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Introduction

One of the most fundamental functions of any local government is to protect its citizens. As urban theorist Joel Kotkin eloquently stated, "...history has shown repeatedly that once a city can no longer protect its inhabitants, they inevitably flee, and the city slides into decline and even extinction."¹ This sense of security is a principal reason why Jefferson Parish has retained its appeal to families and businesses throughout the years. In spite of the challenge of sharing a boundary with New Orleans—one of the most violent cities in the country—and in spite of the fact that the profile of Jefferson Parish is increasingly urban rather than suburban, Jefferson has remained a remarkably safe place to live. However, the perception that the Parish is relatively immune from crime and violence has begun to change since Hurricane Katrina. The displacement of residents, the shake-up in the illegal drug trade since the storm, the loss of social service, drug treatment, and mental health facilities, and a variety of other factors contributed to a spike in violent crime in Jefferson in 2006.

The response to this up-tick in criminal activity has been vigorous, swift, and comprehensive. Additional resources were marshaled, inter-agency cooperation was expanded, and blight remediation efforts were augmented. The result of these efforts was a reduction in homicides and some other violent offenses in Jefferson in 2007². Yet in spite of some very real gains, there seems to be a heightened level of concern about crime among Jefferson residents. This should be a particular concern to Parish leaders. Because the concern for personal safety and the safety of one's family is so paramount, the sense that crime is worsening can be an especially powerful motivation to relocate to another community. Criminal activity elicits a much stronger, viscerally negative reaction among residents than other quality of life concerns.

For this reason, reducing crime in Jefferson must be a central component of any effort to retain and attract residents and businesses. On-going efforts must be redoubled, and tangible progress must be achieved in short order. Furthermore, as gains are made, the public must be informed. Crime is a somewhat unique issue in that the perception of crime is nearly as damaging to a community's health as the actual incidence of crime. Assuaging the community's concerns by providing real information and tangible results is one of the most important functions that local government can fulfill.

Providing a high level overview of the Parish's progress in fighting crime is the first aim of this document. The myriad agencies in Jefferson that are directly or indirectly responsible for combating crime have been extraordinarily aggressive in their efforts. Recognizing the many, new initiatives that are underway is essential to understanding what has worked and what challenges lie ahead. The second aim of this report is to focus on the additional initiatives needed to combat crime in the Parish. Reducing the incidence of crime even further must be a principal focus of Jefferson Parish in 2008 and beyond—both to ensure the personal safety of Parish residents and to give residents and businesses the confidence to continue to make Jefferson their home.

Overview of Crime in Jefferson Parish

In order to fully appreciate the anti-crime initiatives that are underway in Jefferson and in order to understand the reasoning behind the new policies that this document recommends, one must first have some familiarity with crime data and with recent approaches to fighting crime, both nationally and locally. This section will address three themes that collectively will provide additional context for understanding the programs that are underway and those new programs that should be implemented.

Crime Data Nationally and in the New Orleans Area

Crime and personal safety are a major concern in most urban and suburban areas. Lurid crime reporting by the media, the popularity of violent crime dramas on television, and the powerful emotional reaction that crime can provoke combine to make crime a salient topic in virtually all communities. The actual prevalence of crime can vary widely from community to community, however. In some areas, concerns about crime may be greatly out of proportion to the statistical frequency of criminal activity. This is certainly not the case in the New Orleans metropolitan area, as the community's fears about crime are well founded. The FBI cautions against direct comparisons of crime data from jurisdiction to jurisdiction as a variety of factors are responsible for differences in per capita crime rates. Whatever the underlying causes, the fact remains that the New Orleans metropolitan area—and the City of New Orleans in particular—are especially violent in comparison to the rest of the country.

According to preliminary figures, the City of New Orleans recorded 209 homicides in 2007³. While an exact population figure for the City is unknown due to the displacement caused by Hurricane Katrina, the most liberal population estimate would translate that raw homicide total into a homicide rate of approximately 65 homicides per 100,000 residents⁴. By comparison, preliminary figures for New York City indicate that its 2007 homicide rate was approximately 6 per 100,000⁵. Simply put, if New Orleans had had the same homicide rate as New York City in 2007, New Orleans would have witnessed only 19 homicides, instead of the 209 that it actually recorded. Even in comparison to other traditionally violent cities such as Detroit and Gary, Indiana, the City of New Orleans is remarkably violent. Detroit and Gary—the next two most violent major cities in the United States in 2006—still recorded fewer than 50 homicides per 100,000 that year⁶. Furthermore, in 2006 the national average for central cities with greater than 250,000 residents was roughly 13 homicides per 100,000 residents—80% lower than New Orleans⁷. This kind of cursory statistical comparison unequivocally illustrates that New Orleans is indeed *that* violent of a community, with *five times* the homicide rate of the typical American city.

While New Orleans is far and away the most violent, crime ridden community within the metropolitan area, criminal activity is not limited to the City. Indeed, even prior to Katrina, the New Orleans metropolitan area as a whole (including the City of New Orleans) registered the highest per capita homicide rate of any metropolitan

