

**City of Janesville
Public Safety Focus Group Research**

Final Report

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Section I: Executive Summary

This report presents the results of two focus groups held with residents of the City of Janesville. The main objectives of the research include (1) discovering why residential safety ratings (as indicated by the Year 2000 Resident Satisfaction Survey) dropped significantly from 1997 to 2000 by uncovering reasons residents may not feel safe in Janesville, and (2) developing strategies to increase perceptions of safety within the City. Opinion Dynamics Corporation (ODC) randomly recruited residents from across the City to ensure a mix of ages and gender. The first focus group (consisting of 10 residents) was held the evening of March 21st while the second group (consisting of 12 residents) was held the evening of March 26th. Participants were assured that the information they shared and the opinions they expressed would be held strictly confidential. The focus group discussion was designed to engage residents in a discussion of the issue of safety and crime within the City of Janesville.

It is important to note that focus groups are a qualitative research method designed to identify and explore the range of attitudes, opinions, and preferences on a particular topic or research issue. Focus groups cannot confirm hypotheses or allow for estimates regarding the percentage of people living within the City of Janesville who hold similar opinions or attitudes. The information presented in this report should be evaluated within the context of the qualitative nature of the research. Key findings are outlined below.

Living in the City of Janesville

Focus group respondents genuinely like living in Janesville. The vast majority find the City to be a nice place to live and an especially good city for raising children. Participants also appreciate the City's beautiful parks, overall cleanliness, bike trails, recreation opportunities, and the beautiful surrounding countryside. Participants were quick to point out that Janesville has very nice, caring people. Focus group participants also talked about the City's strong economy and, without prompting, the relatively low crime rate compared to other (in some cases larger) cities.

Participants talked about the City having many of the amenities of a big city without “feeling like a big city.” Access to quality healthcare, schools, and shopping were mentioned as things respondents “like” about Janesville. Most participants agreed that the size of the City and their ability to get from one side of town to another in a relatively short period of time is something they particularly appreciate. Despite the overall feeling that Janesville is a great place to live, respondents were able to list several things they “dislike” about the City. Those who have lived in other (usually larger cities) mentioned limited shopping opportunities and lack of diversity in restaurants as things they “dislike.” Both focus groups also seemed to agree that vacant and poorly maintained properties (downtown and on the City’s south side) were things they “dislike” and would like to see improved.

Overall “Safety” and Crime Information

Without prompting, focus group participants—both men and women—said they generally feel very safe within the City at large. Both groups indicated that Janesville has very good, responsive, and supportive police and fire departments. Despite this feeling, both focus groups acknowledged that their feeling of being safe has been on a general decline. Most view this as an issue that permeates society—it is not just a Janesville problem. Participants agree that Janesville is suffering from the same influences and societal ills as other areas of the country.

Bomb threats at schools and vandalism in neighborhoods were particular concerns of focus group participants. A feeling of being somewhat uninformed (or perhaps informed too long after the fact) appears to contribute to some uneasiness with respect to safety. Most focus group participants hear or read about Janesville related crime and safety issues in the Janesville Gazette or the Park Place News quarterly newsletter. While most focus group members say they pay attention to the information they hear and read about, most said it was important not to “scare” people with the information.

Suggestions for Improving “Safety” within the City

Many attribute their perception of increased crime and concern for personal safety to be a result of a breakdown in parenting, moral values (including a lack of religious faith), and respect for individuals and property. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, nearly all focus group participants view this “core” problem as something beyond City government’s control. Finally, participants perceive the crime which takes place within the City to be committed primarily by juveniles (those between the ages of, say, 14 and 23).

Participants suggested the following improvement ideas: (1) clamp down on Juvenile offenders, (2) patrol neighborhoods more frequently, (3) provide targeted/neighborhood level information, (4) improve outreach programs to problem juveniles and neighborhoods, (5) promote the acceptance of ethnic diversity, and (6) sponsor events which foster a sense of community.

Crime Statistics and Information Dissemination

Focus group participants had mixed reactions to the 1997 through 2000 crime statistics they were asked to review. Roughly half of focus group participants were somewhat surprised that many of the statistics had declined between 1997 and 2000. However, roughly as many participants were less impressed that the number of “incidents” had gone down. Instead, these participants focused on the sheer number of incidents that occur in a given year. Generally, all focus group participants seemed to be somewhat desensitized to the statistics. That is, they hear and read about crime everyday and the information provided was, in some ways, not anything new to them.

It appears that group members’ notion of what is going on within the City relative to safety and crime is, at least in part, driven by what they read and see on television—information that, in many cases, may not be directly linked to Janesville. Focus group participants are clearly interested in receiving information about crime and safety. They are also interested in receiving the information through a number of mediums including radio, television, newspaper, and Park Place News. Many agree that it is important to know about events which are happening in their own neighborhoods—and that this

information needs to be timely. Suggested communications include (1) the provision of annual per capita crime statistics (either through the newspaper or Park Place News) in comparison to other cities, (2) the provision of neighborhood flyers when a “rash” of property damage or burglaries are occurring in an area, and (3) more direct interaction with police.

Recommendations Summary

A few recommendations flow from the collective comments made by focus group participants. Participants seemed to be most interested in the City (1) addressing vacant and poorly maintained properties in the downtown and south side, (2) putting additional emphasis on aesthetics and beautification, and (3) promoting the acceptance and benefits of ethnic diversity. More specific recommendations made by focus group participants include (1) addressing safety and crime issues at a neighborhood level, and (2) using all mediums to communicate crime-related information. Finally, it appears to be important that the City address the perception that most crimes are petty crimes committed by juveniles. If incorrect, it would appear to be beneficial to provide clearer information about who is committing what type of crimes in the City.

Section II: Introduction

This report presents the results of two focus groups held with residents of the City of Janesville. The main objectives of the research include (1) discovering why residential safety ratings (as indicated by the Year 2000 Resident Satisfaction Survey) dropped significantly from 1997 to 2000 by uncovering reasons residents may not feel safe in Janesville, and (2) developing strategies to increase perceptions of safety within the City. In order to address these objectives, Opinion Dynamics Corporation (ODC) staff collaborated with City staff to conduct two focus groups with residents of Janesville.

Section III: Background

In May of 2000, the City of Janesville undertook a study to assess resident satisfaction. The main objectives of that study were to (1) measure resident satisfaction levels with government-provided services and programs; (2) identify strengths and weaknesses in the services and programs offered; (3) determine residents' view of the quality of life and safety provided by the City; and (4) measure respondents' use of specific services offered by the City. In order to address these research issues, this previous study included 583 telephone surveys, which averaged 14 minutes in length. Among other findings, the 2000 Resident Satisfaction Study found that while residents generally feel safe in their own neighborhoods, they feel less safe in the City at large. In particular, three out of four respondents rated the safety of their own neighborhood as very safe or safe while only two out of five rated the safety outside their neighborhood as very safe or safe. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the 2000 study found that ratings for safety outside one's neighborhood dropped significantly from 1997 to 2000. These findings provided the impetus for this year's 2001 study. In short, the 2001 focus group study was designed to provide further insight into resident perceptions of declining levels of safety within the City at large.

Section IV: Methodology

ODC's Madison, Wisconsin staff, with the assistance of our Survey Operations Center, coordinated the resident focus group recruitment process with the objective of completing two groups. We randomly recruited a total of 29 people with the objective of having 10 to 12 attendees per group. A copy of the focus group recruitment script can be found in Appendix A. The first group included 10 City residents while the second group included 12 City residents. The groups were recruited to fit the following criteria.

- Random selection process
- Residents 18 years old or older
- Mix of males and females
- Mix of ages
- Mix of resident locations within the City

Both of the focus groups were held on weeknights from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Hedberg Library at 316 South Main Street. The first group was held March 21st and the second was held March 26th. Participants were assured that the information they shared and opinions they expressed during the group would be held strictly confidential. They were also told that ODC would report on the overall findings to the City of Janesville—individual focus group member opinions would not be shared. Both groups were audio and videotaped and group members were paid \$25 for their attendance. A copy of the confirmation letter sent to all focus group attendees can be found in Appendix B.

