
 **Violence**  
and  
**Public Safety**   
in the  
**Halifax Regional Municipality**

***A Report to the Mayor***

Supplemental Report #4:  
The Activists

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## SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT # 4: THE ACTIVISTS

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Here there is presentation and analyses of the views and suggestions, on the Roundtable on Violence and Public Safety issues, of the HRM councillors and the participants in the Roundtable's community meetings.

### ***THE HRM COUNCILLORS***

Subsequent to a general presentation to a grouping of councillors and others at the end of June 2007, all 23 councillors were interviewed on a one-on-one basis by this writer. Most of the interviews, which lasted anywhere from half an hour to three hours (averaging about an hour and forty minutes), were completed in September and October 2007. The purposes of the interviews were (a) to fully inform the councillors of the Roundtable objectives and activities, (b) to learn from them – the “front-line” in responding to day to day concerns about violence and public safety in HRM – and (c) to garner their views about what might be done and what feasible strategic action plans could be implemented to decrease violence and improve public safety. The 23 councillors were elected in districts whose boundaries were set by the Halifax Regional Municipality Act of 1996 (now incorporated into the Municipal Government Act) and adjusted in 2004. The average population size of the 23 districts according to the 2006 Census was 16,211, up from 15,617 in the 2001 Census. The range of the districts' populations in 2006 was from 13,382 to 19,657. The districts farthest outside the urban core and its immediate suburban circle (i.e., #3, #22 and #23) had the largest populations and had shown the most significant population growth between 2001 and 2006, the sole exception being the most rural section of HRM East (#1) where the population modestly declined.

All the councillors welcomed the discussion of the roundtable initiative and expressed displeasure to varying degree over the lack of information transmitted to them and the limited opportunity for input up to the time of the interview. Several councillors expressed disappointment that there had never been a formal council discussion of the initiative, holding the issues of violence and public safety to be of deep concern for all council members. There had been one presentation for councillors in late June 2007 but the turnout was only fair and there was not much discussion following a presentation by the project leader. They cooperated fully however in the one-on-one interviews, identifying priority issues for their district and HRM as a whole, discussing possibilities concerning the role of the municipality in dealing with violence and public safety problems, and offering suggestions and recommendations for strategic planning. Their position on the front-line in responding to the queries and complaints of the citizenry was frequently evidenced during the interviews by their having to respond via the cell phone to residents on a wide variety of concerns (e.g., housing, temporary relief), even where the municipality as such has no mandate; here they had to explain the jurisdictional realities and direct the callers to the appropriate provincial bureaucracy.

The councillors differed of course in their reports of the level of violence and major public safety concerns in their districts, with the urban core grouping indicating the most serious problems while those councillors whose districts were the at the outer reaches of HRM indicated the least serious problems. There was much variation in the reports of the “suburban ring” councillors, though some identified “pockets of problems” and they and others also highlighted public safety concerns on their perimeters. It was widely acknowledged that the discourse for violence and public safety throughout HRM has reflected the issues experienced most in the Downtown and the core urban areas on both sides of the Harbour, and, consequently, even somewhat minor district concerns were often seen through the prism of major issues emanating from this center of HRM. Not surprisingly, councillors in districts, described as having few public safety concerns, were the most likely to consider the media as overplaying the violence and public safety issues in HRM. The councillors’ views on issues such as the adequacy of policing, the importance of police presence and visibility, the serious shortfalls of the YCJA and the criminal justice system in general (especially sentencing practices), and the emphasis on youth issues, reflected closely the views of their constituents as found in the public surveys and Roundtable community sessions described below. They offered a variety of suggestions on what was working to reduce the public safety concerns and what should be improved upon, the chief emphases here being policing and recreation, areas within the municipal mandate. There was widespread consensus among the councillors concerning the existing role – and sharp limits – of the municipal government with respect to dealing in depth with issues of violence and public safety, but substantial diversity concerning possible future directions. They were wary of taking on provincial responsibilities without changing current revenue agreements. The councillors varied in their views of what the municipal government itself should and could do that would require increased municipal funding but all agreed that more municipal coordination of public safety initiatives in HRM was desirable and all were appreciative of the necessity to be fiscally responsible; several noted that the municipal government, through initiatives such as contributions of land and community grants, has already been transcending a strict definition of its requirements, All councillors supported a more effective partnership with the senior levels of government on matters of public safety.

### ***THE URBAN CORE AND CONTIGUOUS DISTRICTS***

Councillors representing the urban cores in Halifax and Dartmouth for the two Community Councils, Peninsula and Harbour East (four of the six districts), expressed pride in their communities and pointed to available resources such as recreational facilities, and new initiatives that they have been involved with, that provided alternatives for youth or made existing resources accessible and affordable. They also readily acknowledged major issues of violence and public safety, identifying significant trouble spots for drug dealing, swarming, robbery, street prostitution etc and not discounting in any way the fear and worry of district residents. One councillor commenting on street crime observed, “Even I no longer walk [in the area] at night as it’s not safe” while another noted, “I get calls from people in all walks of life [over crime and safety issues]”. The trouble spots identified were the public housing projects, the Commons (here not so much because of the quantity of reported person crimes but due to their notoriety which

generated danger signals), the Downtown Bar scene (here the frequency of criminal incidents was considered very significant) and the concentration in their districts of people with problems, and the services to deal with them (e.g., group homes). One councillor referred to part of her district as “a close curtain society” where most residents, fearing to get involved and face harassment and other retaliation, kept a low profile and determinedly “minded their own business”. The urban core area residents were considered to regularly experience significant victimization because the core area, in its deviant service centre mode, drew in people cruising the street sex trade, purchasing drugs, and abusing alcohol as well as outside gangs of “predators”. The majority of the councillors did think, too, that legacy and socio-economic disadvantage had generated racialized conflict that contributed to the violence and public safety concerns.

While appreciating the manpower commitments and programs of the HRPS, there was a sense, too, that, as one councillor mused, “The police presence is not really in-depth”. The councillors were generally critical of the Justice system, especially the YCJA and sentencing more generally, as lessening accountability. One councillor commented that “The court system is the big problem”, adding that “Youth court does not help at-risk youths but acts as a revolving door”. In that context there was some criticism of restorative justice and a concern about how effective it has been in responding to young offenders.

The councillors in the urban core as noted were activists with accomplishments in dealing with the above situation, and ideas to further improve the situation. One councillor was proud of having got the district school board to open school doors for the first time for nightly (“midnight”) basketball (along with some food and an inspirational talk by professional basketball players) this past summer. Another councillor pointed out the large number of recreational facilities in the district – some elaborate such as baseball fields and some modest but convenient like half-court basketball areas. Clearly all the councillors believed that recreational facilities (not only athletics but these were emphasized) should be accessible and supervised - as well as well-designed for public safety – and if so, could provide positive alternatives for youth and thereby reduce crime and improve safety. They also emphasized the need for a significant police presence and the whole range of community-based policing strategies (e.g., beat officers, community police centers). The Safe Community Act, a recent provincial Justice initiative, was deemed helpful in shutting down crack houses and providing more tools to enforce the law. In one district, the councillor highlighted the involvement of business associations in launching initiatives to deal in a positive, rehabilitative way with the homeless. Across the Harbour, another councillor called for similar initiatives, observing that some youths upon becoming no longer eligible, age-wise, for group homes become street people. The councillors suggested a variety of strategies to improve current conditions, namely more community development and coordination by the municipality (one councillor emphasized that these are basic governmental responsibilities), encouraging affordable housing initiatives, early intervention programming for youths who do not have a parent offering support or guidance, exploring possibilities for specialty courts (e.g., drug treatment courts, mental health courts, community courts) to deal with offenders who are addicted persons and/or mentally ill in a more effective collaboration with health and

treatment services, and revisiting strategies for improving race relations. Two councillors commented that major developments in the central area of Halifax are imminent that if, incorporating CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles and increasing the density of population in the area, might dramatically improve public safety.

The role of the municipal government in advancing the public safety agenda was highlighted in the interviews. The councillors typically expressed some frustration at the limited mandate and jurisdictional authority of the municipal government vis-à-vis their own role as front-line elected people responding to the concerns of the residents. One councillor commented, “The different levels of government are always buck-passing and there is a real issue of what the City can do”. They also agreed that councillors typically have little knowledge of pertinent public safety projects in their districts funded by the senior governments and virtually never receive final reports from them. They acknowledged the need for the municipal government to have a more significant role coordinating and networking with regard to public safety initiatives and related community engagement; as one noted, “Yes, the ‘silo’ designation applies more to community groups and projects than it does to government departments”. They generally appreciated the potential value for efficiency and effectiveness in public safety concerns if the municipality had a strategic action plan in place and a vision of its role in public safety beyond the areas of policing and recreation. Several councillors suggested that the recent initiative to resurrect a charter for HRM would be a step in that direction though one councillor warned that without adequate resources to advance on the mandate, it could become frustrating. All councillors considered that a “tripartite forum” approach (regular meetings among federal, provincial and municipal officials) to public safety concerns could prove quite effective.

**The councillors representing districts contiguous to the urban cores** had different conceptions of violence and public safety issues. The two Halifax-based councillors considered that the violence and public safety issues in their districts were minor, namely some break and enter, theft from autos, vandalism and public disturbance but, on the whole, little violence. They did, though, highlight the implications of the Downtown violence and disorder in several crucial ways, namely (a) that the provincial authorities’ extending the hours of operation of the bars and not mandating or enforcing safe practices there, has led to more property damage and theft in their districts, and (b) that predators attracted to the Downtown scene attack the Downtown “party-goers” (primarily students) who frequently reside in these contiguous districts. The two Dartmouth-based councillors indicated that there was some risk to public safety in their areas, one highlighting break and enter and social order offenses (‘youths hanging around public spaces’, sometimes intimidating others), in some specific sub-areas, and with some drug dealing on the periphery. Bullying was singled out as a significant public safety issue for both its short-run and long-run negative implications; one councillor suggested that it breeds more violence. The other councillor pointed to growing, significant violence in the district such as swarming (i.e., assaults and sometimes robbery of strangers by a gang of youths) which has generated much fear for public safety. Conflicts and well-publicized violence at the local high schools were said to greatly enhance the fears. The racialized features of

the Downtown violence, the swarming, and the school-centered violence were noted by all councillors who appreciated the difficulty of disentangling socio-economic disadvantage from subcultural styles.