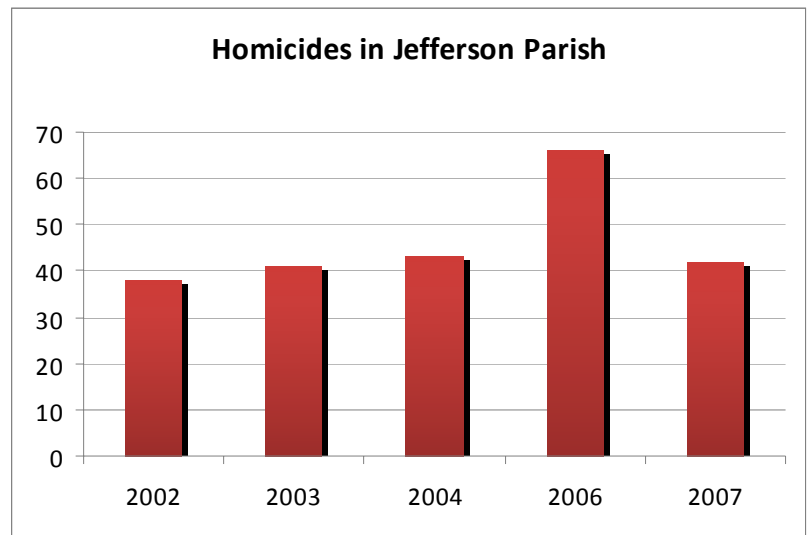
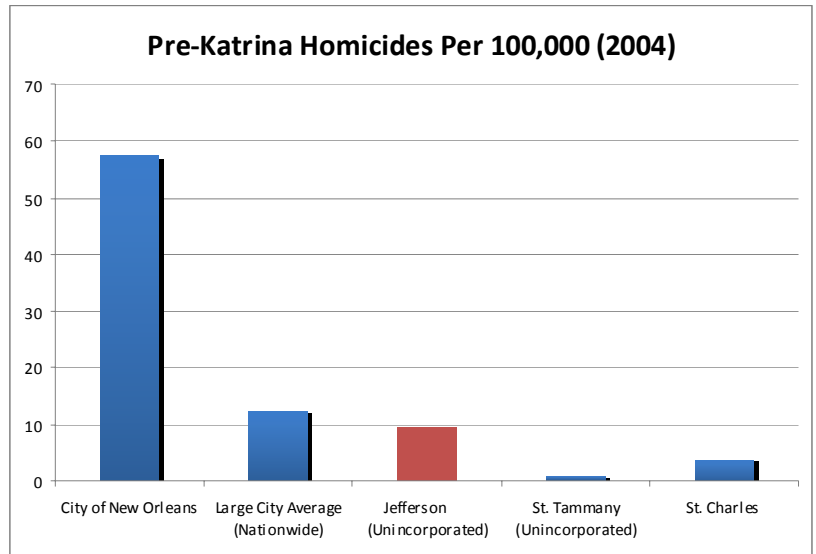
area in the United States⁸. Clearly, the extraordinarily high homicide rate in the City is largely responsible for this statistic; but the metropolitan area figure nonetheless demonstrates that all of the communities in the metro area must remain extremely vigilant in fighting crime.

Throughout the years, Jefferson Parish has had a track record of vigorously combating crime. In spite of the fact that it shares a boundary on both the East Bank and the West Bank with New Orleans, Jefferson has maintained a far lower crime rate. In 2007 the homicide rate in unincorporated Jefferson was approximately 9.5 homicides per 100,000 residents⁹—approximately 85% lower than the City’s homicide rate. Jefferson has also succeeded in steadily reducing crime over the years. In 1980, the Parish recorded approximately 25,000 FBI “Part I” Uniform Crime Report offenses. These offenses comprise a number of violent crimes, such as murder, rape, and assault. By 2006, the total number of Part I offenses had been reduced by almost a third, to approximately 16,800 offenses¹⁰. This is an especially remarkable achievement, given that the overall profile of Jefferson Parish is increasingly urban, rather than suburban. Jefferson is a retail and business center of the region, drawing people from throughout the metropolitan area. Also, Jefferson’s population is not comprised entirely of middle- and upper-income residents. Jefferson, while largely middle class, is home to a diverse population that spans the socio-economic spectrum and that includes pockets of entrenched poverty. In this context, the crime fighting accomplishments that the Parish has registered through the years are especially impressive.

Given that Jefferson enjoys a considerably lower crime rate than New Orleans and given the fact that the criminal justice system has succeeded in reducing crime over the years, why is crime considered to be such a major quality of life issue in Jefferson? There are two very compelling reasons why. First, even before Hurricane Katrina, violent crime in Jefferson was higher than in other suburban communities within the New Orleans metropolitan area and in other metropolitan regions. Once again, the FBI cautions against making direct comparisons of crime rates between communities; and again, the demographic and economic profile of Jefferson Parish is more akin to an urban, rather than suburban, community. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Jefferson is in competition with other communities for residents and businesses; and offering a comparable quality of life (and a comparable degree of safety) is a principal way for Jefferson to remain competitive. Along any number of objective measures, Jefferson Parish registers a higher crime rate than “competitor” communities. While the homicide rate in unincorporated Jefferson Parish in 2004 was 9.51 per 100,000 residents, the homicide rate in unincorporated St. Tammany Parish was only 0.91 per 100,000. In St. Charles Parish, it was 4.0 per 100,000 in 2004¹¹. In 2004 for all communities throughout the country defined by the FBI as “suburban,” the homicide rate was 3.18 per 100,000, or 67% lower than Jefferson Parish’s pre-Katrina rate¹². Prior to Katrina and since the storm, Jefferson has re-

mained an extraordinarily safe place to live for the overwhelming majority of its residents. Clearly, in the context of other communities, Jefferson should strive to be even safer.

The second reason why crime remains a paramount concern in Jefferson is that homicides did indeed spike following Hurricane Katrina. Whereas unincorporated Jefferson had recorded 41 homicides on average in the three years prior to the storm (2002 – 2004), there were 66 homicides in Jefferson in 2006¹³. Fortunately, data from 2007 indicate that homicides have fallen from the elevated levels registered in 2006. In 2007, unincorporated Jefferson recorded 44 homicides, a 33% decrease from 2006¹⁴. Despite this precipitous decline and despite the fact that aggregate UCR Part I offenses are currently lower than pre-Katrina levels, there is ample anecdotal evidence to suggest that crime remains a significant concern among Parish residents. As the perception of crime is nearly as important to a community’s well-being as the actual incidence of crime, it is imperative that Jefferson both strive for further reductions in crime and notify the public as improvements in safety are realized.



Based on the information presented above, it is clear that Jefferson Parish’s reputation for law enforcement is well deserved, especially given its adjacency to the City of New Orleans. It is also clear that further reductions in crime must be a central aim of improving the overall quality of life in the Parish, in light of the lower violent crime rates in “competitor” communities and the public’s heightened concern about crime in the post-Katrina environment.