Approach

The focus group discussion guide was designed to engage residents in a discussion of the issue of safety and crime within the City of Janesville. Each group began with participant introductions which included a discussion of how long they have lived in Janesville, where they live, their family situation, their occupation (if working), and other information about themselves. The first segment of each group addressed the overall quality of life in Janesville. This included a discussion of things that focus group participants particularly “like” and “dislike” about living in the City as well as

opportunities for improvement. Next, we asked participants whether or not they feel “safe” living within Janesville. During this segment of the group particular attention was given to things that make respondents feel either “safe” or “unsafe.” This segment concluded with a discussion of the type of information residents currently receive relative to safety and crime. It also included a discussion of where they see or hear about this type of information and how much attention they pay to it.

The second half of each group began with a very open-ended “brainstorming” session focusing on what the City of Janesville could do to improve safety. Focus group participants were asked to be as specific as possible when providing ideas of what the City could or should do. The final segment of both focus groups focused on Janesville’s crime statistics for 1997 through 2000 (see Appendix C). Respondents were provided with the statistics, asked to take a few minutes to review them, and then asked for their reaction. They were also asked if any of the statistics presented changed any of the feelings or perceptions they had expressed earlier in the group. Finally, the focus groups ended with a discussion of the importance of the City communicating safety and crime related information to residents and the best ways to communicate this type of information. Appendix D contains the focus group moderator’s guide.

Focus groups are a qualitative research method designed to identify and explore the range of attitudes, opinions, and preferences on a particular topic or research issue. Focus groups cannot confirm hypotheses or allow for estimates regarding the percentage of people within the City of Janesville who hold similar opinions and attitudes. The information presented in this report should be evaluated within the context of the qualitative nature of the research.

Section V: Findings

Within this section, we present the key focus group findings. The findings are outlined in the general order in which the various topic areas were discussed during each of the two focus groups. We begin with a discussion of participants' assessment of the "quality of life" in Janesville, including specific likes and dislikes and areas for improvement. Next, we discuss participants' opinions of the overall level of "safety" within the City. This includes a discussion of specific things that make respondents feel either "safe" or "unsafe" in the City at large. The third segment of each focus group addressed respondents' ideas about what the City of Janesville could do to increase their feeling of "safety" within the City. In this segment, respondents were asked for specific ideas they had which the City could feasibly implement. Both of the focus groups concluded with a discussion of Janesville's crime statistics from 1997 through 2000. Particular attention was given to understanding respondents' reactions to the statistics and how such information should be communicated to City residents.

Living in the City of Janesville

Both focus groups began with a discussion of the "overall quality of life" within the City of Janesville. This included a discussion of the things which residents particularly "like" and "dislike" about living in Janesville. Key findings are outlined below.

Overall Quality of Life. Each of the focus groups began with a free-flowing discussion of participants' assessment of the overall "quality of life" in Janesville. The conversation later expanded to include their specific "likes" and "dislikes." We found that focus group respondents genuinely like living in Janesville. The vast majority find the City to be a nice place to live and an especially good city for raising children. Participants also appreciate the City's beautiful parks, overall cleanliness, bike trails, recreation opportunities, and the beautiful surrounding countryside. Participants were

quick to point out that Janesville has very nice, caring people. Those who grew up in Janesville also pointed out that Janesville is the type of city that “people tend to move back to.” In other words, people who move away (for various reasons) ultimately move back—recognizing the City’s strengths in relation to other communities. Focus group participants also talked about the City’s strong economy and, without prompting, the relatively low crime rate compared to other (in some cases larger) cities. The quotes which follow are indicative of the comments heard from focus group participants relative to the overall quality of life in Janesville.

“I think the quality of life in Janesville is good overall. It’s an excellent place to live. It’s an excellent place to bring up your children. It’s clean, caring. The administration seems like they’re with us on things.”

“It’s a great place to raise families. And you don’t have to worry about crime too much even though everyone always talks about it out here.”

“It’s a very nice city especially to raise children. I mean, I grew up in the city and the school systems are really good. I think it’s a good town.”

“I think the economy is real good.... I’ve had my business for 3 ½ years and I’ve never had a problem finding work. Everyone here is always willing to improve their house and make things better. For me it’s been real good.”

Likes. Participants listed a number of specific things they “like” about living in the City. First and foremost, participants talked about the City having many of the amenities of a big city without “feeling like a big city.” Many do, however, like the fact that bigger cities such as Madison, Milwaukee, and Chicago are relatively close. Access to quality healthcare, schools, and shopping were also mentioned as things respondents “like” about Janesville. Participants generally agreed that the school system provides quality instruction and many activities for children to pursue their varied interests. The City’s library system, parks, overall cleanliness, bike trails, and relatively low property tax burden were also mentioned as strengths. Interestingly, long-time residents were more likely to have a favorable opinion of the shopping opportunities and diversity of restaurants. Those who have lived in other (usually larger cities) were quicker to mention limited shopping opportunities and lack of diversity in restaurants as something they “dislike” about the City. Finally, most participants agreed that the size of the City and

their ability to get from one side of town to another in a relatively short period of time is something they particularly appreciate.

“We really enjoy the parks and the bike trails. And for the price you pay in property tax, I think you get your money’s worth.... For the size of the city, the Janesville park system is very good. There are a lot of opportunities.”

“It’s clean.... It’s really clean compared to a lot of big cities. And we’re getting to be a fairly big city.”

“I like the bus and I get around a lot using specialized transit on my own.”

“The library system is pretty amazing for a city of this size.”

“I think it truly is beautiful here. The fact that we can get across town in 15 minutes is something that I love. And, you know, you’re not sitting behind 20 cars in traffic at one light. I think that those things add to our quality of life. They add to our level of or lack of tension in life. There’s certainly enough to give us that in other things. Janesville’s a good place.”

Dislikes. The things which respondents said they “dislike” about living in Janesville should be taken in the context of the overwhelming level of agreement that the overall quality of life in Janesville is very good. Despite this overriding feeling, respondents did list several things they “dislike” about the City. Both groups seemed to agree that although Janesville is improving in this area, the City would benefit by further diversity in shopping and restaurants. This was a particularly prevalent theme among younger City residents who have moved to Janesville from larger cities. Both groups also seemed to agree that vacant and poorly maintained properties (downtown and on the City’s south side) was something they “disliked” and would like to see improved.

“The poorly upkept buildings especially downtown driving along. They’re unpainted, bricks falling off, gutters hanging loose. Business property that should be upkept and if they’re vacant, they should be demolished at someone’s expense whether it be taxpayers or not, it looks horrible.... It hurts the resale of selling our property.”

“The East Side [traffic] is terrible especially around Christmas time.”

Within one focus group, long-time residents and more recent arrivals seemed to disagree on two issues: Janesville's connection to Beloit and the City's openness to diversity and innovative thinking. Long-time residents seem to feel that Janesville gets unfairly "linked" to Beloit, which tarnishes the City's overall image. More recent arrivals perceive Beloit to be forthcoming in acknowledging their problems and innovative in their approach to addressing them (in particular in regards to downtown renewal). More recent arrivals (who were primarily younger) perceive long-time Janesville residents to be somewhat "close-minded" and less accepting of ethnic diversity. They also think City leaders could be more innovative and forward thinking with respect to downtown renewal, and be more resourceful in creating a city that is "more pleasing to the eye." These more recent arrivals (with the agreement of many long-time residents) said the City should (1) focus on the river as a key City strength and focal point, (2) consider creating a boulevard on Milton Avenue to make it more visually appealing, and (3) force south side residents to clean up their properties.

"I think it's good as well. I grew up in Atlanta and lived in Dallas before I moved here. It was a really nice change of pace for us. And I think it's beautiful here, too. I think the down side for me is having to leave Janesville for a lot of the cultural things, and the diversity in food, and things like that. Shopping, whatever. Traveling to Madison or Rockford for some of the things that aren't available here in Janesville, although that's changing."

"...I don't think we take our resources and use them. I think the river should be a focal point for the city. And right downtown, they paved over it with a parking lot. You know, there's a lot of beautiful parks. Milton Avenue... if they put a boulevard down the middle of that and planted some trees or did some landscaping somewhere... I think it would just be a beautiful place and give the city an identity. I don't think it's bad. But I don't think they use what they've got to make it so much better."

