



MIDTOWN STREET PROSTITUTION

An in-depth look at our most visible form of street crime

FORWARD

In 2004 we published *Understanding Midtown Security Issues* as an outline of the public safety and security issues we face. We are in the process of overhauling and expanding that report to better reflect current trends and issues.

The new comprehensive report, with completion and publishing expected by year's end, will contain a chapter on street crimes outlining the following:

- **Robberies and Assaults on the street** – our most dangerous problem
- **Burglaries** – our most sensitive problem
- **Car theft** – our most expensive problem
- **Street Prostitution** – our most visible form of street crime (this article is an excerpt from this chapter).

Other chapters will cover issues including street drugs, vagrancy, police shortage, the role of redevelopment, and our affinity and vision for this dynamic cosmopolitan neighborhood.

Your neighbors at the MPSA spend a great of time talking to neighbors, businesses, community leaders, public officials, and police officers patrolling Midtown about the issues affecting the neighborhood. We also research the various issues in order to understand what necessary tactics and strategies are needed to eradicate street crimes and nuisance issues afflicting our neighborhood.

As we like to say, *we have bought the house, fixed it up, furnished it beautifully, done the landscaping. The MPSA helps us clean up the neighborhood.* This is still very much a neighborhood in the advance stages of revitalization, and the MPSA is here to help with the proactive efforts of taking our neighborhood to the next level.

STREET PROSTITUTION – OUR MOST VISIBLE STREET CRIME

Street prostitution remains our most visible law-and-order problem in the MPSA service area (bound roughly by Juniper Street, Ponce de Leon Avenue, the future Beltline, and 10th Street). While we have seen a significant reduction in this category in recent years, the volume is still unacceptable.

THE DANGERS AND DETRIMENTS OF STREET PROSTITUTION

Street prostitutes pursue this trade primarily to support a drug habit, as reflected by the fact that prostitutes often have crack pipes and other paraphernalia in their possession when arrested. As a result, “dope boys” often come in behind them to create additional problems for the neighborhood. As with other issues in Midtown this is in many ways yet another arm of the open-air drug market along Parkway Drive and Boulevard.

Street prostitutes bring health hazards with them. Residents routinely find used condoms along sidewalks and alleys, and even in their back yards. Occasionally we hear about used needles. This is especially frightening, as children can easily mistake a condom for a balloon, and “play doctor” with the used needles.

Prostitutes often carry blades, thereby making them dangerous to deal with. They will slash anyone in a heartbeat. They don’t shoot – they cut. As their activity primarily serves their drug habit they will readily attack any resident of the community perceived to be getting in their way. The dangers they present to the neighborhood include included vandalism to property (especially cars), threatening or menacing with rocks and other dangerous objects, injury or death to pets, and attacks with knives and pepper spray.

Needless to say, prostitutes bring johns into the neighborhood, who sometimes harass neighborhood women or even mistake them for prostitutes. The customers of prostitutes often have some mental imbalance, often undetected by their peers and spouses. Some are even criminally unscrupulously enough to bring their children along!

Prostitutes have also been known to exploit elderly and disabled residents in the neighborhood. We recently had a situation where a disabled man was about to be rolled by a gang of transvestite prostitutes on Myrtle Street. They got him to lead them toward his house. Luckily some neighbors understood immediately what was happening and intervened. Elderly residents have also been helpless in keeping prostitutes from using their properties for illegal purposes.

And last but not least, prostitutes blight any community afflicted by their presence. Residents do not particularly enjoy watching strangers having sex in cars in front of their homes. The lawlessness of their pursuits contributes greatly to a chaotic atmosphere attracting additional crime in the neighborhood.

MAJOR VARIANTS OF STREET PROSTITUTES IN OUR SERVICE AREA

Within the MPSA service area we see two distinct strains of street prostitution, though with gradually decreasing frequency.

“Crack hookers” along Ponce - Along Ponce de Leon Avenue, especially near its intersection with Boulevard, we see mostly the “real” females. They are invariably tied in very closely with the open-air drug market along Parkway Drive and Boulevard. Since the MPSA Patrol began, we have seen significant reduction in this variant. These few remaining street walkers on Ponce are highly strung-out on years of drug use, as reflected by their extremely unhealthy and unkempt appearance.

There was a time when the entire stretch of Ponce de Leon from Peachtree Street to Moreland Avenue was solidly covered with street prostitution. Years of redevelopment helped to significantly reduce street prostitution along Ponce de Leon Avenue.

Yet a few hard-core street walkers remain near Ponce and Boulevard, due to the abundance of street drugs along Parkway Drive and Boulevard. Other contributing factors include a budget motel on Ponce, where many of the prostitutes stay when they can afford it, and rooming houses and apartment buildings south of Ponce typically under irresponsible property owners. A myriad of free services for street people especially along Ponce also contributes to this problem.