Crime, Its Underlying Causes, and the Role of Law Enforcement

It is hardly a secret among criminologists and law enforcement professionals that attacking crime is not just the purview of the criminal justice system. As President Rutherford B. Hayes succinctly stated, “Crimes increase as education, opportunity, and property decrease. Whatever spreads ignorance, poverty, and discontent causes crime.”¹⁵ The underlying causes of crime, as concisely articulated in this quote, must be a continued focus of Parish leaders. Improving the education system, linking the poor to job opportunities, addressing concentrated poverty, and encouraging re-investment and economic development are all tools in the struggle against crime that must remain policy priorities in the coming years. The leadership in Jefferson Parish—from economic development officials to the Sheriff’s Office to the School Board—recognizes and appreciates these contributing factors and is working to address them in an aggressive fashion. In fact, other components of the *Jefferson EDGE 2020* initiative will deal directly and indirectly with these underlying, root causes of criminal activity, especially the forthcoming Education and Economic Development reports.

Because these myriad contributing factors will be addressed in subsequent reports, the focus of this report is more narrowly defined to encompass law enforcement and blight fighting initiatives. This report acknowledges that a holistic approach is necessary to achieve substantial, lasting reductions in crime; but this report also contends that conventional criminal justice initiatives (policing, juvenile justice, combating blight, etc.) are also essential to reducing crime for two principal reasons.

The first reason is that well designed criminal justice initiatives work. The most striking case study supporting this notion is the example of New York City from the 1990’s to the present. In 1990, New York City recorded a record number of homicides, tallying 2,245 for the year¹⁶. As a result of increasing the size of the police force, enforcing “quality of life” violations, deploying police resources more strategically, and introducing greater precinct level accountability (among other strategies), the City achieved a 70% reduction in its homicide rate in only eight years. Over the same period, the overall number of violent crimes dropped by 50%¹⁷. While the City did experience substantial reinvestment and neighborhood revitalization during that time (in large measure due to the reduction in crime), the socio-economic and demographic profile of the City did not change overnight. New York did not suddenly become vastly more prosperous or eradicate concentrated



New York City has witnessed a precipitous drop in crime since the early 1990’s

poverty in the span of only eight years. More effective policing and strategic investments in law enforcement were largely responsible for the sudden, precipitous decline in crime.

The second, and related, reason why basic criminal justice activities must remain a core anti-crime strategy is the issue of timeframe. The underlying causes of poverty, community dysfunction, and crime are not intractable; but they require focused, innovative public policy attention over the span of years, if not decades. Jefferson Parish must address these issues, but the Parish must also realize tangible improvements in public safety in the short term. A variety of data suggest that the Parish has been slowly losing its middle class population to other communities. Convincing Parish homeowners to reinvest in Jefferson will require relatively immediate, tangible improvements in public safety. Strategic investments in criminal justice initiatives, coupled with new, innovative programs, can effectuate relatively immediate reductions in the crime rate, as illustrated by the New York City case study.

Crime, Blight, and Responsible Agencies

There are a number of public agencies that are responsible for fighting crime in Jefferson Parish. Understanding, at a minimum, the roster of responsible agencies is a prerequisite to understanding the range of anti-crime initiatives that are underway and the new initiatives that this report recommends. To start, the incorporated cities within Jefferson Parish have unique, autonomous police departments, while the majority of the Parish’s population which resides in unincorporated Jefferson Parish is under the jurisdiction of the Jefferson Parish Sheriff’s Office (JPSO). The JPSO is responsible for street patrols as well as for the administration of the Parish jail. Long-term corrections (i.e. following a criminal trial and sentencing) are the responsibility of the State Department of Public Safety and Corrections. Other key players in crime prevention include the Jefferson Parish District Attorney’s office, which prosecutes criminal cases; the First and Second Parish Courts which hear criminal cases; and the Juvenile Court for juvenile justice.



The Jefferson Parish Sheriff’s Office (JPSO) is responsible for a range of law enforcement activities, from patrolling the streets to operating the Parish jail.

Linking the efforts of many of these agencies is the Jefferson Parish Community Justice Agency (CJA), a division of the Parish Government, which serves as a coordinating body for local crime fighting policy. The CJA is also responsible for administering programs targeted at juveniles such as the Truancy Assessment and Service Center (TASC initiative). Both the on-going initiatives that are cited and the recommended actions within this report touch on the activities of virtually all of these agencies.

A second major type of law enforcement activity that this report addresses is code enforcement and the mitigation of neighborhood blight. While code enforcement is not, strictly speaking, a criminal justice endeavor, it is so inextricably tied with reducing crime in Jefferson as to be considered an essential “front line” weapon against crime. There are several reasons why the eradication of blight is tied to reducing crime. The first reason is the “broken windows theory” that was promulgated by professors James Q. Wilson and George Kelling in the early 1980’s. Wilson and Kelling posited that the



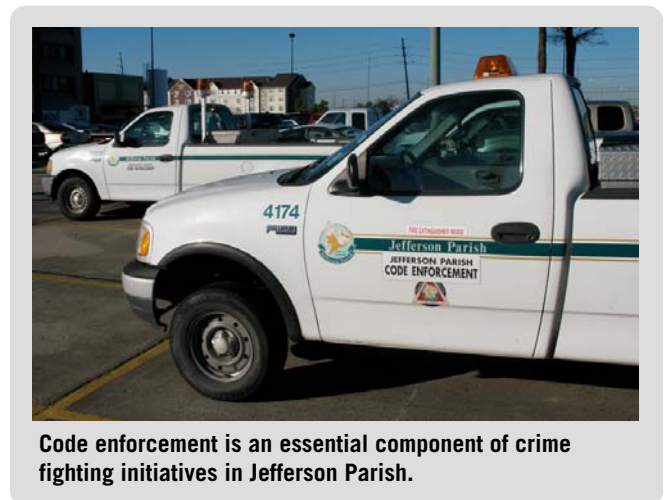
Example of a “broken windows” environment in Jefferson Parish.

proverbial “broken windows” environment in which physical neglect and vandalism are prevalent encourages criminal behavior. When the subtle visual cues which convey social order—well maintained buildings, streets that are free of garbage, grass that is cut, etc.—are absent, lawless, antisocial behavior is seemingly tolerated. Criminal activity soon follows. Conversely, when physical order is maintained, criminal behavior is more out of place and is less likely to be accepted by the community¹⁸. Many criminologists believe that the emphasis on maintaining an orderly physical environment and prosecuting seemingly minor “quality of life” violations were largely responsible for the profound reduction in crime that New York City has witnessed since the early 1990’s.