The suggestions advanced for dealing with the violence and public safety concerns highlighted, on the one hand, greater police presence and, on the other, socio-economic development considerations such as affordable, accessible recreational facilities, summer camps for needy youth, and effective mental health and rehabilitative programs for the growing number of troubled youth and homeless persons. The councillors were wary of trying to solve problems by simply having more police officers. One councillor observed that “There are a lot of police now and you can’t have police on every corner”, while, across the Harbour, another councillor noted that all the talk about vigilantes underlines the limitations of the role of beat officers and of the COPS program. Two councillors noted the significance of recent “university-neighbours-police” collaboration in improving district public safety, especially vandalism and public disorder, and were interested in any suggestions building upon those achievements. Another councillor, on the Dartmouth side, emphasized the value of community initiatives collaborating with the police such as the eight Neighbourhood Watch programs established in recent years in the district, and also suggested that restorative justice would be more effective and appreciated if the processing of cases could be more closely connected to the community in which the offence occurred. All the councillors expressed openness to other suggestions such as specialty courts though reported themselves largely unaware of how they work. Several councillors expressed concerns about the YCJA, and more generally the courts’ sentencing practices, as not emphasizing accountability and balance between offenders’ and victims’ interests.

The four councillors, in the contiguous urban core districts, also expressed similar views to those of their urban core counterparts on the role of the municipality in advancing the public safety agenda. They expressed similar frustrations concerning the gap between residents’ concerns and the fact that the municipality has such a minimal role in providing person services; as one councillor put it, “it is frustrating for a councillor to deal with the problems of the constituents since they can do little to get the provincial bureaucracy going on the problem”. The councillors all appreciated the need for a greater presence of the municipality in coordinating public safety projects and activities and considered that a structure such as a tripartite forum might be a useful component of a strategic action plan (e.g., two councillors cited the example of the Greater Halifax Partnership where the collaboration of the three levels of governments reportedly has had economic benefits for HRM). One councillor expressed the views of others in noting that for the municipal government to take on a more significant role vis-à-vis the public safety agenda, it would have to have a vision and mandate, something which is not there at the present – “The City always has to refer to the municipal governance act and this is like children asking their parents for permission”.

## ***THE SUBURBAN RINGS OF HRM***

There were ten councillors included in this category, two on the Dartmouth side of the Harbour and eight on the Halifax side (i.e., districts 6, 7, 10, and 15 through 21). The **Dartmouth councillors reported** a modest amount of violence and public safety concern in their districts but much more on their periphery, emanating from the urban core. One councillor for example described his district as “affluent and low crime, social order issues such as noise and youths hanging out, but perception is not the same as reality, so complaints come in about low-level ‘gangs’”; he added that there is some significant street prostitution and drug activity just beyond the district boundary. The other councillor basically echoed this viewpoint, commenting that community mobilization and programs such as Neighbourhood Watch have been successful and have reduced crime and enhanced public safety; at the same time, he commented that gratuitous violence in society at large – not in his district – does appear to have increased. He also observed that “It’s adults not youth who are doing the crimes but society focuses always on the youth ... when these adults are released from jail [prison] they drift back to crime because they do not have the tools to cope with legitimate work”.

The two councillors advanced a number of suggestions for reducing violence and improving public safety. In particular, they stressed community initiatives collaborating with the police, and the need for modest funding of such community programs such as COPS on a sustainable basis. Youth programs that specifically targeted problem areas and youth at risk were encouraged as were initiatives that aimed at rehabilitating and reintegrating offenders of all ages. At the same time the councillors held that there needed to be stricter sentencing for violent offenders and more enforcement and monitoring in programs such as bail, restorative justice and house arrests. The councillors appeared to share the critical views of their electorates concerning sentencing in general and the YCJA in particular. They expressed an openness to consider alternatives such as specialty courts and varieties of policing strategies but community-level programming was their emphasis. While councillors were sensitive to fiscal limitations on the municipality’s role in advancing a public safety agenda (“We have to be careful about taking on provincial responsibilities ... we don’t have the resources to do that”), they both considered that more municipal coordination and direction in anti-violence and public safety initiatives within the municipality was essential. The common view was that the municipality’s limited involvement with these initiatives and their own “silo” characteristic meant that lessons learned would be unappreciated and thus the public funding to some degree wasted. One councillor suggested that the municipality should husband its “imprimatur” (seal of approval) by developing and then communicating its strategic action to the funding agencies (basically but not only the senior governments’ agencies). The two councillors also agreed that more effective partnership among the three levels of government, perhaps through a tripartite forum mechanism for a two or three year period, would be valuable in dealing with violence and public safety concerns, contingent upon its having objectives and a scorecard. As one councillor noted, “Partnership is the key”.



There was more variation in viewpoints among **the eight councillors on the Halifax** side of the Harbour, the variation reflecting perhaps some combination of distance from the urban core and socio-economic factors. For analytical purposes two sub-groupings of five and three councillors respectively are differentiated. **In the first sub-grouping, the most uniformly affluent suburban area on the Halifax side of the Harbour**, most councillors held that their district had quite modest levels of violence and public safety concern. One councillor contended that there were only minor issues in his affluent constituency and no particular pockets where there were significant public safety issues. Such a characterization was also provided by four other councillors in describing their districts. One observed that while there were serious problems in areas such as central Dartmouth, and significant racialized violence in several parts of HRM, her affluent area of well-off HRM residents (“lots of seniors and an increasingly diverse ethnic population”) had only relatively minor problems such as car theft, graffiti and older youth carousing in the parklands. Another councillor described her area as “affluent, a combination of older, settled, single family homes and new expensive condos; there is some vandalism, a little burglary, some nuisance issues and maybe a little drug dealing, but definitely low risk”; she added that she herself is worried about being attacked when in certain places in HRM such as the Downtown in the evening, and carries her keys in her hand so that, if necessary, she might ward off attackers with them. A third female councillor varied slightly in her portrait of her district. She noted that her section of the district has hardly any violence and public safety concerns but she allowed that there were a few pockets in the constituency where a small number of well-known gang members involved in drug dealing resided or some troubled youth intimidating others were housed. She, too, noted that in recent years central Halifax has become more dangerous and while in the past she felt safe walking across the Commons in the evening nowadays she felt safer in New York or Calgary; in her view the swarming in HRM have generated much fear and worry “because the swarmings are beatings more than simply robbery or theft”. The fifth councillor commented that the two major violence categories were violence confined to criminals as in drug trade shootings, and random violence such as swarming, and while both are problems for HRM, neither exists in his district. There, he contended there was a little drug dealing but no “collateral” problems such as drive-by shooting or street prostitution, and, similarly, there was some youth vandalism and intimidating loitering but no swarming or “signal crime”. Like the councillors above, he noted that some (but definitely not all) constituents worry about going to central Halifax in the evening and that that area is perceived as “risky”.

**The remaining three councillors, the second sub-grouping among the Halifax suburban areas**, while not wishing to overstate their district’s public safety concerns as they considered has been done in the past by others, did identify some serious violence and public safety issues in their areas. Their areas were also each reportedly somewhat more diversified in terms of housing status and socio-economic income than the other councillors’. One councillor noted that the RCMP detachment in his suburban district is the busiest in HRM but also that the problems are essentially minor, basically youth and nuisance issues (e.g., tire slashing), especially involving junior high students. While there is no swarming and little violence in his view, there are complaints about vandalism and rock throwing on some of the area’s walkways that generate complaints and “this

happens in the context of fears of violence in HRM so it fans the flames”. He noted that there were a few pockets of social disadvantage and problems “but we have a lot of programs and they are working”. Another councillor, reported some violence and public safety issues associated with some “crack houses”, some prostitution, and some non-random (i.e., criminals assaulting one another) assaults in his district. He held that there are some pockets of risk – apparently centered around low rental complexes – but added, “We’re working on it”. Overall, in his view, the residents feel safe. The third councillor observed that while there was some serious “gang stuff” (with collateral public safety fears) in his district based on drug dealing, “otherwise, we are in the lower third [among HRM districts] on most violations and offenses”.

The councillors believed that a number of programs and initiatives were working well and should continue to lead to greater public safety. **Among the first sub-grouping of Halifax suburbs**, police activities were usually singled out. One councillor considered that the police had done a good job dealing with car theft in her district using “bait cars”, and had also helped reduce the graffiti problem. Another praised the police service for its general responsiveness to residents’ concerns and noted that crime issues have not changed much over the past twenty years nor has there been any decline in public safety in most areas of HRM. Another councillor highlighted the positive impact of police liaison with the schools in her area. One councillor commented that police do a good job on many things such as serious crime and school liaison but fall short in their response to minor matters that nevertheless affect the quality of life in her district. A few councillors were concerned about police presence and visibility (i.e., reassurance) and suggested increased support for the COPS program and some enhancement of auxiliary or special policing roles. The councillors also called for more initiatives in the other area of municipal responsibility presumed to impact public safety directly, namely affordable recreation facilities, both in their own districts and elsewhere in HRM. These councillors also advanced broader suggestions. Several mentioned the importance of the municipality being sensitive to “crime prevention through environmental design” (CPTED) possibilities for walkways throughout HRM and especially in the light of major impending developments in central Halifax. Two of the councillors held that the municipal government should do much more with respect to improving race relations in HRM. Several councillors believed that the municipality should encourage projects and schools to do more with at-risk youths at the junior high level throughout HRM. Schools were generally identified as the key to getting at underlying factors that produce problems of violence and public safety in society and therefore the major venue for early intervention and building role models. One councillor in advancing several suggestions, from policing changes to more recreation facilities to school initiatives, observed, “Some people blame the laws for the violence and public safety fears in HRM but HRM has a higher rate of violence than do other cities yet they have the same laws to contend with”. Another councillor mentioned that community groups with public safety-oriented project proposals should be encouraged to seek modest funding from the municipality’s Grants Committee.