"One of my issues with Janesville... was about the diversity of the city and how people supported diverse groups that were living in the city because one of the things that I found growing up here, graduating from Milton, and I lived here for 20 years before I went to school was our really bad reputation about being prejudiced towards people of other colors, towards Hispanic people. And I think that we've made some ends towards that. Certainly getting the Hispanic outreach program like we have through the YWCA is great."

“I think that we lack sensitivity with landscaping and creating a city that is pleasing to the eye, homes that are pleasing to the eye. I mean some of them are getting better, but you know it really is ranch haven. In a way, which not that there’s anything wrong with it, but I do think that we could embrace our historical areas more. I think that the red tape... is something that ties people’s hands.... We seem to be unable to rise above that and invest in our city.”

Overall “Safety” and Crime Information

The second segment of both focus groups focused on participants’ perceptions of “safety” within the City. In particular, the discussion focused on whether or not participants feel “safe” in the City at large and if there are particular things that make them feel “safe” or “unsafe.” The segment concluded with a discussion of the type of safety and crime related information residents currently receive and how much attention they pay to it. Key findings are outlined below.

Feeling “Safe” Within the City. Without prompting, focus group participants—both men and women—said they generally feel very safe in the City at large. Both groups indicated that Janesville has very good, responsive, and supportive police and fire departments. Many participants also mentioned that Janesville is made up of good people and that they have good neighbors who they can “count on.” This feeling of community and neighborliness appears to contribute to many individuals’ feeling “safe” within the City. Despite this feeling, both focus groups were quick to indicate that their feeling of safety has been on a general decline. Most view this as an issue that permeates “society”—it is not just a Janesville problem. Participants agree that, with respect to safety and crime, Janesville is suffering from the same influences and societal ills as other areas of the country. They also agree that they are influenced by a flood of information in the national and local media which focuses on crime and threats to personal safety.

“They [police] do respond pretty good in this town. The fire department, too.”

“I worked in Atlanta and Dallas, and I felt that it was just a matter of time before I was going to become a statistic in my former work because I was out in the public all the time. And there was so much crime and so much of it was against women that it just felt like it was ticking. I feel none of that here. I travel home, my home now is Janesville, and I just don’t live with the fear. We’ve had some vandalism at our house, but at the same time, it’s not the level of fear of violent attacks that you have in your larger cities.”

“The more I read about Janesville, the nicer it was. I mean, not just the overall beauty of the place, but the safety thing. The crime rate was like almost nothing from what the paper said anyway. And I felt safe to move down here.”

“I feel very safe here. I’m a single woman. I live on my own. ...I feel very safe here.”

“I think that Janesville and in this area people are typically a little bit more open and friendlier to each other. And I think that’s what fosters neighbors knowing each other. I think we’re at a point where we could lose that because we’re getting bigger and I think that there are some neighborhoods where you don’t necessarily know the people that are next door to you.”

Feeling “Unsafe” Within the City. Focus group participants were asked to identify things that make them feel particularly “unsafe” within the City. Members of both groups mentioned a rash of bomb threats within the public schools as a particular area of concern. A few expressed a concern that the school district is not forthcoming enough with information when such events occur. Some participants had knowledge (or direct experience) with break-ins and vandalism within their neighborhoods. They also mentioned that they often times were not aware of events in their own neighborhoods until well after the events had been underway. This feeling of being “uninformed” appears to contribute to some uneasiness with respect to safety among some group members. Participants also said that their (and their neighbors) busy schedules and the prevalence of two-income families contributes to some uneasiness with respect to safety. This, they said, translates into fewer people being around to “keep an eye” on things within the neighborhood while people are working or vacationing. Participants in one group said that a lack of adequate street lighting (especially in some residential neighborhoods) contributes to them feeling somewhat “unsafe” at night.

“You walk out of the that area [the middle of the block] and you are in total darkness. People have their shrubs all the way down to the sidewalks. They have fences.”

“Since I have a teenage daughter, I also hear things from her about the drugs in school, guns in school. So it’s like if it’s not right there in front of us, we can ignore it, but it’s getting to the point where we can’t really ignore it anymore.... It’s not something you hear all the time ‘cause Janesville’s this really nice town, but it’s really there.”

“...The communication from that high school to the parents and to the children letting them know what’s going on [relative to bomb threats] and what’s happening with that. I think there’s been a real lack of communication. ...Sometimes they’re sending them [children] home with lame excuses... and finding out later... that it really was a bomb threat.”

“Even though everybody feels safe in Janesville, everybody takes precautions in Janesville that we never used to take.”

“And the vandalism does bother me a little bit. It doesn’t make me feel a whole lot less safe although when it happens, you do feel violated. And you think twice. We certainly never leave our doors unlocked now. And probably part of that is that national media attention to crime and so our level of awareness even though it may not be in our back yard is that it is closer than it used to feel.”

“When I was 12 the city was a lot smaller. And you could ride your bike all over. I wouldn’t let my kids ride their bikes where I rode when I was a kid. There’s no way.”

Safety and Crime Information. Most focus group members hear or read about Janesville related crime and safety issues in the Janesville Gazette or the Park Place News quarterly newsletter. Other media mentioned include Madison-based television stations (particularly those with a Rock County reporting bureau) and local radio. Some members recalled recent articles in the Gazette while others thought that crime statistics were at least highlighted annually in Park Place News. While most focus group members say they pay attention to the information they hear and read about, most said it was important not to “scare” people with the information. A few members of both groups expressed some concern about whether or not crime information was being consistently collected and reported. Some appear to think the police department might not be recording all

“incidents” while others thought that, given the limited number of media outlets, relevant information may not be communicated to them.

“There’s enough media out there of different kinds that they should touch everybody. Radio, TV, newspaper, mail. Somewhere along the way, everybody should get all the important things that are going around.”

“We see all these violence shows and all the child molesters now. I mean, you’re aware of it. They’re out there. I’m not going to take a chance.”

“That might be a big reason why people feel safe because there is no source to find out if it even is unsafe. I mean, Janesville might not be as safe as everyone thinks it is but everyone thinks it’s safe because we don’t know.”

“If there is something going on, if there was a way to communicate things that we can do, you know, to be a little safer or ways that we can connect in our neighborhoods a little bit more.”

Suggestions for Improving “Safety” Within the City

About 30 minutes of each focus group was dedicated to “brainstorming” about what the City could do to improve safety. While both focus groups were able to develop some specific ideas on the subject, two overarching themes developed from both groups. First and most importantly, most participants agree that the safety and crime related issues facing Janesville are part of a larger societal problem. In particular, many view increased crime and concern for personal safety to be a result of a breakdown in parenting, moral values (including a lack of religious faith), and respect for individuals and property. Additionally, nearly all focus group participants view this “core” problem as something beyond City government’s control. Second, and highly related to the first overarching theme, both groups perceive the crime which takes place within the City to be committed primarily by Juveniles (those between the ages of, say, 14 and 23). Many also believe a good deal of the criminal activity to consist of petty crimes committed by these young adults.

“It’s [crime, drugs, etc.] a result of the whole society. Everybody was that way [respectful].... Twenty-five years ago, the kids that I went to school with that

didn't go to church knew how to behave better than the kids today that do go to church.”

“If parents take care of their kids and listen to them and talk to them and direct them, how many parents now a days... it's a 'me-thing.' I want my time. I need to do this for me. Well, you chose to have children and your job in having these children is to raise them to be decent human beings. And if they put the time into it, these children will be raised right. But they're pushing this off onto the school system and the church and to every place so they don't have the responsibility any more.”

“A lot of those things are reflective of society. If you go back to when such things as when we took prayer out of the schools which says there's a god and there's somebody to respect.... If there's nobody up there you have to give an account to then you're not accountable to anybody. That eventually filters down to the grassroots level.... When you throw God out and all those things, the respect for authority soon quickly goes because there's no superstructure and you turn to 'me-ism.' And as far as safety goes, that eventually filters down to 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' And there's no basis to hang your hat on and crime's going to rise.”

“If you look at the breakdown of the crime in this city, it's petty crime. It's theft. It's vandalism. Then you look at the domestic violence, which is a big part of it. And other than that, it's juvenile crime. And it is. And the reason why is because, like you guys said, there's nothing for kids to do.”