A second reason for the Parish to step up its code enforcement and blight fighting efforts is that aggressive code enforcement may unveil more serious criminal transgressions and may yield significant arrests. For the past several months, the Jefferson Parish Inspection and Code Enforcement Department has been conducting neighborhood “sweeps” in certain targeted areas in conjunction with the JPSO and local utility providers. The investigation of minor building maintenance violations or illegally installed cable television service, for example, may spotlight more severe crimes, such as drug dealing, and may therefore help to disrupt criminal behavior.

A third and final reason why aggressive code enforcement can help to reduce crime is that it can influence landlord behavior. As a result of the pressure applied by code violations, landlords who have been negligent in maintaining their properties will be forced to become more conscientious or will decide to sell their property to another owner (who, hopefully, will better maintain the property). Whether the previous landlord decides to improve the upkeep of the property in question or whether a more responsible landlord takes ownership of the property, a landlord who cares for his property is more likely to be conscientious and is more likely to uphold standards of maintenance and tenant behavior. Problem properties, and therefore problem tenants, will hopefully become a thing of the past.

The principal players in Jefferson’s anti-blight effort include the Inspection and Code Enforcement Department, which is responsible for conducting building inspections and issuing violations; the Parish Attorney’s Office, which is responsible for prosecuting violations; and the court system, including the 1st and 2nd Parish Courts and the newly created Environmental Court. Partner agencies include the Jefferson Parish Sheriff’s Office and local utility companies.



Code enforcement is an essential component of crime fighting initiatives in Jefferson Parish.

Because fighting blight is so central to crime reduction efforts in Jefferson, the remainder of this report has been divided into two thematic groupings: crime prevention activities and anti-blight/code enforcement activities. For both initiatives, recent accomplishments and new efforts have been outlined. These are followed by the specific crime prevention and blight fighting initiatives that are needed to further enhance public safety and the overall quality of life for Jefferson residents.

Crime Prevention Initiatives

In the two and a half years since Hurricane Katrina, the various agencies that are responsible for law enforcement have not been idle in their efforts to reduce crime in Jefferson. Pressing capital needs have been addressed, new inter-agency partnerships have been forged, and innovative new programs have been initiated. Due in part to these efforts, the spike in crime that Jefferson witnessed in 2006 has been met head on. Recent initiatives in fighting crime include the following measures:

- Longstanding capital needs in the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office have been addressed through the temporary spike in sales taxes that Jefferson has witnessed following the storm. Capital outlays have included the purchase of new radios and vehicles, among other capital expenditures.
- Site acquisition for a state-of-the-art JPSO crime lab has been completed, and planning for the new facility is underway. The new facility will be elevated and flood proofed and will provide considerably more space and better overall facilities than the current crime lab.
- A community and civic association coordinator has been hired by the JPSO to function as a liaison between the JPSO and traditionally distressed communities. This position will help the Sheriff's Office in their efforts to implement "community policing" and enhance communication between troubled neighborhoods and JPSO deputies.
- In order to address post-Katrina difficulties in recruiting new JPSO deputies, partnerships have been formed between the Sheriff's Office and local universities (UNO and Loyola) to train graduates for future employment with the JPSO.
- A home incarceration program for non-violent offenders has been established by the Jefferson Community Justice Agency (CJA). This cost effective program has helped to mitigate jail overcrowding with no evidence of increased danger to the public.
- A highly effective form of rehabilitative treatment called Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) has been more extensively incorporated into treatment for those convicted in the Parish's juvenile drug court. According to research, every \$1 spent on MST results in \$28.33 in savings to the criminal justice system¹⁹.
- A MacArthur Foundation grant has been awarded to the Jefferson Parish Government to make Jefferson Parish a pilot site for comprehensive juvenile justice reform. Initial reform efforts have focused on a more fact- and performance-based evaluation of the efficacy of juvenile social service providers (psychological counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, etc.)

- The Parish's highly effective truancy intervention program (the Truancy Assessment and Service Center initiative) which has traditionally been for children 10 and younger has been expanded to middle school students, as a result of a pilot grant from the State of Louisiana. In the 2006-2007 school year, over 94% of TASC interventions were considered moderately or highly successful according to the program's evaluative criteria. Only 3% of TASC children were referred to the District Attorney for petition to court. Jefferson Parish Public Schools refer approximately 2,000 students per year to the TASC program. Truancy has been closely correlated with future criminal behavior. The TASC initiative, therefore, represents a critical early intervention against future criminal activity.

Crime Prevention Action Items

The purpose of highlighting in this report both the post-Katrina increase in violent crime and the historically higher rate of violent crime in Jefferson relative to other communities is not to panic Parish residents. Jefferson has a very effective criminal justice infrastructure that has an established track record of responding capably to the law enforcement challenges that the community faces. Rather, the purpose of this report's highlighting those statistics is to challenge Parish leaders, businesses, and residents to expect an even lower level of crime in the community.

A number of initiatives are required to achieve this goal, from a comprehensive reform of the corrections system to implementing certain regulatory changes. Where some controversy may arise is in the need for additional resources. Public policy success stories are typically the result of some combination of effective leadership, innovative public policy, and—not least of all—strategic investments. The oft-cited dramatic reduction in violent crime that New York City has achieved are not simply the result of clever public policy and intrepid leadership. Starting in the early 1990's, a substantial public investment was made in expanding the size of the New York City police force, from 30,524 officers in 1990 to 39,642 officers by 1999, an increase of nearly 30%²⁰. A public investment of this magnitude does not just materialize out of thin air. Additional resources must be marshaled by either raising revenues, re-allocating budgets, or obtaining external support. Given the dramatic funding cuts over the past seven years in federal law enforcement programs such as the “COPS” initiative, recurring operating subsidies from the federal government are unlikely. Thus, local leaders must have the fortitude to examine how existing revenues can be maximized and how additional resources can be obtained.