**The councillors in the second sub-grouping of Halifax suburbs** also had a number of suggestions. While praising the police response to district concerns and the various police

programs along the same lines as their counterparts above, and acknowledging the effectiveness of police assistance in dealing with the “pockets of problems” in their district, they called for greater police presence and more resourcing of programs such as COPS or new policing initiatives. They held that policing should become even more community-focused. The councillors also praised recent police –justice department collaboration (i.e., the Safe Communities initiative) in pressuring the closure of ‘crack houses’ and other similar ventures. The councillors’ focus on policing evidenced perhaps their concern about forestalling any increase in violence and public risks in their districts and also their deep lack of confidence in the other parts of the Justice system. One councillor noted that people in his district blame the YCJA and current sentencing practices for much of HRM’s violence and public safety problems and there has been “increasing talk of dealing with it ourselves a la the Guardian Angels”. The other councillors expressed somewhat similar views. One commented that “the courts and the YCJA are useless” as house arrests are piled on violations of house arrests and there is little monitoring of those presumably under supervision in the community; he added that there is no effective policy either to respond to serious offense by children under 12 years of age. While the focus of the councillors was mainly on policing and the Justice system, there were some suggestions offered especially regarding the schools and recreational facilities (e.g., “schools with facilities are there even though there would be costs for services to take into account”).

On the role of the municipality in dealing more with violence and public safety matters, there was a rather common set of views among both sub-groupings of Halifax elected representatives in the suburban ring area. There was, first and foremost, the sense that HRM financial resources are quite limited. Several councillors observed that HRM obtains roughly 80% of its revenue through property taxes and gives roughly one-sixth of that to the province for educational and other services assumed by the Province in the Services and MGA acts referred to at the beginning of this section of the report. Under these circumstances most councillors considered that the municipality could only exercise a modest role beyond its current responsibilities. Several councillors expressed concern that any elaboration of the current municipal mandate would simply represent an offloading - without compensation - of the Provincial responsibilities.

Several other councillors, in a related line of argument, noted that the municipality already is doing more than a strict interpretation of its mandate would require; for example, according to one councillor, “In addition to the funding and directing police and recreation, the municipality has funded community renovations in the Uptown (\$600,000), contributed to the Metro Turning Point facility for the homeless, has a Community Grants fund, and contributes land and other resources to some projects”. The councillors acknowledged the frustration of being the government closest to the people yet not being able to respond well to (solve) citizens’ complaints and concerns. But most were uncertain about the value of a new vision and a strategic action plan if the ability to implement was questionable as indeed most seem to think it was. Asked specifically whether the municipality has the means to do much more on the public safety agenda, one councillor simply replied, “None, we can’t do a thing”. Of course not all these councillors considered that the municipality’s financial resources were so limited. One

opined that HRM is better off than virtually all other municipalities in Atlantic Canada and added, “We have reserves now and we are getting our debt down”; still he was wary of provincial downloading and noted “The Province sees HRM as a cash cow”.

Despite the major reservations about fiscal capacity, most of these councillors did hold that the municipality should, at the least, do more coordination / direction and networking with other organizations and projects in the crime, violence and public safety field in HRM, obtaining information, implementing good evidenced-based recommendations and giving its support (even if primarily supporting letters) especially to initiatives that are working with the City and congruent with its vision and strategic action plan. The councillors seemed quite concerned about, as one declaimed, “How can we do our thing”. One councillor observed that without a charter (vision) or a strategic plan, “we are sloughing everything off to the police such as the dog school, the john’s school, bylaw enforcement, the parks etc”. Another councillor observed that volunteers would be crucial to any elaboration of the current municipal government engagement in public safety. All the councillors were favorable to the idea of more effective partnering with the federal and provincial government on the public safety agenda through frequent regular meetings over a period of several years, though one councillor was ambivalence about whether any good would come from it. The idea of a tripartite forum on public safety reportedly had been suggested at times in the recent past and the concept was said to have been implemented already in Transport and economic development (e.g., the Greater Halifax Partnership).

### ***THE MOST DISTANT DISTRICTS OF HRM***

Councillors in the more distant reaches of HRM, vis-à-vis its urban core, namely districts 1,2,3, 22 and 23, generally considered the violence and public safety issues in their areas to be quite modest. One councillor referred to district crime and violence as very minor, “school stuff”, though a pocket of the district contained a huge trailer court development which was seen as experiencing some violence and drug dealing, and some racialized violence. That characterization – minor issues (“nuisance stuff”) save for one pocket of the district plus some racialized conflict – was employed by another councillor to describe his area. A different councillor referred to public safety issues as “just a few wayward youth” in his affluent area (“95% of the households are owners of homes or condos and we have ten of the eighteen recreation area rates in HRM and only two bars”). That rather serene characterization was echoed by a councillor describing his rural district on the other side of the Harbour. The remaining councillor indicated that there were no drug or prostitution issues in his district (which he defined as having urban, suburban and rural segments) but some evidence of gang formation in recent years and the use of weapons (knives); overall, though, the public safety problems were vandalism and youths “hanging out” and, whether purposefully or not, intimidating others in the public spaces. Three of the councillors expressly identified much of the violence and public safety discourse in HRM as an artifact of media overplay, especially of course with respect to central Halifax (i.e. the Downtown and the Uptown). There was the view that a few incidents served as signal crimes generating disproportionate public fears. One

councillor observed that the issue is more the perception rather than the actual level of crime and violence (“People in my district see central Halifax as violent mainly because of the media depictions”) while another contended that the violence is largely occurring outside conventional social life (“Who would be walking in the Commons late at night?”).

In light of the above characterization, it is not surprising that the councillors typically did not advance many suggestions for dealing with violence and improving public safety. They were quite wary of the fiscal implications of suggestions such as the popular one of opening up the schools for after hours recreational and other uses, seeing that strategy as expensive. One councillor noted that his district already has numerous facilities and popular recreational programs funded by an area tax with matching contributions from the municipality and the province. Most of these councillors expressly contended too that any strategic municipal plan should indicate the expected return on the investment. One councillor reported that a lack of recreational facilities did underlie much of the vandalism and modest public safety concerns in his district, while another commented that in his heterogeneous district there was some competition among the constituent areas for community centres and rinks and some associated public safety concerns could perhaps be related to the inadequacy of such facilities in some areas. The councillors did not indicate any priority for more police officers but several did note the importance of a flexible police response that included community participation such as COPS and Neighbourhood Watch programs, and agreed too that alternative ways of securing greater police presence, reassurance and visibility, and crime prevention programming would be worth exploring.

The majority of these councillors were concerned about an expansive municipal role with respect to the public safety issue, a role that would involve going significantly beyond the current municipal responsibilities for policing and recreation. One councillor emphasized that he had “no problem with the current City mandate” while another contended that “We are at the edge of our resources already” and have to watch that “We don’t bite off more than we can chew”; in his view the municipality’s role is a modest one as regards violence and public safety and that is appropriate, and talk of resuscitating a City Charter to provide a vision for new endeavors might only “fuel expectations unwisely”. A third councillor adopted the same views though in a more muted manner. The other two councillors, also concerned with the possible tax implications of a larger municipal mandate in public safety, held that a vision and a strategic plan for action were preconditions for a more active municipal government role, one which they considered crucial at least in the sense of the municipality being able to effectively coordinate and give some direction to the many public safety initiatives and projects that take place in the municipality. Without such change, it was argued, the elected officials, and governmental authority closest to the people, are hardly even in the loop. One councillor commented, “As it is now, the community projects go off on their own instead of dealing with the structures already in place”. One of these councillors referred to the appropriate municipality role as akin to that a quarterback on a football team, effectively coordinating team effort and strategically getting the ball into others’ hands. All the councillors were open to exploring relationships with the other levels of government on the public safety

agenda (i.e., a tripartite forum arrangement) and considered that the Greater Halifax Partnership might be a model to follow in public safety.

