



## **How bad is crime in HRM, anyway?**

**By Nancy Conrad**

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Each year, the Chamber releases a scorecard measuring the city's progress on various measures of growth. The Chamber is particularly interested in people. Of particular interest to the Chamber is people – growing the city's population and reputation as a great place to do business. This, in turn, will grow the economy.

In April, a report commissioned by HRM's Mayor Peter Kelly titled "Violence and Public Safety in HRM" was released. Contrary to public perception, according to page 13 of the report: "It (the rate of violence in Halifax Census Metropolitan Area) has fallen appreciably over the last two years cited (2005 and 2006) and recent statistics indicate that it has fallen further in 2007 (about 10% overall and a dramatic 40% in robberies)". On page 14, the report states, "It might be expected that if and as violent crime continues to be reduced, these views and the public image of HRM will also change. However, that is not certain..."

In a recent meeting in June with the Chamber, Halifax Regional Police Chief Frank Beazley stated that crime in our city is not random. In reality, it is highly unlikely that if you are walking on Spring Garden Road in the middle of the day, you will be a victim of crime. Citizens of HRM agree. According to the Halifax Urban Report 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2008, conducted by CRA, when HRM residents were asked, "In general, how safe do you feel in the community where you live?", 86 percent responded that they felt either very or completely safe where they live.

There seems to be a disconnect between perceptions. On one hand, the rate of crime is going down and people feel safe in Halifax. On the other hand, Halifax is being branded as violent. Our city will feel the negative impact of this for years to come. Direct action is needed to restore our city's reputation as the best place to live, work and play. Of course, we must continue to take steps to reduce crime even more so that statistics continue to work in our favour. But we must celebrate that in reality, the crime rate has decreased and is continuing to go down.

We all have a personal responsibility for our own safety. We need to take precautions in our own lives to reduce the likelihood that we will be victims of crime. Local media, politicians and businesses also have a duty to promote our city.

The fact is that cities compete internationally for business and levels of crime are an important factor when choosing a location. Declaring a "war on crime" might be popular politically because no one wants crime. But in some cases – like this -- it does nothing but create unjustified fear and a negative image in business.

Statistics show that crime is decreasing in our city. We should, and must, celebrate that fact.

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Contact Nancy Conrad at [nancy@halifaxchamber.com](mailto:nancy@halifaxchamber.com)