Jefferson Parish clearly has a moral imperative to do everything that it feasibly can do to reduce the incidence of violence in its neighborhoods. Because of the heightened attention that violent crime has received over the past two years, Jefferson Parish must also convey the *message* (through tangible, measurable reductions in crime) that Jefferson offers its residents and businesses a secure environment.

The following action items have been identified as critical to achieving further reductions in crime:

1. **Seek additional local resources to support the staffing needs of the JPSO, Jefferson Parish District Attorney's office, and the municipal police departments.** Prior to Hurricane Katrina, operating revenues and pay scales were sufficient to meet the staffing needs of the JPSO, DA's office, and municipal police departments. While Hurricane Katrina has bestowed one-time windfalls to Jefferson's public agencies in the form of increased sales taxes, long-range revenue forecasts do not portend any meaningful increase in annual operating revenues at current sales and ad valorem tax rates. Revenues would not be a problem, were it not for the present diminished labor pool and inflated wages in the New Orleans metropolitan area, as well as a nation-wide shortage in law enforcement personnel. In the two and a half years since Katrina, these labor market changes have resulted in persistent difficulties in recruiting sheriff's deputies, police officers, and assistant district attorneys, thereby producing chronic staffing shortages. The by-products of these staffing shortfalls have been reduced capacity in the Parish jail, longer response times to calls for service, and a variety of other law enforcement hurdles.

The acute staffing needs of these agencies cannot be over-stated. The JPSO, for example, has gone from being fully staffed prior to Katrina to having 268 unfilled positions—16% of the size of the entire agency. JPSO salaries were somewhat below the Southern average for law enforcement personnel prior to Katrina; since Katrina, that discrepancy in pay is all the more pronounced. Restoring these three critical branches of law enforcement to their pre-Katrina staffing levels is one of the most fundamental steps to a safer Jefferson Parish. As long as present labor market conditions persist, a permanent, recurring source of revenue will be needed to attract additional personnel.

2. **Work with the State Department of Public Safety and Corrections to Design and Implement a Comprehensive Overhaul of the Long-term Corrections System.** Throughout the United States, prison systems have not had a very successful track record in truly reforming inmates. The national rate of recidivism—the incidence of criminal behavior subsequent to an inmate’s release from prison—is approximately 68%, according to research by the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics²¹. That is to say that nationally, 68% of former prisoners are re-arrested within three years of their release. This is a particularly salient issue in Louisiana for two reasons. First of all, Louisiana has an extraordinarily large number of inmates. On a per capita basis, Louisiana has a larger prison population than any other state in the country²². Secondly, most prisoners in the United States—on the order of 95%—end up being released from prison eventually²³. This means that Louisiana has a very large population of individuals that, upon their release, will likely commit more crimes. The State can either ignore this problem, lock up inmates for even longer periods of time (an extremely expensive, impractical solution given Louisiana’s already sky-high incarceration rate), or aggressively work to transform inmates into productive, law abiding members of the community upon their release.

There are a number of examples of counseling, job training, job placement, and social service programs that have been successful in transforming inmates into productive, law-abiding citizens. To name one, the Safer Foundation which provides job and life skills training, job placement services, and client follow-up has achieved promising results in the future employment and arrest prospects of its clients²⁴. Implementing this kind of intense counseling and job training/placement program would likely require considerable upfront investment from the State. In the long run, though, it would likely save money by reducing the number of repeat offenders. Given that Louisiana leads the country in the rate at which it incarcerates its citizens, it is a public policy imperative that Louisiana take the lead in transforming former inmates into productive, law-abiding members of society.



Reducing recidivism must become a policy priority in the coming years.

- 3. Work with the State of Louisiana to provide additional funding for juvenile justice reform, after care programs for at risk children, and truancy intervention.** The fact that Louisiana incarcerates a higher percentage of its citizens than any other state in the country is an indictment of the sociological health of our communities. A systematic approach to the root causes of crime, as discussed earlier in this report, is one way to reduce crime and the incarceration rate. An equally important and more immediate kind of intervention is to address problem behaviors before minor transgressions turn into a criminal way of life. When the State of Louisiana closed the juvenile justice facility at Tallulah several years ago due to conditions at the facility, the State was supposed to have provided funding for more grassroots, community based juvenile justice activities at the Parish level. That funding has never fully materialized. For example, Jefferson Parish's truancy intervention program (the TASC initiative) has not been funded to fully operational levels by the State. Instead, programs that are targeted to at-risk youth have traditionally seen their State funding reduced.

These programs represent the kind of early intervention and treatment that would ultimately save the State money by reducing problem behaviors and the need for incarceration. Furthermore, the level of investment needed for local programs is fairly minimal. In the case of the TASC program, an annual additional State appropriation of only \$150,000 is all that is needed for the program to be fully funded in Jefferson Parish. At an absolute minimum, there should be recurring State appropriations dedicated to existing juvenile justice and truancy programs. Optimally, the State should work with local governments to expand these programs. Again, to use the TASC initiative in Jefferson as an example, the program only recently widened its reach to include middle school children. This expansion is only being done on a pilot basis as a result of funding limitations. High school age children are not included whatsoever in the TASC program. Expanding this program and other programs targeted toward at risk youth (such as expanded after school care) should be a public policy priority at the state level in the coming years.

- 4. Work with the State to secure additional resources for Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) for non-violent offenders and juveniles.** Research has shown MST to be a highly effective and cost efficient way of treating non-violent offenders. It has been used extensively in recent years by the Jefferson Parish Drug Court for juvenile offenders. Funding for this treatment regimen is currently fairly limited. If the State were to designate MST as a Medicaid reimbursement-eligible treatment as other states have done, there would be substantially greater resources available at the local level for its use. This simple regulatory change could significantly expand this proven rehabilitation program.