Transvestite prostitutes - Transvestites are the other major variant and remain the most problematic due to the numbers, tenacity, and aggression. Since the MPSA launched the patrol the bulk of them seem to stay mostly outside of the MPSA service area, especially on Peachtree Street. A resilient gang of transvestite prostitutes remains on our side of Juniper, and have exhibited much violence and detriment to the residents of the MPSA patrol area.

Our approach to this gang-like group of prostitutes stirs up controversy in certain circles outside of our neighborhood. Elements in the transgender community (which we see as very distinct from “transvestite”) identify closely with this group and are very vocal in their criticism of neighborhood disapproval of their illegal activity. They often criticize the MPSA for being intolerant and insist that we take a more social-services approach to this problem.

It is important to understand that the MPSA is not a social services organization – we represent strictly a public safety standpoint. We take the very strong position that street prostitution, like other forms of street crimes, is totally unacceptable to the Midtown community. While we applaud sincere efforts to steer these street girls into any necessary treatment and onward to a productive life, we do not hold out much hope for this approach. We therefore work from the angle that special public safety measures are necessary to address this scourge.

It is worth noting that social workers on the streets face the same hazards as the residents afflicted by the presence of prostitutes. Prostitutes are not your typical next-door neighbors – they come from milieu deeply entrenched in hard-core criminality. A typical prostitute has been exposed to a wide array of drugs, gang activity, and violence. This is ultimately what we do not want for the Midtown community.

Male hustlers - Another variant of street prostitution – male hustlers - exists around Cypress Street and creates an intimidating atmosphere for residents especially in that area. While the Cypress Street problem does not lie within the MPSA service area (except when they venture over here occasionally), this topic does come up regularly in our public safety meetings and in our correspondence.

We still see a few male hustlers loitering around Ponce and Boulevard though in significantly smaller numbers than other variants of street prostitutes. The closing of the Phoenix, notoriously a pickup place for male prostitutes, has helped the surrounding area a little bit. Occasionally hustlers are observed loitering near Piedmont Park.

OTHER PROSTITUTION NOTES

It is our understanding that some street prostitutes in our area are also directly involved in drug dealing, especially by arranging for a purchase from a street dealer. They often run in the company of “dope boys.” Contrary to neighborhood perception the bulk of the street prostitutes (especially the transvestite variant) generally do not work under a pimp – those are typically the “dope boys” that they are seen with on the streets.

Occasionally prostitutes from other parts of Atlanta (like Metropolitan Parkway) test the waters in our area. This happens especially when police measures are at high levels in other parts of town. While they are the most dangerous because they normally work under a pimp, they typically do not stay long enough to become

accustomed to a patrolled and watched area. Furthermore, the existing prostitutes in our area tend to be territorial even among themselves.

Another serious problem lies in the fact that some police officers on the streets will tolerate prostitution in order to catch bigger criminals. This is true not only in Atlanta but in other cities too. While it may seem on the surface that catching bigger criminals would be a bigger priority, this approach fails to address why these bigger criminals are near the prostitutes to begin with. In other words, this form of limited tolerance does not adequately deal with why these bigger criminals in one place and not another. Years ago Midtown was considered to be a “bounty hunter’s paradise” given the abundance of street criminals in our area and prostitutes who will readily snitch on them. Fortunately this is far less true than 20 years ago. Often the presence of these more serious criminals has something to do with the prostitutes themselves.

LEGALIZATION AND TOLERANCE ZONES WOULD NOT HELP MIDTOWN!

Regardless of any merits perceived in such a politically unfeasible movement, legalization would still have little to no effect on *street* prostitution. The girls working in bordellos such as those in Las Vegas – an entirely different kind of prostitution - are worlds apart from street prostitutes. The girls on the street are generally not fit for indoor work due to their orientation toward a highly criminal milieu.

Some people conceptualize street prostitutes based on glossy ads in adult magazines and mainstream fantasy movies like *Pretty Woman* – in reality the street workers are typically strung out on drugs. Whereas girls working in the bordellos of Las Vegas, Hamburg, and Amsterdam may or may not have career aspirations in sex work (for whatever this is worth), street prostitution emanates from drug use and criminality. In other words, drugs and criminality, not sexuality and career aspirations precipitate street prostitution.

Tolerance zones with facilities for street prostitution, as found in some European cities (most notably Cologne, Dortmund, and Utrecht), fail to address the basic issue driving street prostitution: crime and drug addiction. The same issues as legalization apply.

