	4
Simple Assault	70	90	76	94
Destruction/Damage/Vandalism	52	84	71	53
Robbery	26	22	12	17
Weapon Law Violation	0	0	0	2
Disorderly Conduct	13	8	9	8
Driving Under the Influence	33	39	55	44
Drunkenness	10	6	11	5
Liquor Law Violations	0	0	0	1
Runaway	0	0	0	2
Trespass of Real Property	0	0	0	1
All Other Offenses	89	114	93	106
Total	608	731	636	674
Total Violent	34	34	19	24
Total Property	251	293	250	286

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