

Downtown much safer than rest of city

by AJ Robinson

Cynthia Tucker's Sept. 19 column "Downtown renaissance threatened if crime increases," is right on target that any crime increases could impact downtown's and the city's rapid growth.

However, it seems that some facts in the crime discussion always get glossed over or worse, just disregarded.

We'd like to set the record straight as to crime, or really the lack of it, here in our downtown neighborhood.

For four years now, Central Atlanta Progress, in partnership with the Atlanta Police Department, has been reporting our crime statistics every six months to anyone who will listen. We do this purely to counteract false perceptions of crime in downtown, many of which are driven by the media.

If our numbers are good or bad, we report them just the same. Of course, how we react to them is different. For a number of years now, we've smiled a lot.

Those perceptions are fed by the fact that when Atlanta crime is discussed, much as in Tucker's column, it seems to be the easy way out to reference downtown and the city of Atlanta in the same breath.

Tucker is right in one instance. Crime in Atlanta is on the rise and that is not good. However, what didn't get said within her reference to downtown is that crime here continues to head in the exact opposite direction from the rest of the city.

Quite frankly, when it comes to crime, there is no comparison. Here are the facts drawn from APD's most recent six-month statistics.

In our most recent report (January-July 2007), we witnessed one of the steepest drops in crime in all the years we've been reporting.

Within the first six months of 2007, crime in downtown was down by 648 offenses, compared to the same period in 2006.

It's also important to note that even though downtown has the city's largest daily population base of 200,000 plus, it accounts for only 6 percent of the city's overall crime.

And, of that crime, almost 90 percent is nonviolent, with the largest category (70 percent of all downtown crime) being larceny and larceny from autos.

Interestingly, in the past six months, this is the category that showed the largest drop.

So what makes downtown's crime statistics different from the city's?



Downtown's ambassador force helps tourists and natives who have questions.

First, downtown has a larger concentration of certified law enforcement officers across multiple jurisdictions than any other area of the city. Supporting our public enforcement, downtown also has some 3,000 private security personnel within and around private property, also with an eye out for crime.

Second, representatives from all these jurisdictions meet monthly at CAP to discuss and share information on crime trends. They work closely with our ambassador force and others in our community to coordinate their efforts.

The focus of eight public enforcement jurisdictions in step with private security makes a difference that the statistics clearly validate.

Added to those efforts, new surveillance cameras, funded through our improvement district, are positioned throughout downtown and monitored by APD personnel in the newly opened Zone Five miniprecinct provided by The AmericasMart.

These collective efforts have been ongoing and it's clear they are impacting crime in downtown.

To our knowledge, we are the only community in the city that publicly and regularly reports our crime statistics, and we will continue to do so.

So the next time you are leaving downtown and the city, be careful out there!

A.J. Robinson is president of Central Atlanta Progress Inc. and The Atlanta Downtown Improvement District.