THE REALITY OF STREET PROSTITUTION



The picture above shows the degeneration of a street prostitute in New York City due to years of drug use and personal neglect. This series of mug shots shows the same prostitute over a period of 15 years. Prostitutes in our area degenerate in a similar fashion. Even scarier is the fact that johns cruising through our neighborhood are demented enough to actually pay good money to exploit drug-addicted women similar to the one documented about...

THE MPSA ROLE IN ADDRESSING THIS PROBLEM

The MPSA hears about and observes prostitution. Because prostitutes are more visible than other street people, they are a leading category of MPSA Patrol arrests. As with other problems for which the MPSA exists, effectively and efficiently eradicating street prostitutes from our neighborhood requires a well-structured problem-oriented approach. This also means that multiple agencies and groups – law enforcement, code enforcement, public officials, and community groups - need to work together for a safer neighborhood for all.

Before the MPSA launched the patrol, we saw significantly more prostitutes than we do now. We surveyed the patrol area a week before we deployed the patrol, and found just about every corner in the southern half of the service covered with prostitutes. The transvestite prostitute gang would literally put on a boisterous show along Myrtle Street and Piedmont Avenue. They would shamelessly ply their trade every day and night without fail, and with utter impunity. Until we had a patrol we could not address this problem systematically.

In first few months after the MPSA Patrol was launched the officers arrested at least one prostitute nearly every shift. They were usually arrested for violation of pedestrian duties, impeding traffic, flagging down cars, and disorderly conduct, rather than for prostitution itself (which usually requires undercover work to prosecute).

As the MPSA Patrol became established, the prostitutes have been much quieter and more restrained in their conduct. They are now more discreet – they often exchange phone numbers with a john and meet them away from the patrol area. Still, much work remains in getting them to stay out of our neighborhood completely.

The National Neighborhood Safety Legal Network recommends three basic strategies in dealing with street prostitution. These more or less guide our approach to the street prostitution issue:

- Communicate community disapproval of street prostitution
- Limit access to marketing space
- Remove the sense of impunity of prostitutes and patrons

We have indeed driven away much of the prostitution, yet we still have more work to do towards a zero-prostitution community especially with the transvestite variant. The MPSA works closely with various departments of the Atlanta Police. While our court watch program is a hit-or-miss affair, we urge judges to hand down the stiffest sentence possible, and to impose banishment from our area when possible, when we can show for court cases.

Occasionally residents provide us with documentation about a john in his company vehicle picking up a prostitute in the neighborhood. We will very aggressively pursue any john on whom we can find out anything about. We routinely provide employers

with videos, photos, and witness reports, and clients of prostitutes have lost their jobs with thanks to the MPSA.

We have our own catalog of prostitutes and other miscreants to better sort them out and plan strategies. We collect photos, videos, and other documentation and assign control numbers to chronic offenders. We routinely share intelligence with the Atlanta Police so they can more effectively identify and target prostitutes during their periodic stings. Our catalog also encourages our officers to be more attentive to specific individuals, which in turn have resulted in arrests.

Things are very different now, and the MPSA leads the neighborhood in letting street criminals know that they are truly living in the past. Our appreciation for diversity leaves no room for tolerance of criminal activity. Those pursuing criminal activity, including street prostitution, should heed the warning that we are out to get them...

The presence of the MPSA Patrol and the proactivity of neighborhood residents and businesses help not only to increase the risks of plying this trade here but also to increase the effort in afflicting our beautiful neighborhood with their illegal conduct.

PREPARATION FOR THIS REPORT

This report was prepared by Steve Gower to guide the Midtown Ponce Security Alliance in serving the residents and business community in eradicating street prostitution. Many insights and observations were taken into consideration including:

Eugène Bott (2003) "**Sex ist eine Arbeit wie jede andere [Sex is a job like any other].**" Die Zeit 42/2003 <http://www.zeit.de/2003/42/SM-Prostitution> Note: this is a review in a major German newspaper of a book advocating the legalization of prostitution forms that are voluntary and in a manner that does not harm the community.

Michael Scott, Kelly Dedel (2006) "**Street Prostitution, 2nd Edition.**" U.S. Department of Justice - Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. www.popcenter.org

Unknown Author (unknown date) "Action Guide: Street Prostitution." National Neighborhood Safety Legal Network. <http://www.communityinterest.org/neighborhoodsafety/neighborhoodsafety.htm>

Articles and reader letters in publications like Southern Voice

Years of public safety meetings

MPSA Patrol logs and field observations

Field visits to prostitution tolerance areas in Germany, and conversations with authorities and residents in those jurisdictions

Conversations with numerous Midtown residents and business owners, police officers patrolling Midtown, community leaders, and public officials.