## **THE ROUNDTABLE COMMUNITY MEETING SESSIONS**

The purpose of the six Roundtable community meetings was to further the objectives of the Roundtable by securing the views and recommendations on violence and public safety of community activists who have been involved with public policy issues in HRM. It was a matter of learning from them and also potentially being a catalyst to their future mobilization on Roundtable issues. These meetings were seen as supplemental to the one-on-one interviews conducted with the HRM councillors. The six C.C.s constitute a significant part of HRM governance and accountability and are themselves on-going organizational units. The Roundtable sessions were held between September and November 2007 in each C.C. area. Two operational concerns were to get a good attendance and to engage all the attendees in the deliberations. On both grounds – thanks to efforts of the mayor’s staff on the former and the staff of the HRM Development Department on the latter – the C.C.s initiative was quite successful. All six meetings, at least two hours in length, were well-attended, the attendance ranging from 35 in the most rural area to 85 in the Dartmouth urban core. The average attendance was 61 people and there were roughly 300 total participants, not double counting repeat attendees. The attendees were truly participants, engaged in small group (tables composed of six to ten persons) discussions about salient specific issues. The C.C. participants were usually middle-age persons, in number roughly equally men and women, and there were few visible minorities; however it can be argued that they were representative of the attendees at the regular C.C. meetings. Generally the councillors representing districts within the C.C. area also attended and participated fully in the table discussions as did police officers and other officials, save the organizing team. The format was standard; the Mayor introduced and ended the meeting. Professor Clairmont followed the introduction with a ten minute overview of the Roundtable initiative and strategy, and a representative of the Development Department then detailed the evening’s format. The first step called for the participants to write down on wall sheets what they considered to be the major challenge(s) for dealing with violence and public safety in their area. The Development Department’s staff then quickly scanned the written comments and identified the most common themes. The themes were then distributed on a one table-one theme basis. After roughly fifty minutes discussion, each table through a designated spokesperson presented the group’s views and recommendations. A standard format was provided for the discussions, namely in relation to this table’s theme

1. What Programs and policies have been working in reducing violence?
2. What programs and policies help to increase public safety?
3. What (programs and policies) can be improved upon? How can they be improved upon?
4. What are the assets (community, public and private) that can be built on to help deal with the challenges that you’ve identified?
5. What strategies can be suggested to enhance the assets and deal with the issues?
6. Based on all that has been discussed, please identify two priorities or priority areas that you feel need to be acted on?

### *The Major Challenges Identified*

Chart A depicts the top five major challenges identified in each of the six C.C. meetings. It can be seen that policing issues (especially the need for more visible policing), justice issues (especially the need for “tougher” application of the law), youth issues (more youth programs and earlier intervention) and cultural trends (especially the emphasis on violence and personal satisfaction) were most commonly identified as the major challenges. There was clearly, too, significant diversity among the Roundtable C.C.s, both among the groups and within them. Interestingly, the urban core C.C.s – Harbour East (Dartmouth) and the Peninsula (Halifax) were quite similar, overlapping in their identifications of youth issues, specific crimes, and violence and the fear of being outside in their areas, as the major challenges. The two C.C. areas most distant from the urban core, namely Marine Drive on the Dartmouth side of the Harbour and Western on the Halifax side, were also quite similar, emphasizing policing needs, Justice “shortfalls”, accessible resources (especially but not only recreational) and undesirable cultural trends.

The other two C.C.s – Chebucto and NorthWest (Bedford and Sackville) - were transitional geographically and also in terms of identified major challenges, sharing some of the views of both the urban core and more rural sectors of HRM as seen in Chart A. As in the case of the provincial task force on crime, C.C. participants did often highlight the three issues of more police, especially police visibility, tougher enforcement and sentencing, and more recreational and community facilities accessible in the evening and on the weekends and affordable to all residents not just the well-off. Essentially the accessibility was seen in terms of “opening up the schools, the facilities we now own”. Some participants, more so in the suburban areas, called attention to the high costs of recreational sports such as hockey; as one person wrote, “Sports today is really only for those who can afford it”. The critique of Justice – virtually all the Justice-related comments were sharply critical – was summed up in one person’s comment, “Make sure there are consequences for violence”. The Youth Criminal Justice Act was usually pilloried for presumably giving serious young offenders anonymity and demanding little accountability. The fear for one’s safety in public was evident especially in the urban core areas and is captured most strikingly by one participant there who wrote, “We are prisoners in our alarmed homes, whereas we used to go out without fear of physical harm”. Not a few participants, emphasizing the importance of greater police presence, echoed the words of one who said, “Downtown I see officers walking the beat and it gives one a feeling of security”.



**Chart A - Five Top Major Challenges for Public Safety by Council Area\***

<b>Main Challenges Identified</b>	<b>Marine Drive</b>	<b>Harbour East</b>	<b>Peninsula</b>	<b>Chebucto</b>	<b>North West</b>	<b>Western</b>
Policing Service (i.e. Need more)	#2				#1	#1
Justice System – (i.e. Stricter)	#1	#3		#1		#2
Accessible Recreational /Community Resources	#3				#2	#3
Cultural Change, Media Depictions	#5			#4	#5	#4
Poverty and Inequality Issues	#5		#3	#2		
Youth Issues (i.e. Programs, early intervention)	#4	#1	#2	#3		#5
Community Spirit/Engagement Needed			#5	#5	#4	
Specific Crimes (i.e. Drugs, Swarming)		#2	#1		#3	
Violence and Fear		#4	#4			
City Design Features (i.e. Lighting)		#5				

*\* Participants at the meetings initially identified the major challenges for Public Safety in their areas. The specific written remarks were then categorized.*

With respect to youth issues, a challenge that was articulated especially in the urban core areas, but definitely not limited to them, was to ensure that the educational system is responding to all youths not just those likely to pursue a university education. One person commented, “Build bridges between support in communities and service for youth unable to make it academically through high school”, while, on the other side of the Harbour, a person noted, “Abolishing the old vocational schools in favour of community colleges which require grade 12 education leaves a number of kids, with nowhere to go; [they need] to feel they are not a failure and can contribute to the community”. In both these C.C.s in particular there were also comments calling for effective rehabilitation of young offenders who do get incarcerated, and for marshalling effective help for young offenders before it gets to that – incarceration. Many participants in highlighting youth issues stressed the challenge of early intervention with at-risk youth under 14 years of age. Related to the focus on youth was frequently the attribution of poor parenting such that certain youth were deemed likely to become engaged in crime and violence because they

lacked positive direction and good role models. The comments on parenting usually had to do with things other than parenting per se, such as resources, the need for mentors etc.

In most of the C.C.s, participants also identified the need for more community development to counter certain macro-societal trends. A not uncommon written comment was “We’ve lost our sense of community and what it means to be a neighbour”. Others explicitly connected decline of community to larger macro or global trends such as lack of respect for authority including parents and community “elders”. Environmental design was mentioned frequently with respect to lighting and related safety features whether on the streets in the urban cores, on the Commons or in the “pedways” of Sackville and Cole Harbour.

### *The Views and Recommendations from the Tables*

Chart B indicates the tables in each C.C. dealing with a particular topic and here the discussion will focus on the specific table themes.

**Chart B - Roundtable Community Area Meetings\***

Chief Themes Discussed at the Tables**	Marine Drive	Harbour East	Peninsula	Chebucto	North West	Western
Policing Issues	X	X	X	X	X	X
Recreation & Infrastructure	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Justice System	X	X		X		
Parenting and Family	X	X	X	X	X	
Drugs and Gangs	X	X	X	X		X
Youth Issues	X	X	X	X	X	X
Education & Schools		X	X	X	X	
Downtown & Bars	X		X	X		X
Community Action/Spirit		X	X	X	X	X
Poverty/Inequality & Racism	X	X	X	X		

\* *Halifax Regional Municipality is divided into these six community council areas.*

\*\* *In the Marine Drive meeting there were tables discussing the seniors’ issues and mental health issues. The Peninsula session had a table on the role of the media and the Harbour East meeting had one on vandalism.*

### *Policing and Justice Issues*

Policing issues were a constant theme raised through HRM. **In the areas policed by the HRPS**, the view was widespread that community based policing works in improving security and reducing violence. It was claimed that more police presence in recent years has had positive results. Other aspects of the police service that were deemed to be effective were the town hall meetings with the chief, park patrol, the community offices and the volunteer programs, especially COPS (citizens on patrol). The participants in two of the tables expressed interest in programs such as the Guardian Angels, and in general there was a widespread view that auxiliary programs or something like auxiliaries were beneficial additions to the police service. Generally, they held that more is needed of virtually all the beneficial services, from more community police offices to more police visibility (New York was cited by a few participants as an example of a transformation to a less violent place as a consequence of greater police visibility) to specific programs

such as Neighbourhood Watch. Vandalism was cited as requiring more attention (“Vandalism is not treated seriously enough and that is the biggest problem ... police don’t respond but want you to just phone it in”). The participants also considered that there could be better communication provided on current police services. Assets identified included both police service initiatives (e.g., training in cultural sensitivity) and community volunteers, but participants believed that too little utilization is made of local businesses or the several universities in HRM. The priorities advanced for change in responding to violence and public safety concerns were threefold, namely (a) first and foremost, greater police visibility especially in “hot spots” such as the Commons, (b) a different type of policing (rather than simply more police) with members of different kinds / levels of responsibility, and (c) more public participation in crime prevention programs such as Neighbourhood Watch and COPS.

**In the areas policed by the RCMP** (Bedford is policed by HRPS but could not be disaggregated in this format) the participants held that programs such as community liaison officer, COPS, youth programs (e.g. the Sackville Summer Youth Initiative), and bike patrol have been beneficial in reducing fears and decreasing crime. COPS, particularly, was highlighted as providing both community involvement in policing and more “eyes and ears on the road” which reduces crime. They believed, too, that surveillance cameras, “graffiti to art”, Neighbourhood Watch, and neighbourhood task forces are positive programs that should be enhanced. As in the areas of HRPS jurisdiction, the value of greater police visibility was emphasized, throughout these C.C.s, with foot patrols being encouraged in the built-up areas of Sackville and Bedford. Participants believed that local assets to build upon were many, including community facilities and programs that help crime prevention, assets whose value could be enhanced through more affordable and accessible recreational facilities. It was contended in one C.C. that the increased availability of the schools’ facilities for after-hours activities has already paid dividends for public safety there. The significant involvement of community people in the COPS programs was noted (in one C.C. over 30 men were engaged in COPS and reportedly spent many hours and used their own resources (e.g., cars, gas) in that service) and seen as something to nurture well. Police liaison to seniors was deemed important to improve in the more rural areas of HRM. The main priorities advanced for improving the police service in dealing with violence and public safety were (a) greater police visibility and (b) more funding to encourage community engagement in crime prevention programs, and (c) community-based police programming centered at the community level.