Anti-blight/Code Enforcement Initiatives

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, blight was emerging in certain neighborhoods in Jefferson. In the 1960's and 1970's as much of the Parish was being developed or had recently been developed, blight was not an issue, due to the young age of the housing stock. As the Parish has matured and as most of the building stock within the Parish is now between 30 and 60 years old, some neighborhoods are in need of reinvestment. Fortunately, investment has readily flowed to most areas of Jefferson, and consequently, most neighborhoods have retained their value or even appreciated in value over the years. For a variety of reasons, though, reinvestment has not occurred in certain parts of the Parish, and blight had begun to take root even prior to Katrina.



Most neighborhoods in Jefferson have witnessed steady reinvestment through the years.

Since Katrina, the combination of storm damage, an increasingly transient rental population, and the post-storm spike in crime has highlighted blight as an emerging threat to the Parish's quality of life. As with crime prevention initiatives, the response from the relevant public agencies has been vigorous. Post-Katrina code enforcement and blight fighting initiatives are as follows:

- Seventeen “target zones” in unincorporated Jefferson Parish have been delineated as code violation hot spots that require concerted action. Code enforcement “sweeps” that are coordinated among the Parish Inspection and Code Enforcement Department, the JPSO, the Parish Attorney’s Office, and utility providers have been conducted in eight of the seventeen areas thus far. The sweeps have yielded many violations and are already starting to reverse physical decay.



A number of “target zones” in Jefferson have been designated for aggressive code enforcement activity.

- Both temporary and permanent staff have been furnished to the Inspection and Code Enforcement Department for stepped up enforcement and for follow-up sweeps in the target areas. Consultants were hired on a temporary basis to address the spike in the number of dangerous building violations following Katrina. The hiring of eight additional full-time inspectors and four additional clerical personnel was authorized in January 2008 to permanently augment the Department's enforcement capacity.
- A closer, more coordinated relationship has been forged between the JPSO and the Inspection and Code Enforcement Department to link code and law enforcement efforts. The JPSO has hired a former Jefferson Parish attorney to work on blighted housing from a law enforcement perspective and to coordinate efforts among the JPSO and Parish agencies.
- Official code enforcement vehicles have been purchased to give the Inspection and Code Enforcement Department a more visible presence and to ensure a safer work environment for inspectors.
- The 2006 International Building Code (IBC) has been adopted by the Parish and is currently being actively enforced by Inspection and Code Enforcement Department personnel. Jefferson was cited in a recent State audit as being especially successful at implementing and enforcing the new, more stringent building code.
- A Jefferson Parish Environmental Court was established in 2006 to deal specifically with certain code violations. To expedite the processing of cases, state legislation was passed in 2007 that allows more cases to go through a "summary proceeding" rather than an "ordinary proceeding," thereby expediting the flow of cases through the Environmental Court. Between the establishment of the new court and the summary proceeding legislation, a significant volume of code enforcement cases is being processed every month.
- Temporary and permanent staff have been furnished to the Parish Attorney's Office to deal with the increased case load. Since the inception of the code enforcement sweeps and stepped up enforcement across the Parish, there has been a 100% increase in the number of cases sent to the Parish Attorney's Office every month. Legal consultants have been hired on a temporary basis, and two new full-time Parish attorneys have been hired to deal exclusively with blight and code violations.



Blighted structures along Eisenhower Avenue are slated for demolition and redevelopment as a recreation facility.

- The Parish Attorney's case management database is in the process of being overhauled, a process that will be completed in the summer of 2008. This upgrade will further expedite the processing and resolution of code enforcement cases.
- Dilapidated multifamily properties along Eisenhower Avenue in Metairie have been acquired by the Parish and are scheduled for demolition. The site will be redeveloped as a recreation facility.

Anti-blight/Code Enforcement Action Items

Most of the recommended action items for improved code enforcement involve relatively minor statutory changes. Now that coordination among Parish agencies has been enhanced and now that additional personnel have been dedicated to the effort, changes to state and local laws are the primary means to increase the speed and efficacy of code enforcement efforts. However, one of the recommended action items will require more effort, creativity, and resources from Parish leaders. As was stated earlier, the primary source of blight in certain Parish neighborhoods is a lack of investment over time. Buildings have aged, market rate investment has not been forthcoming, and buildings have deteriorated as certain communities have become communities of “last resort.” That is, families that have the resources to choose to live in any number of areas have chosen not to live in these few areas. As a result, the only residents that these areas have succeeded in attracting are those that have no other options; consequently, concentrated poverty and all of its attendant social problems have taken root in these areas, in a manner not unlike traditional public housing developments.

In the case of traditional public housing complexes, there was a realization at the federal level in the early 1990’s that the only way that these communities could be improved was through major capital improvements, the attraction of market rate investment, and the pursuit of “mixed income” housing whereby both market rate and subsidized housing units would co-exist. The HUD-sponsored HOPE VI redevelopment program has had its share of controversy, but research has confirmed that HOPE VI projects have succeeded in reducing crime, improving the quality of affordable housing, and attracting market rate investment to communities that the market had previously shunned²⁵. The problem that Jefferson Parish is now facing is that there are certain neighborhoods in Jefferson that mimic the concentrated poverty, social dysfunction, and crime of traditional public housing developments; yet there is no specific program to effect their revitalization because they are private—not public housing—communities.

The Parish’s response thus far has been to address these problem areas primarily through code enforcement. In certain neighborhoods, these efforts will likely be sufficient to effect a turnaround and catalyze private investment. In other neighbor-



River Garden in New Orleans—funded in part through the HOPE VI program—is an example of an aggressive, holistic approach to neighborhood redevelopment.

hoods, though, the housing stock is so poor and the built environment is so unappealing, that anything short of major reinvestment akin to HOPE VI redevelopment plans is unlikely to spur any kind of market response. In the absence of market rate reinvestment, these especially intransigent areas are guaranteed to remain communities of last resort and, therefore, communities of concentrated poverty.

