

Officials draft crime plan for Annapolis

State, federal, local proposal focuses on most violent residents, patrols, lighting, cameras

BY JUSTIN FENTON
(SUN REPORTER)

State, federal and local officials are working on a comprehensive crime plan for Annapolis that could make the state capital a model for other cities across Maryland.

The plan, which has the backing of one of Annapolis' newest residents, Gov. Martin O'Malley, would sharpen the focus on the city's most violent residents, increase police patrols, lighting and security cameras in public housing communities, and fund mentoring programs for youths and drug and alcohol treatment.

"We think this is an opportunity not only to solve the crime problem in the city of Annapolis but to use it as a model program that can be duplicated across the state," said House Speaker Michael E. Busch, a Democrat whose district includes the city.

Crime has been a major issue in Annapolis, where residents are concerned about continued gun violence around public housing communities and a spate of crimes in upper-class neighborhoods. They have demanded that the city come up with plans to combat violence.

Two people were shot to death in a private, low-income housing development last month, about two weeks after the city recorded its deadliest year on record with eight homicides. Still, city police announced this month that overall crime in 2007 was down 9.6 percent from the previous year and have expressed tempered optimism that anti-crime efforts are working.

The "Capital City Safe Streets" plan seeks to attack the crime problem at nearly every level, including increasing cooperation among government agencies and re-examining how resources are used. A new criminal-justice coordinator would keep tabs on the multi-faceted effort.

City lobbyist Minor Carter said the program was born out of Mayor Ellen O. Moyer's attempts to get bills dealing with crime passed in the General Assembly this year. He said the response from the state was more than the city could have expected and results in part to O'Malley's recent pledge to make crime-fighting a cornerstone of his administration.

"I think it was serendipity," Carter said. "We were looking at small programs, and the speaker said, 'Why don't we make this a little bit more comprehensive?' I don't think we otherwise would have had the nerve to ask for such an allocation of resources."

One of the key steps would be the identification of the city's most problematic adult and juvenile offenders, who would be virtually suffocated by Annapolis police, parole and proba-

tion officials, and the county sheriff's office.

The sheriff's office, for example, which has thousands of unserved warrants, would prioritize those that deal with violent offenders, even if the offense is relatively minor.

"Serving a violation of probation warrant for a repeat drug dealer could have a huge impact on the community," said Kristen Mahoney, executive director of the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention, which is helping to secure grant money.

Meanwhile, the state would expand its use of touch-screen, ATM-like computers that allow low- and moderate-risk offenders to check in using their fingerprints and answer questions electronically. The machines — in use in Baltimore and Hyattsville — free up agents to focus on high-risk offenders, Mahoney said.

Local leaders have sparred over the role public housing communities play in the city's crime, with some housing advocates arguing that those areas have received a disproportionate share of the blame. The city been quarreling for years with the Housing Authority of the City of Annapolis over funding for crime prevention and its direction.

The safe-streets program focuses heavily on housing communities, with re-establishing a working relationship between the city and the housing authority as one of its main goals.

Police patrols in and around public housing communities would be stepped up under the plan, with police assisting the authority with evictions and trespassing violations for unauthorized residents and visitors. Additional lighting and security cameras would be installed, at a cost of about \$100,000.

Department of General Services police would also expand its jurisdiction to city streets around state government buildings, though many of the city's most troubled neighborhoods are not adjacent to state facilities.

Officials want outreach to be a key component. That includes reaching out to community groups to discuss how they believe their neighborhoods would be best served, but also the offenders themselves, who would be warned that increased scrutiny from the U.S. attorney's office would mean tougher sentences if they are convicted of handgun violations. The public at-large would be encouraged to call in to tip lines via billboards and TV and radio advertisements.

The project's overall cost is \$550,000, of which grants are expected to cover about \$350,000. Busch is working with the governor's office to cover the balance.

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