

St. Paul neighborhood activists rally for more police protection

by [Marisa Helms](#), Minnesota Public Radio
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St. Paul City Council member Dan Bostrom, a former police officer and life-long East Side resident. (MPR Photo/Marisa Helms)

A group of St. Paul residents say crime in their neighborhood has been getting worse over the past few years and they want the police to do something about it. They're holding a rally on St. Paul's east side to urge the mayor and city council to hire more police officers.

St. Paul, Minn. — Police say crime is much less of a problem in St. Paul than in Minneapolis. And even they're not sure why. But not everybody in St. Paul sees the issue the same way.

On the east side, some residents complain about graffiti, threats from roving groups of youth, prostitution, and suspected drug houses. Twenty-two year resident and business owner Mick Kieffer says he has waited from 45 minutes to two hours for cops to show up after calling 911. He doesn't like what's happening to his neighborhood.



"Everything we do we do is right here," he says. "This is our life. Right here. We love it here. We just don't want it to turn into what Minneapolis has turned into."

Mick and his wife Kathy are in their late 50s. They live above their print and trophy shop. They say their building has been shot at twice. They say they hear gunshots nearly every night, and are threatened regularly by people they call "gang-bangers" who have taken control of the neighborhood. Kathy says she feels like a hostage in her home.

[Kathy and Mick Kieffer](#)

"I've come to the point where I've had enough. I'm like, OK, let's just sell the business, sell the building, get the hell out," she says. "But then, the next day, I calm down, and I'm like, you know what, I'm not leaving. We have too much at stake here and I'm not leaving."

The Keiffers are part of a growing number of east siders who are complaining about increased crime and the lack of police patrolling the streets. The couple have joined up with about a dozen local activists who are organizing a rally in hopes of persuading the city to hire 200 more cops.

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- Kathy Kieffer, resident and business owner

There are currently 571 officers on the force. That's a historic high number for the department. But it's 125 fewer than what the chief of police and police union have been asking for in recent years.

The neighborhood activists are getting a sympathetic ear from St. Paul City Council Member Dan Bostrom, a former police officer and life-long east side resident.

"I'm hearing what these folks are saying," Bostrom says. "And I strongly suspect that some of my other colleagues are hearing the same things. And they're just going to have to get their arms around it, and say, we are going to have to make this our priority, period, and do something about it. Now, the next question people are going to ask of course, is, 'Well, that's all fine Dan, how you going to pay for it?'"

Funding 200 more officers would cost the city about \$14 million a year. That's about one-quarter of the current police department budget. The city is already facing a nearly \$17 million deficit.

Even so, former St. Paul Mayor Randy Kelly already budgeted for 12 new officers this year. And current Mayor Chris Coleman is proposing to add five more next year.

Still, east side activists say the city can and should do more, since 911 calls from the eastern district are up from last year. Also up are crimes like discharging firearms, auto theft, and burglary, which have spiked by more than 20 percent.



Mayor Coleman's spokesman, Bob Hume, says the administration has proven its commitment to public safety. He says despite the current budget crisis, police is the only department in the city that's going to see an increase in resources and staffing.

"At the same time, we can't just throw bodies at this problem and expect it to go away," says Hume. "We need to break

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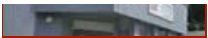
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what has been a cyclical problem for generations. And that's going to take more than bodies on the street. It's going to take effective parks and rec programs, it's going to take economic development, it's going to take a holistic approach to bring this particular area of the city back to what it once was."




Despite the upcoming rally and pressure east side residents are putting on St. Paul officials, the city is having a relatively quiet summer. For the first six months of 2006, St. Paul's overall crime rate is down nearly five percent compared to last year. In Minneapolis crime is up 17 percent in the first six months of 2006.

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