If the Parish is serious about reversing the fortunes of certain neighborhoods that have spiraled into a state of disrepair, locally driven, aggressive redevelopment plans will be necessary in addition to ramped up code enforcement. The redevelopment “toolbox” for these areas may entail site acquisition, major infrastructure improvements, and the provision of redevelopment incentives. There is precedent in Jefferson Parish for this kind of major intervention. Multifamily units along Eisenhower Avenue were in such a state of disrepair that the Parish proactively acquired the site and is now making major infrastructure improvements by converting the site into a park. Similarly aggressive, government-driven redevelopment plans may be required in other areas of the Parish.

The following action items have been identified as essential tools to further combat blight in Jefferson Parish:

1. **Adopt the International Property Maintenance Code.** The Parish currently has in place the 2006 International Building Code to deal with building code violations and enforcement, but the International Property Maintenance Code covers a number of more superficial maintenance violations that are not covered by the building code. Adopting the International Property Maintenance Code will give the Inspection and Code Enforcement Department a better legal foundation for enforcing the kind of maintenance-related violations that contribute to blight.
2. **Adopt state legislation to enact more severe penalties for certain code violations.** The Parish Attorney’s Office is currently in the process of identifying the specific penalties within the Parish code that need to be strengthened in order to give negligent property owners a greater incentive to comply with violations. For instance under current law, building code violations cannot be placed on the Parish tax roles. If the law were changed to allow the Parish to place a tax lien on a property due to a building code violation, the property could ultimately be sold at a tax sale in the same way that a tax delinquent property could. This would provide the Parish with one more enforcement “stick” in targeting dilapidated properties.

3. **Adopt state legislation to direct minor building code violations to administrative adjudication rather than to the court system.** Currently, some minor code violations in Jefferson Parish are directed to an administrative adjudication hearing rather than a formal court date. Administrative adjudication has the advantage of being less expensive than formal court proceedings; it is easier for the average citizen to navigate because adjudication hearings do not require formal legal representation; and the process usually results in a quicker resolution than a court hearing. For this reason, the Parish Attorney's Office is eager for the State to pass legislation to direct more minor building code violations to the administrative adjudication process.
4. **Adopt stronger local ordinances to limit illegal activities in motels.** Dilapidated motels in Jefferson have evolved into nodes of illegal activity. Drug dealing, prostitution, and other illicit behaviors are not uncommon occurrences. The Parish Council recently enacted an ordinance prohibiting motel room rentals by the hour. The Parish should consult with other jurisdictions to determine the full range of local regulations that can be marshaled to clamp down on criminal activity at motels.
5. **Appoint a conviction verification officer to assist apartment owners in obtaining background information on tenants.** The JPSO should establish a conviction verification officer to work closely with landlords, should they have questions about the criminal history of prospective or current tenants. Having access to this information may help landlords to be more vigilant in addressing problematic tenant behaviors before they grow worse.
6. **Work with the Jefferson Parish Housing Authority to conduct more stringent pre-occupancy inspections of Section 8 housing units.** The Section 8 low-income housing voucher program requires a pre-occupancy inspection to ensure that the unit in question meets an exacting list of standards for maintenance and appearance. In practice, units that are in relatively poor condition are nonetheless being leased to Section 8 tenants. The Inspection and Code Enforcement Department should work with the Jefferson Parish Housing Authority to improve the frequency and stringency of rental inspection to ensure that Section 8 landlords are in conformance with the letter of the law.
7. **Secure additional administrative staff to assist the Parish Attorney's Office with the present, increased code enforcement caseload.** The Parish Attorney's Office has been provided with ample assistance in the form of additional attorneys to handle the recent 100% increase in the Office's code enforcement caseload. Additional administrative staff and an inspector for the Parish Attorney's Office are now needed to round out the staffing increase so that cases may be prosecuted with maximum speed and efficiency.

8. **Develop a comprehensive redevelopment strategy and secure funding for the revitalization of areas of intractable, concentrated poverty.** Because code enforcement alone may be insufficient to effect the revitalization of certain neighborhoods in the Parish, a more aggressive redevelopment strategy—including site acquisition, infrastructure improvements, beautification, the provision of public amenities, and public/private partnerships—may be advisable. The Parish should work with the community in question, HUD, affordable housing providers, and private developers to craft ambitious revitalization strategies for those areas that have experienced persistent disinvestment through the years. In many of these areas, market driven revitalization is unlikely. For these communities, a public/private partnership modeled on the HOPE VI initiative should be developed. The major goals of this initiative should be to improve the quality of affordable housing, to attract long-absent market investment, to create sustainable mixed income communities, and to eradicate crime.



Aggressive, public/private redevelopment initiatives may be needed in certain areas of the Parish.

Because of the level of public investment that this kind of project would require, a pilot redevelopment project may be advisable as a first step in a larger initiative. Federal resources such as New Markets Tax Credits, Community Development Block Grants, HOME program funds, and Low Income Tax Credits could be combined with local resources to implement comprehensive redevelopment plans in troubled areas.

Summary Matrix of Action Items

The following tables provide summaries of action items for both crime prevention and code enforcement. Certain action items are the purview of local government while other action items are more the purview of State agencies. This distinction has been noted in the matrix below. Even for those actions that are more State-driven, however, responsible local agencies have been designated. This is to ensure that a local body takes “ownership” of each of the actions and serves as an advocate for State action, where necessary.