**Justice issues**, such as perceived inadequacies concerning the YCJA and sentencing in general, were highlighted at many tables but Justice only constituted the focus theme for three of them. Apart from policing and sentencing, there was very little mention of any Justice levels or roles such the Public Prosecution Service, Legal Aid or Corrections. **In the urban core**, programs and policies that work were identified as restorative justice programs and the Safe Communities Act (aimed at shutting down drug houses and so forth), both of which, participants believed, needed much more promotion in HRM. They also held that sentences needed to be increased for “violence against persons” crimes, and that rehabilitation programs should also be increased and improved and these, along with

the expansion of restorative justice, were also their main priorities for change. **In the suburban area**, the programs and policies that have been working were identified as restorative justice and programs and policies at the police level (e.g., bike patrol, satellite offices). It was also considered that “dangerous offender status” and “three strikes, you’re out” sentencing policies have worked in other jurisdictions and should be applied locally (presumably, in the case of dangerous offender status, applied more often). Participants held that improvements in justice would include maximum sentences for repeat violent offenders, remand for persons facing multiple charges, faster court processing of cases, and increased use of restorative justice for minor offenses. The participants considered that “getting citizens in high crime areas engaged in their own community” would be a major asset for securing the needed improvements in justice matters and that also was their major priority for change.

In the most **rural Roundtable meetings in HRM**, the participants believed that programs and policies that have been working to reduce violence and enhance public safety included camera surveillance in high crime areas, having young offenders tried as adults in crimes of violence, and a variety of police programs but, as was emphatically stated, “Definitely not the justice system as it now stands”. It was held that the YCJA must be revised to allow less anonymity and more adult-like sentences, that repeat offenders should be remanded not released on bail, and that judges should focus on enforcement of the law and leave rehabilitation to the social workers. In keeping with this tough justice approach, the participants held that there should be no statutory early release, more accountability for parole boards, and more stringent supervision of half-way houses. Suggested strategies for change included electing judges, more victim participation, and a speedier case processing by hiring more judges and crown prosecutors. The two major priorities for change were (a) revamping the YCJA and (b) stricter sentences for violent crimes.

A related table theme was **Drugs, Gangs and Gangs**. In the more rural areas of HRM the discussions about drugs, gangs and guns basically centered on the drug problem while in the urban core areas the focus was much more on youth and gangs; in the transitional suburban C.C., both issues were discussed under the above broad rubric. **In the urban core areas**, the participants considered that some recent programs and policies were working well to diminish the violence and public fear / worry; these included new federal policies confiscating the proceeds of crime, the provincial government’s Safe Communities Act, the LOVE project (Leave Out Violence) directed at youth, school liaison, and restorative justice (a program currently limited to young offenders) initiatives. They identified other possible initiatives that might also be effective such as curfews and coordinated, comprehensive “wrap around” programs for youth, community “walks” or marches to demonstrate community concerns and mobilize sentiment for change, legalizing the sex trade as in some European countries, and the “broken windows” approach in enforcement (several attendees in different areas cited the success of this strategy in New York City) which paid much attention to minor crimes and violations as a way to improve the quality of urban life and also have implications for reducing serious crimes. The participants also held that improvements were necessary in extant programs either because the public was not adequately engaged (e.g., in

Neighbourhood Watch), or the Justice response was inadequate (e.g., the YCJA, house arrest and weapon possession sentences), or the governmental funding was inadequate and usually short-term (e.g., youth mentoring projects). The participants considered that there were many assets such as community resources, volunteers, facilities, and institutions (e.g., the churches) but there was a lack of networking and coordination, issues of insurance liability and affordable access, and lack of public awareness. The major priorities were to deal with these latter issues, building on the beneficial programs and policies in place either locally or elsewhere through (a) the community taking more ownership, (b) reassessing how the justice system is dealing with crime and offenders, and (c) more and consistent governmental funding and coordination.

The other tables' discussions on this broad theme veered more to illicit drug activity. **The suburban discussants** observed that effective programs included the methadone clinic and teen outreach programs which get at the demand side of the drug trade, and port security and plain clothes and related policing which get at the supply side. They were more informed about assets and possible improvements on the youth side of the ledger and thus highlighted the need for building on existing youth programs (e.g., mentoring, school programs) that could provide alternatives to engaging in gangs and using drugs, but there was also mention of improving addiction services. The two major priorities advanced were (a) widening educational opportunities to generate employment and life skills and thereby a better quality of life for at-risk or addicted persons, and (b) greater coordination among the three levels of government and the schools and service organizations. In the discussions in the **more rural C.C.s**, the participants in highlighting drug and gang issues indicated that the recent federal and provincial justice policies noted above will make a difference, especially in conjunction with more police officers being hired. "Gangs and guns" were not seen as significant problems in these areas but drug issues were by many of the participants. Enhancement of drug awareness initiatives (e.g., The Mainland North Drug Awareness program) and addiction services were cited as positive developments in dealing with drugs and crime on the demand side. The participants also held that CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design) initiatives in conjunction with more police presence should be valuable in that regard. They called for more police presence, tougher sentences, and a revised YCJA, but also more restorative justice and more programs aimed at the rehabilitation of addicts. The major priorities advanced reflected that balance namely (a) a tougher Justice system response to gangs and the illicit drug trade, (b) getting at the root causes of drug use and gang affiliation.

The **Downtown Bar Scene** was a table discussion theme in four C.C. areas, the two most directly impacted and the two most geographically removed from the Downtown night scene. It is included in this section since the discussion focused on enforcement issues. The same basic points were highlighted in all the C.C.s, namely the responsibilities of the bar owners to have qualified security people on site and appropriate policies in place for the safety of customers, the importance of significant police presence, the necessity for more effective controls and enforcement by the provincial Liquor Control authorities, and transportation policies (e.g., special bus service) to facilitate public safety. The participants in all discussion groups saw the violence and public safety issues of the

Downtown Bar Scene as virtually exclusively being alcohol-induced, anti-social behaviours. **In the Halifax urban core**, the community activists held that surveillance cameras, police presence and collaboration with the universities go hand in hand with the above-mentioned factors in producing a night-time economy that can be relatively free of violence and extensive public safety risks. They also highlighted the need for “more people living in the area” but acknowledged a “chicken or the egg dilemma” in which might come first, more public safety or more dense population. The Downtown issue was defined as largely a matter of improving – enhancement – in all these above-mentioned respects, the chief priority being “the bar owners must be made more responsible by new policies and close monitoring by government” (the provincial Liquor Control Act authorities).

**The more rural-based C.C. activists** echoed these views, adding a number of specific suggestions that the C.C. participants elsewhere would have acknowledged too such as “eliminate the cheap drinks practice”, explore the safety implications of “different hours of operation” and have better street lighting. Some participants also called for stiffer penalties for alcohol abusers while others called for “educating the youth before they get to the bar stage [in their lives]”. While, as noted, participants typically perceived the Downtown bar scene issues as an alcohol-abuse problem, in the Halifax core there was also discussion of public safety on the Commons. While the reported assaults and swarming were few they clearly had powerful symbolic value as “signal crimes”. Here the activists’ view was that the Commons is a fundamental piece of Halifax’s attraction as a city and the central way to improve public safety there would be to make it even more of a social gathering place or venue by encouraging family events, having more facilities such as outdoor skating there, and incorporating the principles of CPTED (e.g., lighting, shrubbery maintenance).

### ***Youth, Parenting, Mentoring and School***

Youth issues were discussed at one or more tables in each C.C. area and indeed youth issues were prominent in discussions whatever the specific table theme. In the **areas policed by HRPS** (i.e., the pre-1996 amalgamation cities of Halifax and Dartmouth) the participants cited “a lack of respect” on the part of youth and appreciated the comment of a senior who noted “Up until a few years ago I walked anywhere, anytime but now I plan my trips”. They identified a number of programs and initiatives involving youth that they believed reduce violence and youth crime in their areas, especially Phoenix House, Boys and Girls clubs, LOVE, mentoring programs, after-school programs, and police beat and bike patrol. Programs and initiatives held to improve youth and public safety included recreational programs, police school liaison, Block Parents, Neighbourhood Watch, Kids Help Line, and COPS. Generally the participants considered that improving what is currently available was an important step, and the key to that was more governmental coordination and funding. As in the provincial task force, a major recommendation in this regard was accessibility to recreational facilities and sports and other programs at minimal cost (i.e., subsidizing recreation). It was suggested that the YCJA should be changed in part because “The YCJA does not do any favours for kids by just slapping offenders on the wrist”. Other recommended improvements dealt with more officers “on

the beat”, parenting programs, and macro-level matters such as affordable housing. In considering assets that could facilitate meeting the challenges of youth issues in violence and crime, the centerpiece was usually seen to be the school which implicitly was depicted as the appropriate hub or nexus for the youth experience. Participants pointed as well to the underutilized (for working with youth) assets of the many universities and the significant military presence in HRM, while churches and residents’ associations were also sometimes cited. The Dartmouth C.C.’s report offered the view that “the monetary requirements are not too steep” for the above suggested improvements and changes. The strategies advanced by the participants for responding to youth issues highlighted identifying and helping at-risk youths as early as possible, more use of school facilities, safe places for youth to go, and imposing curfews. The summary priorities were identified as (a) parenting and family support (especially for unwed teenagers and young parents), (b) early intervention programs for youth at-risk, (c) more after-school programs, and (d) “toughening up” the YCJA.