Despite the overarching feeling that there is little the City can do to change the problems plaguing society in general (in particular a reported breakdown in parenting, moral values, and accountability) some improvement ideas were mentioned.

- **Clamp down on Juveniles**. Many believe that the police and schools (i.e., teachers) often know who the problem kids are. While all agree it is not the City's or the school's job to be “parents” some feel that more proactive intervention with “at risk” kids and “habitual offenders” may help.
- **Patrol neighborhoods**. Some focus group participants think the police department could do a more comprehensive job of patrolling neighborhoods. That is, they would like to “see” the police in their neighborhood from time-to-time.
- **Provide targeted/neighborhood level information**. One focus group thought the City could be more proactive when a “rash” of crimes (such as burglary or damage to property) is occurring in a particular neighborhood. Many supported the idea of police putting a flyer in the mailbox or doors of a neighborhood to let them know about such events.

- **Outreach to problem neighborhoods.** Some thought the City, with the assistance of other organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club, should do more outreach in problem neighborhoods. Group members said that people with problems typically don't seek out the City services they need. Therefore, the City must do more to reach out and "pull" problem individuals into programs that might help them.
- **Promote the acceptance of ethnic diversity.** Some group members felt the community could benefit by efforts to promote events and programs that attempt to expose people to diversity. This, it was hypothesized, would bring people of varying backgrounds together and create a sense of community. It was further hypothesized that exposing people to other ethnic groups would reduce stereotypes which might be leading to unfounded concerns about safety.
- **Sponsor Community Events.** Some group members speculated that City sponsorship of more community-wide events would bring people together. This, they hypothesized, would lead to a greater sense of community and, over the long-run, lead to lower crime rates.

"Even a neighborhood flyer. Would that be too much? ...Maybe a notification that this is going on. ...Maybe we could have a neighborhood phone tree."

"The police started a bike patrol program probably two years ago.... Now they only do it during the day. They should be out using these bikes at night and sneaking up on the kids instead of driving around in their cars. Everyone knows where the kids hang out. The kids are the problem. It's not the adults in the city. It's mainly that... 14 to 23 age.... They're the problem. They need to go around to these areas and patrol them.... Now if they were sneaking up on them instead of driving around in their cars where every one can see them coming, that would be different."

"[Put] lights in the residential sections."

"There have got to be more consequences for these children. When they get caught doing something, they've got to be punished for it and the only way they are going to learn and maybe help the other kids learn too that if they do something, they've got to be responsible for it. They've got to be punished for it."

"More neighborhood watches.... Get to know your neighbors. Take care of each other. Because you can't really count on the police department, only to a certain point."

"If there was a flyer that was put in everybody's mail box and then we had a neighborhood meeting about it. If we knew something was going on would that help flush out? Because a lot of times it's probably kids in our neighborhood."

“One of the problems, I think, with any community programs that we have even and activities that we set up and it’s no different with the church.... One of the problems is a lot of times all those things they sit back and wait for people to come to them. You set up a program or you set up a night or an activity... and then you sit and you wait for people to come. That generally doesn’t work and the people that really need the help, you know, they’re not going to come. They’re not going to come to that stuff. And that’s why you’ve got to find some way to actually reach out, actually get out, actually go door to door, neighborhood to neighborhood, and actually, you know, get involved and meet people face to face and come meet them on their terms on their ground not just sitting back and waiting.”

“If the City could somehow recognize positive things various communities are doing, wouldn’t that help somewhat? Like if one neighborhood does something, the City could point that out and say, ‘oh, look these people are doing this ‘ or ‘this is happening on the west side of town’ or ‘wonderful things are happening over here.’ ...They need positive reinforcement.”

Crime Statistics and Information Dissemination

The final segment of both discussion groups focused on City crime statistics from 1997 through 2000. After being given some time to review recent crime statistics, focus group participants were asked for their general reaction. Participants were also asked if, after seeing the statistics, any of the views expressed during earlier segments of the group had changed. Finally, the discussion concluded by asking respondents to talk about the importance of crime and safety related information. In particular, they were asked whether or not the City should provide such information and, if so, how. Key findings are outlined below.

Reaction to Recent Crime Statistics. Focus group participants had mixed reactions to the 1997 through 2000 crime statistics they were asked to review. Roughly half of focus group participants were somewhat surprised that many of the statistics had declined between 1997 and 2000. However, roughly as many participants were surprised at the sheer number of incidents that occur in a given year. They were somewhat less impressed that the number of incidents has gone down over time. Generally, all focus group participants seemed to be somewhat desensitized to the statistics. That is, they hear

and read about crime everyday and the information we provided was, in some ways, not anything new to them. Despite this reaction, a number of participants voiced particular concern about the number of sex related crimes. Some members of both groups expressed some concern about whether or not the statistics are accurate. These participants said that the police might not be reporting all incidents in order to make the City seem safer. In short, the presentation of the 1997 through 2000 Janesville crime statistics really did not change how focus group members felt about their safety in the City at large. In fact, it appears that group members' notion of what is going on within the City relative to safety and crime is, at least in part, driven by what they read and see on television—information that, in many cases, may not be directly linked to Janesville.

“I don’t have a lot of trust in the police department as far as reporting the facts and I think they might shove some things underneath the carpet to make themselves look good.”

“I see that these rapes are disgustingly high for a city of our size. ...I’m surprised in a negative way at the rapes and ...not surprised at the disorderly conducts.”

“I’m not surprised by any of these numbers. I don’t think it’s necessarily all that bad for a city of 70,000 people to have these sorts of numbers.”

“I personally feel very safe and think it is safe. I live alone and I see people out walking at night. Boy, in Amarillo, Texas, you didn’t do that. So to me, I feel safe here so that these figures don’t bother me one way or the other.”

Communication of Crime and Safety Information. Focus group participants are clearly interested in receiving information about crime and safety. They are also interested in receiving the information through a number of mediums including radio, television, newspaper, and Park Place News. As previously discussed, while people want to know, they do not want the information presented in a way that “scares” them. Many agreed that it was important to know about events which may be happening in their own neighborhoods—and that this information needed to be timely. Noteworthy suggestions for communicating crime and safety related information are outlined below.

- **Annual Per Capita Statistics.** Both focus groups seem to agree that providing annual crime statistics is important. One group suggested that this information be provided as crimes per capita and compared to statistics for other cities. A number of group participants said that the number of “incidents” does not mean much to them unless it is provided within the context of other communities. Most felt Park Place News and the Gazette were appropriate mediums through which to provide this information.
- **Neighborhood Notices/Flyers.** As previously mentioned, one focus group thought it was a particularly good idea to provide timely information on “break-ins” and damage to property when it is occurring in their neighborhood. Most thought the City could be more proactive in this regard, and this pro-activity would lead to them feeling safer. Some felt this step was important because the neighborhood grapevine (given people’s busy schedules) is not very reliable anymore.
- **Direct Interaction with Police.** Members of one focus group seemed to feel that the police should take more time to talk with people, particularly teenagers. This, they hypothesized, would help create a more positive environment, ultimately leading to fewer problems and less crime.

“I think it depends on your age, though. People that are younger are going to go for a different type of information input. For me, I read everything or just about. I glance over it to see if it’s interesting. Somebody that’s younger probably wouldn’t be interested in reading Park Place.”

“I think we need more police officers and that going to schools and talking to the kids and telling them what’s going on.”

“I like Park Place also. I think especially if they put it [crime statistics] right on the front cover, the front page so it would be right there for them to see something important that’s happening.”

“If you compare the numbers from a big city like Milwaukee to the numbers here in Janesville, it’s like, well gee we don’t even have a problem. I think it depends where you’re coming from. If you’re comparing Janesville to a big city, hey we’re doing just fine. But if you’ve only experienced Janesville, then you don’t really don’t know what the big city is all about you’re saying well these numbers sure are higher than they should be. I think you have to put it in perspective.”

“People don’t trust numbers any more. If you want to make people feel safe, just come out and say, ‘Hey, Janesville is a safe place to live,’ and why you came to that assumption. ‘Well we interviewed people and they feel safe here.’ People would feel good about that. They would say, ‘Well, you know what, the people who live here feel safe, so I feel safe, too.’”