Crime Prevention

Locally Initiated Action State Initiated Action

Action ID#	Implementation Action	Responsible Local Agencies/Actors	Benchmarks	Local Resources/Funding	Timeline
CP1	Seek additional local resources to support the JPSO, District Attorney's Office, and municipal police departments	JPSO, municipal (incorporated) governments, Jefferson Parish District Attorney's Office,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of funds to be reallocated if possible • Ballot proposal before voters if additional funds are needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time related to research, coordination, and ballot initiative • \$15 - \$20 million annually to fill staffing gaps for all agencies 	Identify surplus resources or submit ballot proposal by in, 2008
CP2	Work with the State to design and implement an overhaul of the corrections system.	Parish Government (Community Justice Agency), JPSO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of legislative committee to formulate specific policy recommendations • State legislation and appropriations to improve prisoner “reentry” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time and direct costs related to advocacy 	Assemble State committee/task force in 2008; pass legislation in 2009
CP3	Work with the State to provide additional funding for juvenile justice reform, after care programs, and truancy intervention	Parish Government (Community Justice Agency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplemental funding for TASC program in 2008 • Designation of recurring state appropriation to fully support these initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time and direct costs related to advocacy 	Secure supplemental funding for TASC in 2008; secure increased funding and recurring State appropriation in 2009
CP4	Work with the State to secure additional resources for Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) for non-violent offenders and juveniles	Parish Government (Community Justice Agency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designation of MST as Medicaid reimbursement--eligible treatment • Determine need for additional State/local resources for MST 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time and direct costs related to advocacy • Staff time to study need for additional (i.e. beyond Medicaid) resources for MST 	Secure designation in 2008-2009
CP5	Initiate a major public outreach campaign to inform the public about new anti-crime initiatives and crime fighting successes	Parish Government (Community Justice Agency), JPSO, JEDCO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll out of a web-page specific to crime and crime fighting in Jefferson • Roll out of a newsletter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$20,000 for website • \$110,000 for annual newsletter 	Unveil website and issue newsletter in 2008

Anti-blight/Code Enforcement

Locally Initiated Action State Initiated Action

Action ID#	Implementation Action	Responsible Local Agencies/Actors	Benchmarks	Local Resources/Funding	Timeline
AB1	Adopt the International Property Maintenance Code	Parish Government (Inspection and Code Enforcement Department)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption of code by Parish Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incidental administrative staff time 	Adopt code in 2008-2009 depending on enforcement capacity
AB2	Adopt state legislation to enact more severe penalties for certain code violations	Parish Government (Parish Attorney's Office)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State legislation signed into law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff time and direct costs related to advocacy Staff time related to researching necessary code changes 	Adopt legislation in 2008
AB3	Adopt state legislation to direct minor building code violations to administrative adjudication rather than to the court system	Parish Government (Parish Attorney's Office)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State legislation signed into law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff time and direct costs related to advocacy Staff time related to researching appropriate legislative language 	Adopt legislation in 2008
AB4	Adopt stronger local ordinances to limit illegal activities in motels	Parish Government (Parish Attorney's Office), JPSO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research best practices from other communities Craft new ordinances if necessary Adoption of new local ordinance(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff time related to research and devising ordinance language 	Research best practices in 2008; adopt ordinance(s) in 2008-2009
AB5	Appoint a conviction verification officer to assist apartment owners in obtaining background information on tenants.	JPSO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff position created 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One FTE salary; approximately \$75,000 annually 	Create position and hire officer in 2008
AB6	Work with the Jefferson Parish Housing Authority to conduct more stringent pre-occupancy inspections of Section 8 housing units	Jefferson Housing Authority, Parish Government (Inspection and Code Enforcement Department)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved coordination between housing authority and Inspection and Code Enforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff time related to enhanced inspections and improved coordination with Inspection and Code Enforcement Department 	Improve inspection protocols and formalize relationship with Inspection and Code Enforcement in 2008-2009
AB7	Secure additional administrative staff for the Parish Attorney's Office	Parish Government (Parish Attorney's Office)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional staff hired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two FTE salaries; approximately \$100,000 annually 	Hire additional staff in 2008
AB8	Develop a comprehensive redevelopment strategy and secure funding for the revitalization of certain areas	Parish Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot revitalization plan developed Public funding secured; master developer selected Redevelopment project initiated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff time relative to administrative cost RFP for master plan; approximately \$200,000 Local cost of redevelopment is unknown; federal CDBG, HOME, and tax credit funds may be used toward redevelopment 	Issue pilot redevelopment plan RFP in 2008-2009; select developer in 2009-2010; initiate implementation in 2010

Conclusion

Reducing crime is essential to Jefferson Parish's efforts to remain an attractive place to live and do business. More effective coordination among local agencies and a vigilant response to dynamic, post-Katrina circumstances have yielded many successes thus far. These efforts must be complemented by additional policy and regulatory initiatives and, in some areas, by additional resources.

Parish leaders—as stewards of public resources—will have to make some difficult decisions in the months and years ahead. The question before the community is whether Jefferson is willing to tolerate a certain level of crime or whether the Parish will strive to be one of the safest communities in the region. Presently, the Parish provides a secure environment for the overwhelming majority of its residents, but it is nonetheless statistically more dangerous than many other suburban communities. If Jefferson is to achieve meaningful, lasting reductions in crime, additional resources for law enforcement and for wholesale, neighborhood revitalization will likely be needed.

This document has delineated the specific actions that are necessary to improve public safety in the Parish. With the support of Parish residents, businesses, and political leaders, this plan will function as a roadmap for reducing crime and for improving the overall quality of life for Jefferson's residents and businesses.

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Debbie Villio – Jefferson Parish Community Justice Agency

Louis Savoye – Jefferson Parish Inspection and Code Enforcement Department

Crystal Heine – Jefferson Parish Attorney's Office

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- ² Source: Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office (JPSSO). These figures do not include crimes committed in the incorporated cities of Jefferson Parish.
- ³ Rick Jervis, "New Orleans Homicides Up 30% Over '06 Level," USA Today 2 Jan. 2008
- ⁴ Because homicides are objectively reported and easily measurable and because of the profound effect that the incidence of homicide has upon the public's perception of safety, homicide statistics are the focus of this section.
- ⁵ Rick Jervis, "New Orleans Homicides Up 30% Over '06 Level," USA Today 2 Jan. 2008
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ FBI Uniform Crime Reports. www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Statistics are for unincorporated Jefferson Parish only and do not include data from incorporated places. Overall homicide total and homicide rate may be somewhat higher. Source: Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office. www.jpssso.com
- ¹⁰ Source: Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office
- ¹¹ FBI Uniform Crime Reports. www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm. As with Jefferson Parish, homicide totals in St. Tammany are for the unincorporated Parish only. Overall homicide totals and the homicide rate may be higher.
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