**In the former Halifax County areas (plus Bedford), policed by the RCMP,** youth issues were also a lively and common topic at all tables. Participants identified a number of positive youth programs and initiatives for reducing youth violence and crime such as Phoenix House, Boys and Girls clubs, Scouts and Guides, school initiatives such as codes of conduct and programs such as the “Youth Transition Pathways”, police school liaison, and recent Department of Justice initiatives such as the youth attendance centre. They also held that programs such as Anti-Bullying, DARE, Racing Against Drugs, and COPS have focused on youth and have improved public safety. Other initiatives that were claimed to have had the effect of reducing crime and increasing public safety were cameras in the schools and better lighting in areas where youth congregate. In their view the changes required to enhance public safety and reduce crime included a “tough love” package such as toughening up the YCJA (stiffer penalties, accountability) but also assisting better the at-risk youths, enhancing the police school liaison activity, and making affordable virtually all school programs and recreational initiatives. Participants pointed to a number of area assets such as school facilities, mentorship programs, police programs, community centres, available outdoor areas, churches and willing volunteers, and they identified strategies such as more funding (basically governmental funding) for security to protect these assets if they were more fully utilized, and some remuneration for the volunteers working with youth at the various facilities. Other strategies included identifying and intervening early with at-risk youths, after-school programs, encouraging voluntarism by youths and adults, and asking and listening to youths concerning what recreational and other activities they want. They were, too, of the view that “free help” as offered by a group such as the Guardian Angels should be considered in that it increases a counter-violence visibility. The central priorities were stated as (a) provide funding for the security and liability requirements of community groups and assets (e.g., the Sackville arena) serving youth needs, (b) do more to “ensure that no one falls out of the educational system”, and (c) change the YCJA on the premise that harsher and more certain penalties deter crime.

**Parenting and mentoring** were specifically discussed at tables in five of the six C.C. meetings. **In the urban core area** policed by the HRPS, participants identified family

resource centres, after-school programs, special programs in parenting offered by the churches (e.g., the young mothers' resource centre in Chebucto, Fresh Start, a parenting program in Ward Five), and projects aimed at economically disadvantaged families such as Family SOS (housing), food banks, and breakfast and lunch school programs, as making a major contribution to violence and public safety issues in a preventative sense. These programs were seen as collaborative with youth-specific initiatives such as Phoenix House, Block Parents and Neighbourhood Watch. Generally, the participants stressed that the lack of effective parenting, fuelled often by poverty and associated particularly with unprepared young parents, was a major concern requiring more funding and governmental resources. It was contended too that the churches frequently have filled the void but their resources are limited and their access limited by a lack of coordination and networking. Major strategies and priorities advanced included (a) improved coordination and networking (e.g., a C.C. newsletter), (b) parental support in terms of education, housing and food policies and after-school programs, (c) appropriate Justice response (e.g., "courts must stop sending youth back to dysfunctional families") and (d) early intervention strategies for at-risk youth.

The above views and suggestions were essentially echoed in the table reports from the other C.C. areas. **In the more rural areas of HRM** the participants sometimes claimed there were no programs and policies directed at poor parenting or the needs (often defined as poverty-based) of parents struggling with at-risk youth issues. It was acknowledged that family resources centres, the City Watch, and Parenting First initiatives could be significant in getting at these issues but they would require sustained funding and be well-coordinated. A number of community assets were noted including community centres, citizen engagement and police programs. Affordability concerns with respect to services and programs for youth were also commonly raised in the table discussions. The major priorities included (a) more government funding for parenting programs, and (b) affordable, accessible youth and children services.

It was noted above that **the school** apparently is seen as the nexus for focusing on a wide variety of social issues including violence and public safety. That position was evident in the discussions on education in **the urban and suburban HRM areas** (there were no tables specifically devoted to education and schools in the rural meetings). The participants considered that school policies and programs, such as in-school suspensions, police school liaison, cameras in the schools, anti-bullying initiatives, and special programs for youth with difficulties (early intervention as well), have helped to reduce violence and improve public safety. They were positive as well about the similar value of youth attendance centers for youth who have been involved in crime. It was usually advanced that the schools and education in general could and should be more engaged in the prevention and response to violence and crime. A variety of ways this might be achieved were noted, such as university-community liaison, use of university students as mentors, school-community meetings, and after-school programming in "opened-up" and "accessible to all" school facilities (not just athletics though athletics was considered important). There was a widely held view that the human resources to supervise and manage assets could be volunteers and that that would require more community mobilization, more public meetings, and more interaction between local community



leaders and school officials. These community activists focused then very much on the schools as the centers of social activities. Their major priorities were (a) much more community involvement and community-school (university too) partnerships, (b) extensive use of school facilities, and (c) a school system with a broad social mandate (e.g., teaching essential life skills, having responsibilities with respect to reducing violence and improving public safety).

### **Infrastructure, Recreation and Community Assets**

Recreational facilities and community activity centres, if accessible, well-designed and well-supervised, were considered significant in providing positive alternatives for youths and improving the quality of life for all residents. An adequate community infrastructure was seen as integral to public safety throughout HRM. Participants in the **urban core Roundtable meeting areas** believed that recreational facilities such as the Needham Centre and the Grey Arena, as well as the skating rinks, had proven value in reducing crime and improving public safety. The facilities provided youth by non-profit organizations such as the Lions and the Boys and Girls clubs were also appreciated as were the many volunteers mobilized in these activity centres. The urban core participants suggested that improvement could be made by having more such facilities with wider accessibility and here they usually focused on “opening up the schools” through the mechanism of a province-wide policy which also covered insurance issues and aligned the positions of government, unions and businesses. More outdoor rinks were also suggested but somewhat surprisingly no mention was made of outdoor basketball courts which have become commonplace in some areas of the urban core such as the North-End Halifax. More governmental support, including HRM support, was a common strategy advanced but many participants apparently were of the opinion that the resources / facilities are basically there and the challenge lies in husbanding them more effectively. This was a theme commonly articulated in the discussion groups, namely that greater effectiveness requires coordination and networking by government more so than it requires “big bucks”. It was observed too that support for the volunteers is crucial since as one spokesperson commented, “We have a lot of facilities but the shortfall is the human resources to manage them”; in this connection, an important additional comment was that the average age in some service clubs such as the Lions is about sixty-eight and that means fewer people available for voluntary monitoring and fund raising. The participants’ main priorities were (a) more affordable policies for users (especially youth) and (b) expand the use of school facilities after regular school hours.

Attendees at the Roundtable community meetings in the **suburban and more rural parts of HRM** also placed much emphasis on recreational facilities and community centres in proactively dealing with issues of violence and public safety. School facilities were again highlighted as pivotal. Participants believed that where available outside regular school hours, school facilities have provided a centre for healthy, safe, social gatherings for youths and adults alike. Other facilities such as community centres and properly lit and supervised ball fields, along with the usual non-profit organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls clubs) and safety design features such as shrub clearance, well-lit pathways, and proactive graffiti measures were considered very crucial to reducing

violence and crime and ensuring public safety. Service clubs were identified as another significant community asset in the suburban areas while in the rural Roundtable community meetings the participants primarily mentioned police-related initiatives such as COPS. In all the Roundtable community sessions it was contended that public engagement was an asset and could be further nourished. While acknowledging that in most areas HRM had an adequate infrastructure, participants held that much improvement could be achieved through more implementation of CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design), removing the costs for facilities such as fields, arenas and gyms, and perhaps having safety patrols in certain areas. In the rural areas there was attention drawn to construction of needed community centres. Overall, the major priorities advanced were (a) greater accessibility and affordability in the use of community resources, (b) increased funding for the related programs and services and (c) encouraging the engagement of volunteers, whether youth or adults, to supervise activities at the various recreational centres and at schools after-hours.

### ***Other Macro or Contextual Issues***

Other issues discussed at the C.C. tables included poverty, the role of the media, mental health issues, seniors' security and values and faith. Only the poverty issue was the central focus of table discussion in more than one C.C. area. **In the urban core C.C.** area where poverty was selected as the table theme, the role of churches and food banks were highlighted as "what was working" to decrease the severity of impoverishment and hence, presumably, creating a more favorable context for family life, the education of youth and so on, which in the long-run would yield more public safety for all citizens. The participants emphasized the need for accessibility to school, community, and recreational programs to be based on affordability and need, for subsidized day care, and for affordable if not free transportation (i.e., the FRED busing initiative –Free Rides Everywhere Downtown - provided by the Downtown Business Commission for tourists and others between July and the end of October was cited as a model). Bringing back the trade school alternative for youths (seen as effecting a more inclusive educational practice than the current presumably university-track model), and early intervention strategies for disadvantaged youth were recommended. A bottom-line priority was stated as "find out how to help and act on it", if possible by getting the private sector involved and not having to raise taxes. **In the suburban C.C.**, the discussion generated similar points, adding, to the above cited "things that are working" (churches, food banks, FRED), school-based programs that provide breakfast and sometimes lunch, and shelters for the homeless. In both these C.C. groups the efforts of the well-known, youth – oriented organizations such as Phoenix House, Big Brothers and Big Sisters were also acknowledged. It was considered imperative for local government to become more engaged with the homeless issue and to involve local businesses in solving this social problem. The suburban table noted particularly the responsibility of the school system for teaching life skills and developing alternatives such as trade schools for those unable to achieve acceptance in today's community colleges.

**In the rural-based C.C.** there was little mention of church programs or food banks or shelters for the homeless, perhaps indicating their lesser presence in rural areas. The

emphasis was rather on education, unemployment insurance, school breakfast programs and some Community Services programs that mitigated the effects of poverty. Attention was drawn to the importance of mentoring (“If we can’t help the parents, maybe we can help the kids”) and accessible daycare (“So parents can get an education or look for work”). The priorities for this group were declared as “Education and education”. Overall, the participants in all three C.C.s articulated a modest action plan for dealing with poverty that was feasible at the local level of activism and highlighted (a) more local government engagement in creatively dealing with homelessness, (b) more sustained funding for practical initiatives that mitigate the effects of poverty such as food banks, affordable programs and services, mentoring and early intervention. In conjunction with these modest priorities there was the major thrust for a flexible educational system. Just as the police are the referral point for all surface level issues of violence and public safety, so the educational system is seen as the key for getting at underlying problems. It may be noted that while the table theme was, in two of the three cases, poverty and racism, not simply poverty, no specific references to racism were recorded.