“I think it would be a really good PR move for them because those numbers [crime statistics] when compared to other cities really do work. They are in our favor. ...I do think that Public Relations has a lot to do with it and sharing information.”

“The City could really expand on it and say, ‘This is what it’s saying. We’re really proud of our city.’ And really frame it in that context.”

Section VI: Recommendations

This section of the report outlines recommendations that flow from the collective comments made by focus group participants. Some of the recommendations are fairly abstract and lack some specificity. These recommendations are, for the most part, related to the overall quality of life within the City. Other recommendations, as articulated by focus group participants, are slightly more specific. Both types of recommendations are briefly outlined below.

Overall Quality of Life

- **Address vacant and poorly maintained properties.** Focus group participants expressed particular concern with downtown business properties and both business and residential properties on the City’s south side. Some expressed an opinion that the City could be more forward thinking with respect to renewal.
- **Focus on aesthetics and beautification.** Many participants agreed that the City could do more to make the City more “pleasing to the eye.” Specific suggestions were made about beautifying Milton Avenue and the downtown business district.
- **Introduce residents to diversity.** Some focus group members think the City could more proactively promote ethnic diversity. Community events and outreach programs were mentioned as possible action areas.

Specific Recommendations

- **Address safety and crime issues at a neighborhood level.** Participants agreed that it would be useful for the City (particularly the police department) to engage neighborhoods when/if a rash of crimes are occurring in the area. Some mentioned that even providing flyers in their mailboxes telling them what was going on might be helpful.
- **Address the perception that most crimes are petty crimes committed by Juveniles.** This appears to be the perception among many residents. If incorrect, it would be beneficial to provide clearer information about who is committing what types of crimes.
- **Use all mediums to communicate crime-related information.** While people don’t want to be “scared,” they do express a need to be informed. Most agree that television, newspaper, radio, Park Place, and direct mail are all appropriate and necessary means of disseminating crime and safety related information.

Appendix A

Focus Group Recruiting Script

**City of Janesville
Resident Focus Groups
Recruitment Script
March 21, 2001**

Hello, my name is _____ and I'm calling on behalf of the City of Janesville from Opinion Dynamics Corporation. The City of Janesville is interested in asking a small group of city residents to participate in a focus group about a few important city issues. The City will use information from the focus groups to improve services that they provide to city residents. Participants will receive \$25 for their participation. I have just a few questions to ask you to determine if you qualify for the study.

1. First of all, do you or anyone in your household work for the City of Janesville or for a market research firm?

1 Yes THANK and TERMINATE
2 No

2. Do you currently reside within the City of Janesville?

1 Yes (Confirm respondent lives within the city limits)
1 Yes Go to #3
2 No Thank and Terminate
2 No THANK and TERMINATE

3. Which of the following age groups are you in?

1 Under 35
2 35 – 49
3 50 – 64
4 65 and older

4. [OBSERVATION] Gender:

1 Male
2 Female

That completes the qualifying questions and I see that you would fit into one of our focus groups. As I mentioned earlier, you will be paid \$25 for your participation in the focus group and the session will take about two hours. I also want to mention that your participation in this study is strictly confidential—your name will never be associated with your comments.

Would you be available on Wednesday, March 21st at 6:00 p.m.?

If yes:

The focus group will be held at the new Hedberg Public Library at 316 South Main Street. You will receive a letter confirming your participation and it will include directions to the library.

In order to ensure that the information I send you will arrive on time, could you please give me your name and address?

Name: _____

Street: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone (Days): _____

Telephone (Evenings): _____

We are only recruiting a small number of people to participate in the groups, and each person's attendance is very important. Refreshments will be served. If you have questions or if your schedule changes, please call Amy Boyer of our Madison office at (608) 276-9880 ext. 12. If you have any questions regarding the focus group and would like to contact someone at the City of Janesville, please call April Little at (608) 755-3193.

Appendix B

Participant Confirmation Letter

DATE

NAME

ADDRESS

Janesville, WI ZIP

Dear NAME,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the upcoming City of Janesville focus group discussion. Because only a limited number of individuals have been asked to participate, it is very important that you attend.

The group will be held at the **Hedberg Public Library** on **Wednesday, March 21st** at **6:00 p.m.** We have attached directions to this location. Please plan on arriving 15 minutes early. A light snack will be served.

The City of Janesville has hired Opinion Dynamics Corporation to conduct the focus groups. Opinion Dynamics will be responsible for conducting the groups and analyzing the results. The information you share and opinions you express during the group will be strictly confidential. Opinion Dynamics will report on their overall findings to the City of Janesville—individual focus group member opinions will not be shared. As a token of our appreciation for your participation you will receive \$25. If problems arise and you cannot attend the group, please call Amy Boyer at Opinion Dynamics Corporation's Madison office at (608) 276-9880 ext. 12. If you have any questions about the study feel free to call me at 755-3193.