The public safety concerns of and for seniors and the issues of mental health and drug addiction were frequently cited throughout the C.C. meeting but constituted main table discussion themes in only two meetings, both in the most rural of the C.C.s. Clearly the average age of the Nova Scotian and the HRM populations are on an upward trajectory and this is especially the case in the most rural C.C. where the population declined between the 2001 and 2006 censuses. The participants there raised a number of concerns about public safety and seniors. It was held that police programs such as The Vial of Life, Lifeline, and community policing initiatives have been beneficial for monitoring the safety and well-being of seniors; environmental design features of CPTED initiatives have also improved lighting and transportation. Essentially the table participants called for more of the same, namely security checks on seniors, possible an outreach “elders program” such as the RCMP has introduced in some First Nation communities, and continued improvements in creating a safe environment. Police presence / visibility was particularly emphasized. With respect to issues of addiction and mental health, the C.C. attendees called for more rehabilitation programming and stressed the benefits of accessible, basic governmental services such as detox centers and initiatives such as Metro Turning Point (for the homeless) and Hope Cottage (meals for the needy) in the urban core. They suggested the use of local facilities – community centers, hospitals and churches - to provide such services in the more rural areas. The relative paucity of treatment-related facilities on the Eastern Shore was contrasted with the alleged adequacy in the Cole Harbour district. Their main priorities were (a) accessible programs and services, (b) more cooperation and networking among the salient service providers, and (c) more public education about addictions.

As indicated above in the section on perceived major challenges, another broad theme for violence and public safety, mentioned at most C.C. meetings, was cultural change and, in that regard, the role of mass media. The issue was posed as one of building up communitarianism in a societal context where individualism and themes of violence were dominant. These topics were specifically focused upon in an urban core C.C. meeting. Reporting on cultural values, the participants, while citing the usual assets such as youth

non-profit organizations and police-initiated community programs such as Neighbourhood Watch and COPS, highlighted the importance of non-profit initiatives that help to create a sense of community and develop self-esteem, dignity and respect; here the role of the churches (e.g., Hope Cottage, parenting and family programs) was particularly singled out. The strategies advanced for building upon such assets and effecting more profound change were funding for such programs and services to ensure adequacy and sustainability, accessible affordable recreational facilities, and increased collaboration among the various service providers. At a nearby table the participants discussed the role of the mass media in shaping the public's views about violence and public safety. It was contended that there is routinely in the media an emphasis on violence, crime and danger, the antithesis of community, while community enhancing stories and values are under-included. There was posited, then, a lack of balance that some participants considered to be expected as they acknowledged in summary comments such as "Violence and security fears sell newspapers". The participants held that perhaps the municipality has some additional responsibility to communicate the positives, the civic pride stories, and the developments that improve public safety and create a stronger sense of community (e.g., initiatives in "problem areas"). It was suggested that HRM officials should regularly meet with editorial boards and other media to convey such information but also not rely solely on the mass media to impact public awareness. No mention was made of HRM publications that may be currently engaged in such dissemination of information.

## CONCLUSIONS

Among the councillors, there was significant consensus along with significant diversity. The summary provided on pages 1 and 2 of this report depicts this nuanced consensus. There were systematic differences between the views of those in the urban core and contiguous districts and those beyond suburbia on a variety of issues while the suburban councillors were themselves quite diverse in their views. The diversity was perhaps the greatest in the area of whether the municipality should take on a broader mandate than it currently has (vis-à-vis the province) in response to challenges of violence and public safety; here, while almost all agreed with a greater coordinative role for the municipal government and closer partnership with senior levels of government, the further out from the urban core, the more the councillors raised concerns ‘getting over our head’ and costs. Some councillors warmed to the idea of a new vision and strategic action plan in the public safety areas while others were quite concerned about either the need and/or the unachievable expectations that might be set in train by such initiatives. There was much similarity among virtually all councillors in their positive assessments of policing vis-à-vis the rest of the criminal justice system, largely seeing the latter as ineffective in responding to, if not compounding, the problems. There was much similarity too in their views of the need for accessible, affordable recreational facilities (especially opening up the school facilities, though here there were some wary voices as well). A number of councillors pointed out the racialized nature of much violence whether in swarming or in the Downtown or in the schools, and suggested the need for more commitment and action in improving race relations. Several councillors suggested the need to consider specialty courts such community courts, mental health courts or drug treatment courts.

As was true among the councillors, there was diversity within strong consensus among the approximately 300 activists participating in the community meetings’ discussions. The major consensus themes for improving public safety revolved around the role of the police services and the school systems. The policing service was highlighted for dealing with the immediate enforcement and crime prevention issues whereas the school system was highlighted by participants when they focused on getting at the roots of social problems generating violence, roots which they conceived of as shortfalls in values, mentors, and alternative opportunities. Concerning the police services, there was much praise, and when participants cited what was working in their community in reducing violence and increasing public safety, they usually cited various policing initiatives, whether that be DARE, Neighbourhood Watch, COPS, community / school liaison officers, foot-patrol or street crime units. They, like the councillors and like the public survey respondents, were usually quite critical regarding the work of the courts in sentencing and also regarding the youth justice system (particularly of course the YCJA, here decrying especially the ‘anonymity’ of offenders and what they perceived to be the lack of meaningful sentences and accountability). They usually called for major changes in the criminal justice system for both youth and adults– bail, sentencing and the YCJA – but, pending these, their focus was logically on the pre-arrest, crime preventative activity of the policing service. In their priorities for policing, the participants generally called for more of everything that the police services are already doing, but especially for closer

collaboration with the communities with respect to visible police presence and crime prevention programs.

In the case of the school systems, the participants looked to the schools to have a broad mandate, focusing on values and civic culture in addition to the three Rs, and being more accessible in every respect for the community and for youth in particular. The schools were seen as the chief venue for providing mentors and role models where there were inadequacies in parenting, and the schools' physical resources – the gyms and meetings rooms and so forth – were seen as extant, 'bought for', resources that should be available off-hours and affordable, if not free, to community residents. A number of participants also emphasized the need for the school system to retain youths more effectively, reducing drop-outs, and to re-establish trade school programs for those who for one reason or another do not qualify for or cannot cope with the expectations of community colleges and universities; in this perspective, drop-outs and credential-less young people are seen as more likely to become engaged in anti-social behaviour.

The emphasis on the policing service for short-term response, and the schools for the long-term social development approach, to problems of violence and public safety is a perspective that may have faults itself on a variety of levels; for example, police programs such as Neighbourhood Watch, D.A.R.E. have been sharply criticized by criminologists as ineffective, as implemented, for reducing crime, and the school systems may be already overburdened with responsibilities (though prospects of a declining youth population as noted in the Roundtable Report may offer some room for taking on other tasks). The overall perspective, however, is consistent and congruent with participants' views of how the criminal justice system operates, of effecting possible improvements in public safety without radical social change, and especially with their focus on youths when thinking and talking about violence and public safety. Indeed, the emphasis on youth – usually though not always, considering youth in the junior high and under-18 years of age categories – was very pervasive in the Roundtable community discussions. Little mention at all was made of the adult population which accounts for 87% of the reported offenses in Nova Scotia and in Canada overall. Several times, participants mentioned this preoccupation (see the Roundtable Report for a discussion of this issue) to the researcher; one noted on exiting the meeting place, "They sure all focused on youth didn't they", while twice, nearing the end of a Roundtable community discussion period, a participant asked rhetorically, "Why are we just talking about youth". Certainly, when the Roundtable community participants discussed what was working to improve public safety in the HRM, apart from the police initiatives, they usually cited youth-oriented agencies and programs as noted above. Beyond both police and school initiatives with youth, and additional ones recommended for them by the Roundtable community meetings' participants, the chief recommendations were that youth-at-risk be given special attention and that there be much greater coordination of services (e.g., "wrap-around" programming) for such youth; as will be noted in the Roundtable Report a number of such projects have recently been funded in HRM.

Another general consensus theme, articulated quite similarly to the positions advanced by many HRM councillors, was that there needed to be much more coordination and

facilitation carried out by governments and especially by the municipal HRM government, the government closest to the communities and of course to their public safety concerns. Many activists did not envisage such municipal initiative to require major investment (“big bucks “). They were cautious of affordability and any tax increases but the view often was expressed, as one activist put it, “It’s not a question of big money but rather of political will”. They saw the municipality’s role as coordinating and planning, working with the non-profit agencies, volunteers, and businesses and universities (the latter both seen as able to make valuable contributions and as very under-utilized by HRM planners at present). Modest government funding was seen as required to secure and make affordably accessible, existing recreational facilities, to facilitate volunteering (some training, some registry, some coverage of liability insurance etc), to communicate and publicize crime prevention and public safety successes and strategies throughout HRM, and to lobby senior levels of government. It was generally held that at present the municipal government lacks the capacity to carry out that role effectively.

Another consensus theme emerging from the Roundtable community discussions was that signal crimes such as the swarmings, however infrequent, and the general high level of violence in the Downtown have created a sense of fear and worry for public safety that transcends the urban core areas. Even modest incidents of disorder and violence are increasingly seen through the prism of such violence and that makes problematic the sense of trust between youth and adults and the feelings of safety even in areas of very low crime, as well as increasing anxiety about going into Central and Downtown HRM. A related consensus theme was the underlying sense of balance in the positions advanced by the Roundtable community participants. Not only did they discuss the difference between perceptions and realities but also they coupled recommendations on toughening sentencing and the YCJA with recommendations for working more with disadvantaged families and at-risk youths and for ensuring that salient services and facilities are accessible and affordable to all HRM residents. To borrow a contemporary phrase, the participants were not “one trackers”.

Specific additional recommendations emerging from the Roundtable community discussions point to some diversity within the above consensus:

1. Increase police presence and visibility as a deterrent to violence and crime, especially in ‘hot spots’ such as The Commons.
2. Increase public participation with the police in crime prevention initiatives.
3. Get citizens in high crime areas more engaged.
4. Get at the roots causes of drug use and gang formation.
5. Revise the YCJA and have tougher bail and sentencing practices for both adults and youths who commit violent offenses.
6. Consider the reintroduction of curfews.
7. Examine the possibilities and effectiveness of restorative justice.
8. Provide other affordable opportunities for wholesome recreation (especially for youth and the disadvantaged) by “opening up the schools, the facilities we now own”.

9. Ensure the educational system is responding to all youths, not just those likely to pursue a university education.
10. Have schools appreciate a broader mandate with respect to teaching life skills and taking on more responsibility for reducing violence and enhancing public safety.
11. Focus more on at-risk youths and coordinate better the services appropriate for them.
12. Provide more assistance to parents of at-risk youths.
13. Improve public safety by paying more attention to CPTED.
14. Encourage police to adopt an elder watch program as in the First Nations communities.
15. Consider how to get sex workers off the street whether by legalizing (decriminalizing) the sex business or otherwise.
16. Have more government funding and coordination in public safety field. Husband better what is 'out there' in human resources and infrastructure.
17. Have better coordination among the different levels of government.
18. With respect to the Downtown violence and offending, have special taxi and/or bus services to facilitate public safety, maintain or increase police presence at the right times, ensure bar owners are held responsible for living up to higher standards for training staff and serving clients, have better monitoring by Alcohol and Gaming authorities, eliminate the cheap drink practices, and reduce the hours open after midnight.
19. Ensure volunteers are nurtured by the municipality and seek more voluntary collaboration from the large pool of university students in HRM, the military, and private business generally.
20. Achieve better balance in media accounts of crime and positive community initiatives, perhaps by having the municipality taking some responsibility for communicating the positives.

### ***COMPARISON TO THE PROVINCIAL TASK FORCE***

The provincial “Minister’s Task Force on Safer Streets and Communities” was launched in 2006 with a panel of 25 informed volunteers and back-up support from the Department of Justice. It held a number of public meetings and focus group sessions throughout Nova Scotia, including five public meetings and three focus groups sessions in HRM. In HRM these meetings took place in February and March 2007 and each lasted about two hours. Basically they entailed short presentations by elected officials and several citizens, with little discussion save in one instance (i.e., North Branch Library, March 22). The report of Task Force, released on May 23, 2007, indicated that specific precipitating factors for it being created were (a) the relatively high crime rate in Nova Scotia, in particular the increase in violent youth crime “in the three years prior to May 2006”, (b) the high level of self-reported violent victimization in Nova Scotia and especially in Halifax as reported in the Statistics Canada’s 2004 GSS, and (c) incidents of street crimes that have “dismayed Nova Scotians” (Report to the Minister of Justice, May 2007). The focus was on crime prevention and “the vast majority of feedback focused on public concern about youth issues and youth crime involving drugs, violence, theft and vandalism”. There were



three focus groups composed entirely of youth, one of which was held at the Nova Scotia Youth Facility.

Personal observation at the HRM sessions identified six key themes, namely

1. Generally high praise for the policing services and sharp criticism for the courts, sentencing, and especially the YCJA. There were some complaints of police investigative work but overall the presenters gave police high marks but lambasted the courts and the YCJA for neglecting the rights and security needs of victims and the community.
2. The schools, and the educational system more generally, were seen as pivotal for crime prevention and public safety. It was noted for example that the CLM course, mandatory in senior high, should be elaborated and introduced at the junior high level, and, of course, affordable access to school facilities after hours was emphasized.
3. Several presenters emphasized that there are few consequences for minor to modest youth offenses and, in their view, there should be since without consequences, “serious offending is sure to follow”. A few presenters pointed to the apparently successful public safety initiative in New York City that was premised on there being such consequences.
4. Some presenters highlighted macro-societal trends that facilitate dismay over public safety, such as less sense of community, more family breakup and the like.
5. A number of presenters, especially in the urban core areas, highlighted social development factors such as affordable housing, jobs, and improved race relations as key factors in any thorough attempt to reduce crime and violence. In the urban areas, too, there were references to quasi-gangs and swarmings.
6. A good number of presenters were representatives of community agencies or volunteers and appropriately they called for governmental assistance in matters such as core funding, liability protection and expenses.

The report reviewed briefly the large variety of concerns and strategies obtained through consultations and issued eighteen recommended priorities, including emphasizing the importance of early intervention and assistance to parents, fostering student attachment to school and offering alternative school options, removing barriers in access to services and recreational programs for children and youth, increasing police resources and strengthening the public prosecution’s role in making stiffer sentencing recommendations, supporting community mobilization and providing core funding for nonprofit organizations promoting crime prevention, mitigating the impact of racism, ensuring adequate rehabilitation and reintegration support for offenders, and examining the feasibility of specialty courts. There were two valuable appendices, one, dealing with rates of crimes in recent years and the costs of crime, and the other, depicting the commonality of the recommendations with those advanced by the Nunn Commission (2007) and those emerging from the Youth sessions held by the Task Force. The recommendations of Task Force were said to have overlapped with the both, save with

respect to also raising the issues of racism, and community mobilization and funding. There was also much overlap between the Task Force's recommendations and the activists recommendations detailed above of course. Here the attention was focused solely on HRM so discussions and recommendations on the possibilities of the municipality's role in public safety, the significance of the Downtown and the Commons, and the improvement of race relations were more significant; additionally, the overlapping items were more thoroughly considered in part because of the discussion format adopted in The Roundtable initiative. In the Minister's Task Force, it was expected that broad recommendations would be fleshed out by the Department of Justice and indeed they have been and will be discussed in the Authorities and Experts Supplemental Report.

### ***A NOTE ON YOUTH***

This Roundtable did not involve significant interaction with youth under eighteen years of age. The Provincial task force had held three meetings with such youth and their findings were available to the Roundtable and noted above. It might be added here that, in the youth session held at the NSYF, the incarcerated youths identified the key central causal factors in their offending troubles to be dysfunctional family environments and peer pressure. There were a few meetings at Cole Harbour (Boys and Girls Club and South East Community Health) and Halifax Shopping Centre (a youth centre drop-in at the Mall) and the Mayor's office did receive some written comments from junior high youths. The Cole Harbour meeting brought together several youth-serving organizations as well as a bevy of youth. During the meeting, a survey of youth carried out by HRM's Community Engagement Strategy project was discussed. It was noted that youth emphasized the importance of "more space to hang out with minimum adult / police oversight" and that the youth involved indicated that they were already busy and not overly keen to do more things outside of school hours on a regular basis; rather their preference was for 'special events'. As noted earlier, adults often saw a solution to violence and offending by youth in opening up extant facilities until late in the evening and these findings suggest some careful consideration should accompany such implementation, though it may well be that these youths would not be committing the violent acts in the first place. The drop-in centre for youth at the Halifax Shopping Centre Mall seems to be consistent with what many youths do want. It has been a successful private initiative that over a five year period has brought youth together in a minimum supervised milieu (a youth board takes some leadership) where they can surf the net, play videos and "just hang". The program is upping the ante soon by requiring some community service for membership and also initiating a pre-charge restorative justice type alternative for shoplifting, so it will be interesting to see how it evolves.

Comments about violence from Caledonia Jr. High School students received by the Mayor's office in January 2008 emphasized several themes that also were noticeable in the Roundtable community discussions. One was the anxiety that some adults experience when, out walking, they approach a group of youths (because of the swarmings and the media attention they have received). Several junior high students wrote of youths' perception that some adults seem to cringe when they near a group of youths even as

young as themselves. One student wrote, “A lot of people are becoming scared of teenagers. Elderly people seem to get quite nervous when they pass my friends and I on the street ... This shows that today’s youth isn’t trusted anymore, even though most of us would never hurt anyone”. Another youth wrote, “Violence has a huge change on me because every time I walk on the sidewalk it seems like parents and families are afraid of youth these days”. Another theme highlighted by the Roundtable community participants and by many of the young students was the pervasiveness of violence in culture and society. In their view it is hard to avoid. One particularly articulate student wrote, “Violence affects everyone, especially youth. Violence is all around us. Many youths try to model themselves after people and if their role model is violent they are more likely to be violent as well. Violence is dangerous to youth because if you are violent at a young age then you are more likely to be a violent adult and that can be really dangerous”. Another youth observed “We’re taught how to solve our problems with words instead of fists but we don’t see that happening in the real world. Stories on the news are mostly about violence and conflict. We may know how to sit down with someone and talk about our problems and feelings; however the reality is it’s not how things are done”.

A number of students noted that violence had interfered deeply with their learning at school. One wrote, “My friend doesn’t like to walk up the street to her friend’s house because kids that sometimes get in fights in school live around her. Violence affects our learning. It is extremely hard to focus on your school work when you’re worried if you or your friend will make it through the day without getting punched in the face”. In terms of solutions the youth mentioned a variety of strategies but cautioned about some possibilities favoured by some adults; for example one youth, after stressing the violence at school, on the streets and on the internet, wrote “Really all I am trying to get across here is try to do something to stop the violence but don’t go too far and make some kind of curfew or something such as that”. Another student commented, “The more violence that gets pumped into each generation is making more and more adolescents act in a violent manner. If this doesn’t decrease or stop all together eventually violence is all we’re going to have and all youth is going to look upon it as a solution to everything”.