Sincerely,

April Little

Community Information Specialist

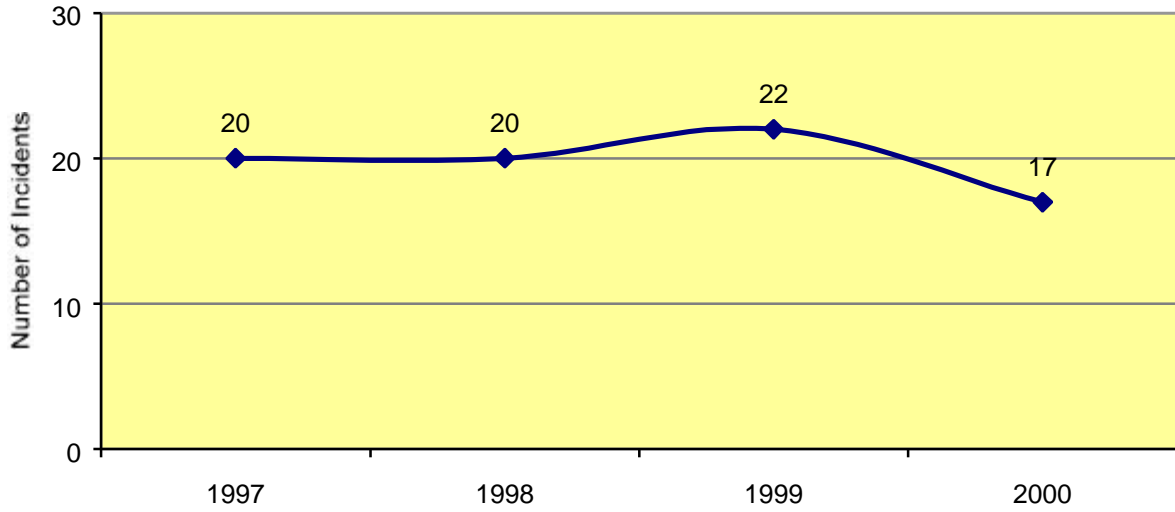
enclosure

Appendix C

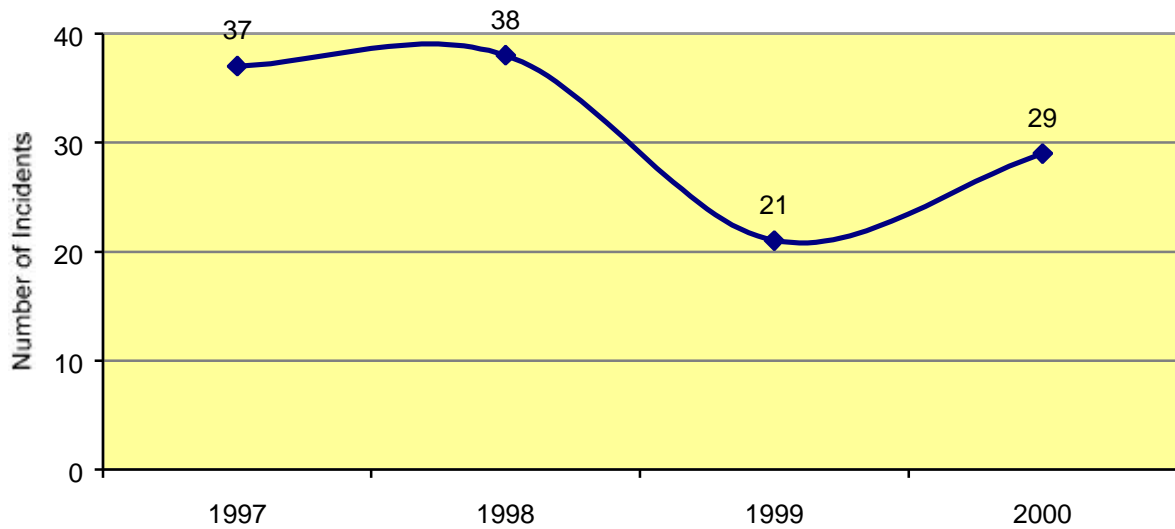
Janesville Crime Statistics

Crime Incidents in Janesville from 1997 to 2000

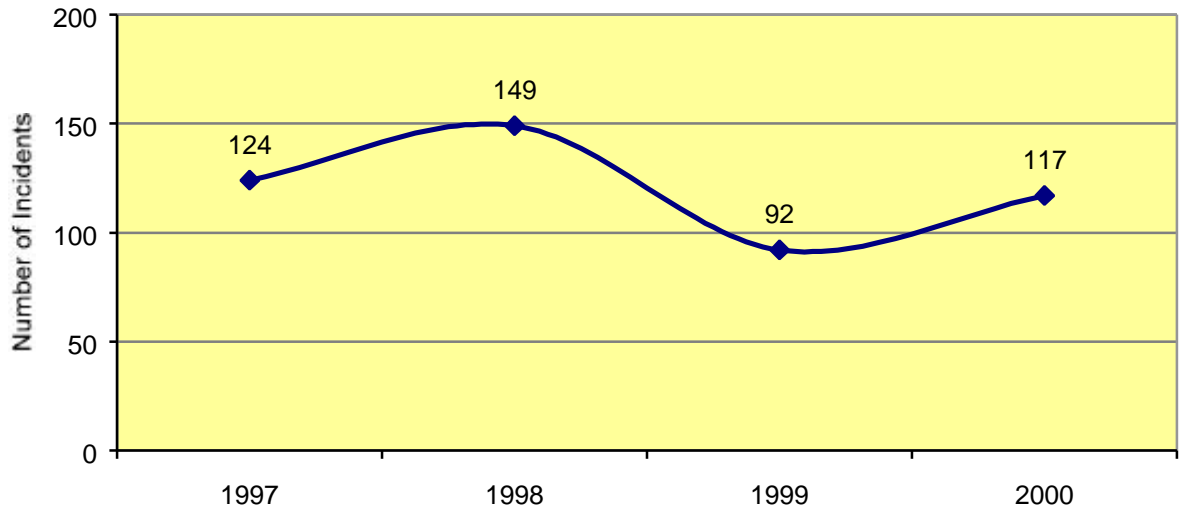
Forcible Rape



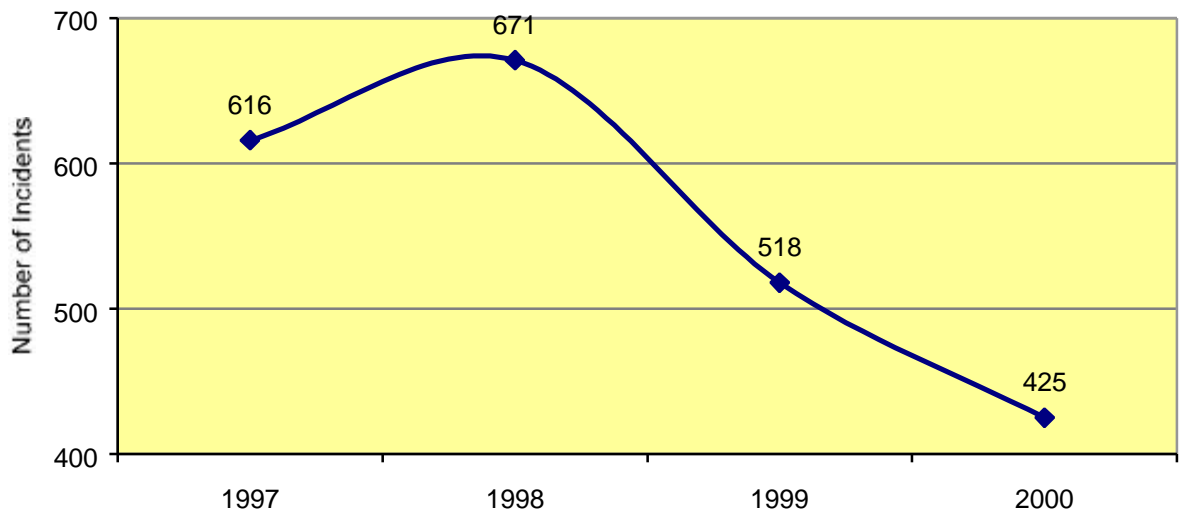
Robbery



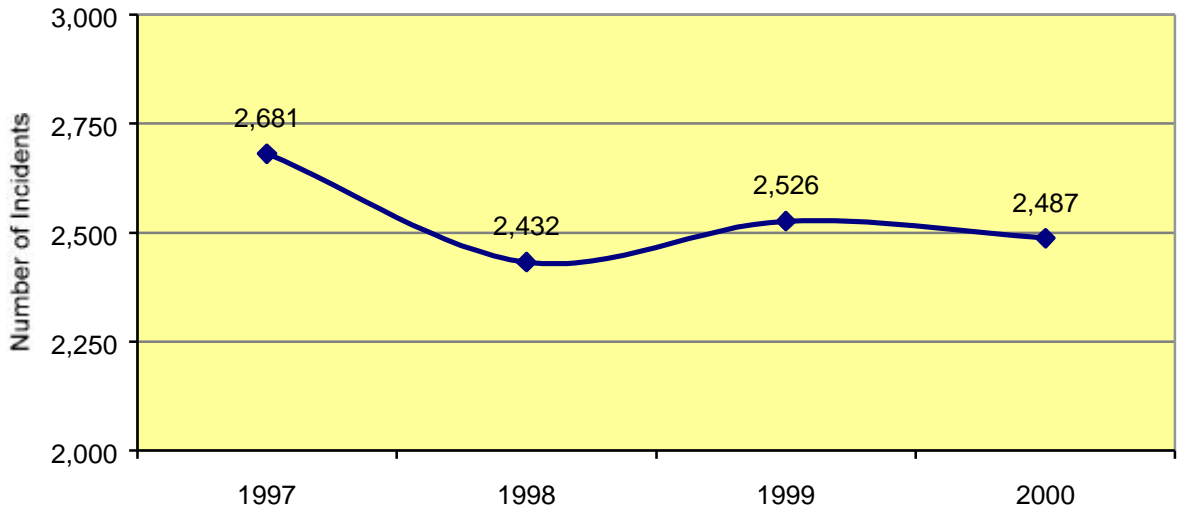
Aggravated Assault



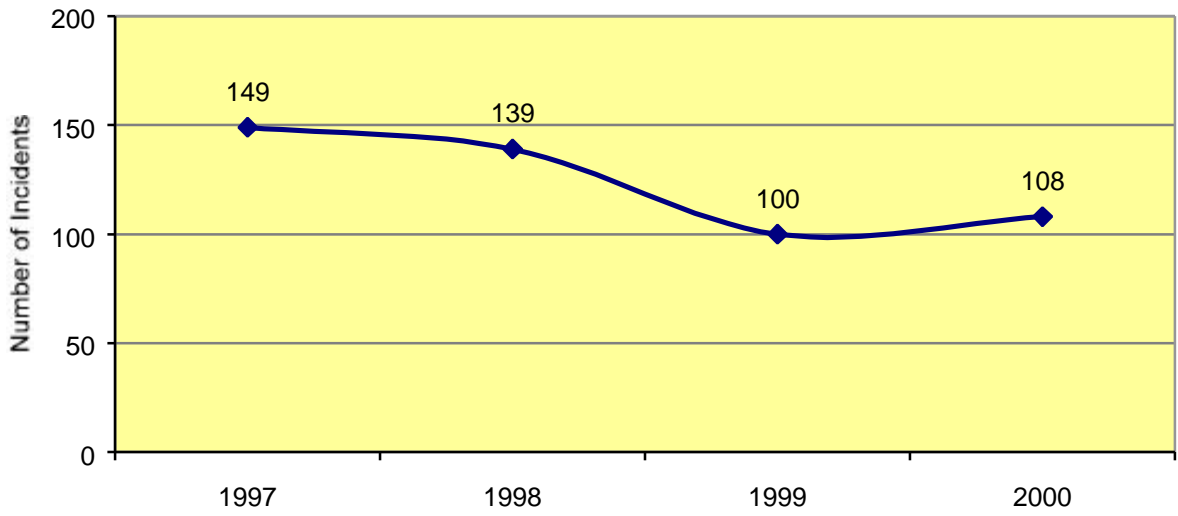
Burglary



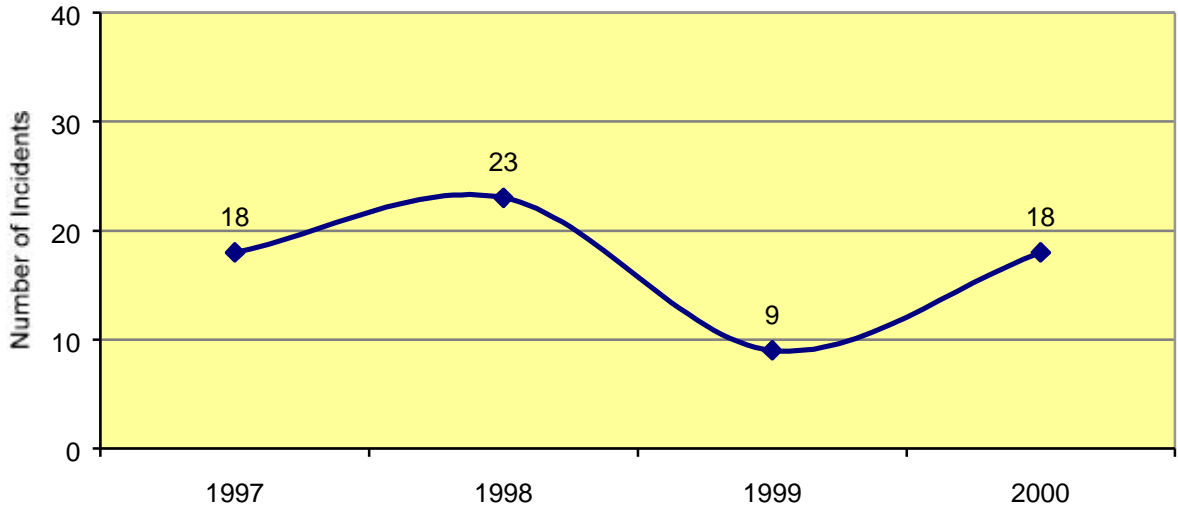
Theft



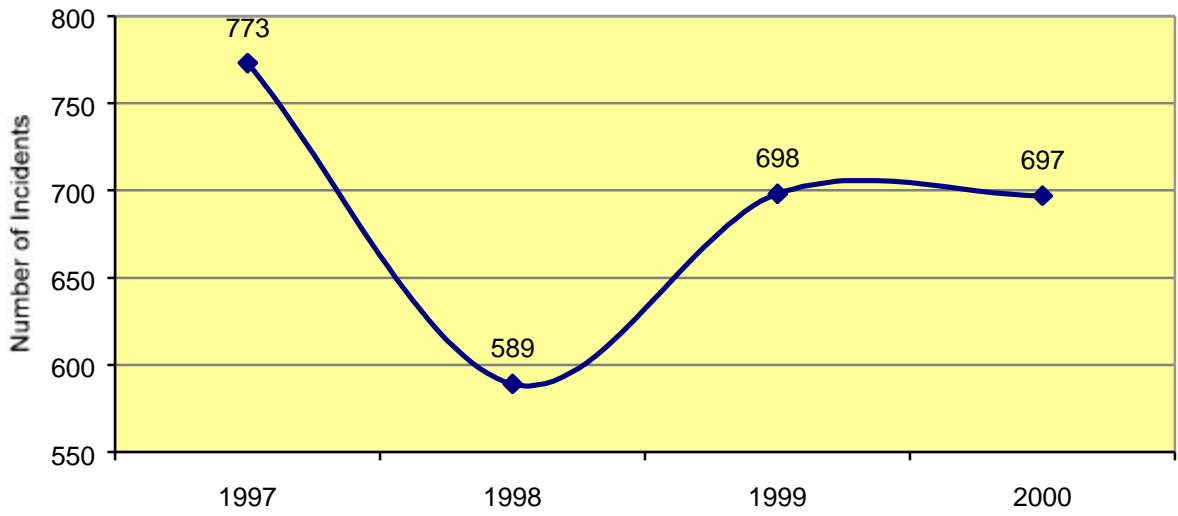
Motor Vehicle Theft



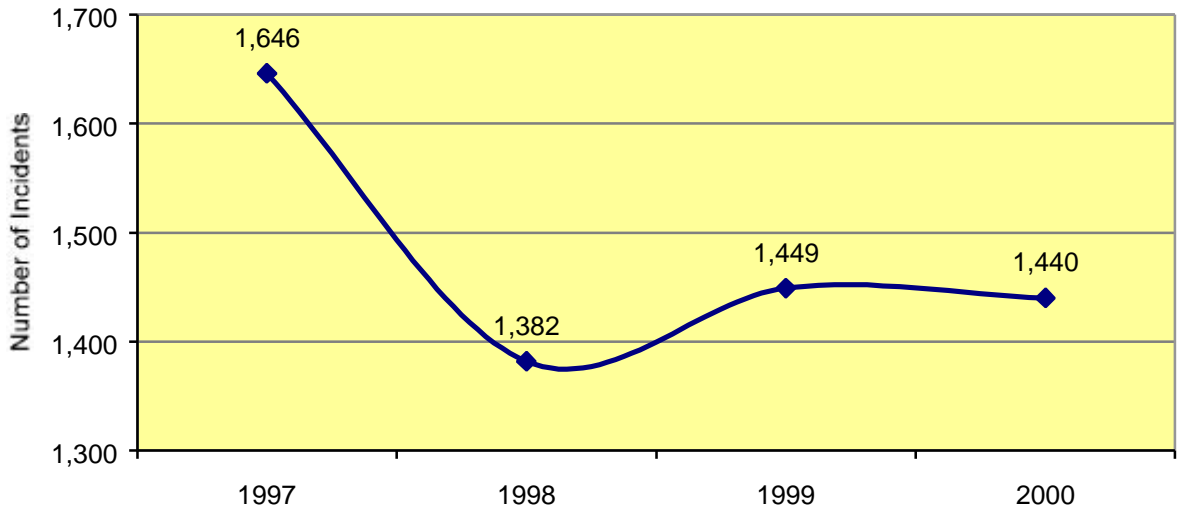
Arson



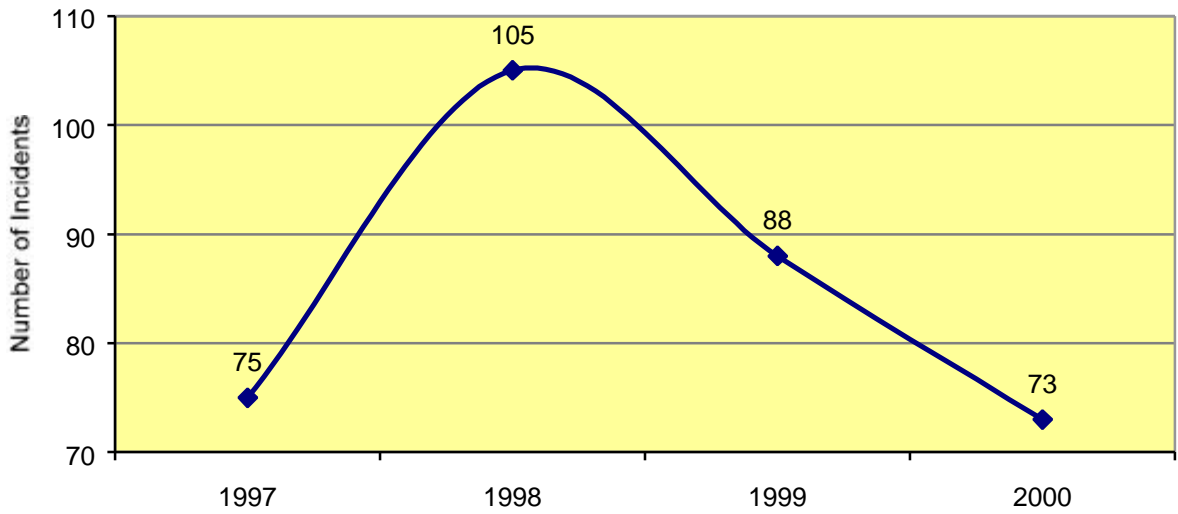
Assault



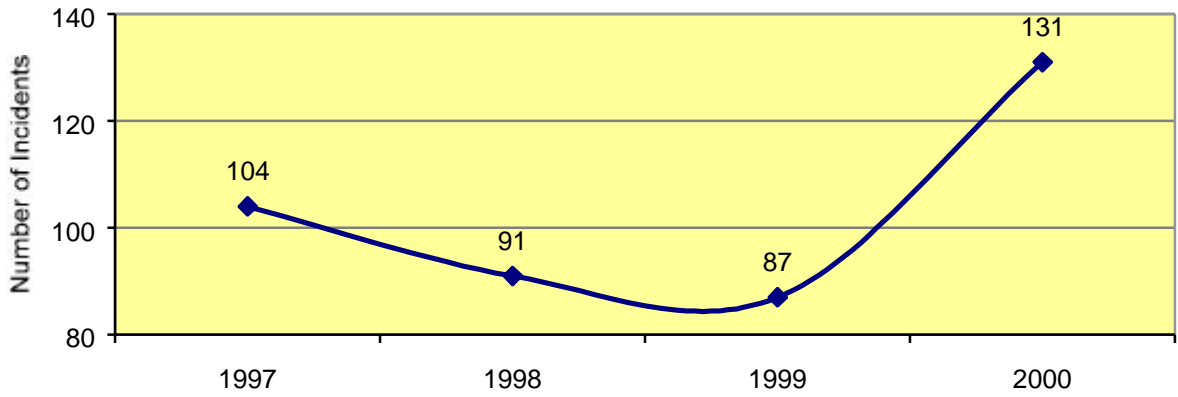
Vandalism



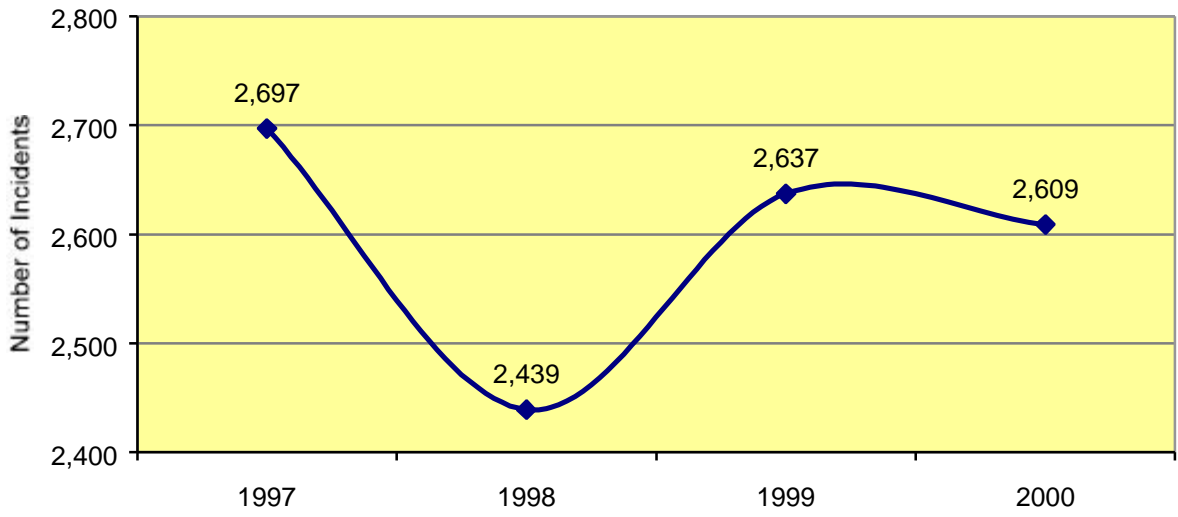
Weapons Offense



Sex Offense



Disorderly Conduct



Appendix D

Focus Group Moderator's Guide

**City of Janesville
Resident Focus Groups
Focus Group Discussion Guide**

A. Warm Up (5-10 minutes)

1. Thank participants for attending
2. Ground rules and purpose of the group
3. Introduction of participants
 - a. Name, where they live, household situation
 - b. Number of years lived in Janesville
 - c. Work within or outside of City
 - d. Time spent in the City on a typical weekday/weekend

B. General Discussion of Likes/Dislikes About Living in Janesville (15-20 minutes)

1. Overall, how would you characterize the “quality of life” in Janesville?
2. What do you like about living in the City of Janesville? (Probe: What makes living in Janesville good?)
3. Are there things about the city that you would not change? (Probe: What? Why?)
4. What do you dislike about living in the City of Janesville? (Probe: What makes living in Janesville less than ideal?)
5. Are there things about the city that you would change? (Probe: What? Why?)

C. Discussion of Safety within the City (15-20 minutes)

1. I'd like to spend some time talking about the issue of "safety." In particular, feeling "safe" within the City of Janesville. When I bring up the term "safety," what kind of things did you all immediately think about?

(Continue probing until no further thoughts are expressed)

2. Does the City of Janesville feel "safe" to you?
3. What type of things make the City feel "safe" to you?

(Probe: What?)

(Probe: Why?)

(Probe: Source of information?)

4. What type of things make the City feel "unsafe" to you?

(Probe: What?)

(Probe: Why?)

(Probe: Source of information?)

Communication

1. What type of information do you currently get about "safety" or "crime" within the City?
2. How do you receive the information? (Probe: TV news, newspaper, City TV channel, other)
3. How much attention do you pay to the information when you receive it?

(Take a 10 minute break to use restrooms and get a snack prior to second half of group.)

D. Discussion of what City could do to increase safety (15-20 minutes)

Introduction: Prior to taking a break, we spent quite a bit of time talking about safety within the City of Janesville. In particular, we talked about what makes you feel “safe” or “unsafe” about living in the City. Now, I would like to ask you to really put on your thinking caps and think about what the City of Janesville could do to make the City safer.

1. What could the City do to increase your feeling of “safety” with the City?
2. Why do you mention this idea?
3. How would implementation of this idea contribute to you feeling safer?
4. What do others think about this idea?
5. Give me some examples of how you would implement this idea

Probe: What City departments would be involved?
 How would you communicate it to City residents?
 What impact do you think it would have?
 How would you measure whether it was successful?
 How would you communicate successes to City residents?

Note: *Repeat this exercise until the group is unable to come up with other ideas for increasing safety within the City*

E. Presentation and Discussion of Latest Crime Statistics (15-20 minutes)

Introduction: I would like to present some of the crime statistics for the City of Janesville for the past several years. [Note: Facilitator will take 3-4 minutes presenting and explaining the crime statistics to the group]

1. What is your first reaction to the information which I just presented?
2. Did you find any of the information surprising?

(Probe: What surprised you?)

(Probe: Why were you surprised?)

3. Was any of the information NOT particularly surprising?
(Probe: What was NOT surprising?)
(Probe: Why were you NOT surprised?)
4. Does any of the information I just presented change the way you feel about some of the “safety” concerns we discussed tonight?
(Probe: What concerns or issues does it change?)
(Probe: How does it change the issue or concern?)
5. How important is this type of information to you?

Communication

1. How important is it for the City to communicate this type of information to you?
2. Do you have any ideas on the “best” way to communicate information on “safety” and “crime” to City residents?

Probe: Newspaper
Community Newsletters
Other Publications
Television
Radio

F. Discussion Wrap-up (5 minutes)

Thank participants for attending