



Taking Back our Boulevard



Tukwila Police Department

Tukwila, Washington

Summary

The City of Tukwila is centrally located in the heart of the Puget Sound Region of Washington State - a large, bustling, and prosperous metropolitan region. Although relatively small in geographical size (about 10 square miles) Tukwila's unique location puts it at a crossroads of activity. The city has a small residential population, but large employment and commercial entities bring an influx of people into the city every day.

Crime is a major problem for Tukwila. While the presence of a large commercial district and a high daytime population do inflate the crime statistics somewhat, these factors alone do not account for the disproportionately high crime rate. An analysis of all police case reports showed an elevated number of incidents occurred along a 1.5 mile section of Tukwila International Boulevard (TIB), a major thoroughfare near SeaTac Airport, and in the Central Business District (CBD), the primary location in the city for commercial activity. Looking specifically at violent criminal offenses, the TIB corridor had the highest concentration of activity.

Situated along TIB are nine motels. Several of these motels were suspected of being safe havens for persons engaged in prostitution, drug dealing, and the violent crimes associated with those activities. An examination of police case reports taken along the TIB corridor from 2008-2012 showed particular motels accounting for three of the top five problem locations. Interestingly, all three of these motel properties were adjacent to each other in a one-block area of TIB.

In June of 2012, a detective from the Tukwila Police Department's Anti-Crime Team (TAC) was assigned to a temporary task force created by the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF). The mission of the task force, (called DIVA, for "Down in the Valley") was to conduct enforcement on gang crime in the local region. The task force was looking for locations, including businesses, with high crime and drug activity. Tukwila detectives knew of a motel (the Boulevard) that fit the criteria and offered it as a project for task force investigation. The task force took on the investigation, and in the course of their work learned the management of the Boulevard and other motels were not only allowing criminal activity, but appeared to be profiting from it. When the DIVA task force completed this emphasis, Tukwila detectives and ATF agents continued their partnership with the goal of eliminating the on-going criminal enterprise they had uncovered. The U.S. Attorney's Office adopted the case and it became a joint Tukwila and A.T.F. investigation.

A year-long investigation was conducted using historical crime analysis, assessments of calls for service, surveillance, interviews with cooperating witnesses, undercover officers, and

confidential informants. The investigation proved three motels - all owned by members of the same family - were used by the owners to facilitate and profit from criminal activity. The investigation resulted in the arrests of the owners and the federal seizure of the motels in a dramatic and unprecedented police action.

One year after the motels were shuttered, data showed a 12% drop in violent crime city-wide and a 40% drop in violent crime along the TIB corridor. No single investigation in the history of the Tukwila Police Department has resulted in such a dramatic reduction of crime.

Scanning

The northern edge of Tukwila borders the city of Seattle. Tukwila has many distinct, attractive features including the largest shopping center in Washington, a very strong employment base, a diverse residential population, and an exceptional array of recreational activities. Commerce thrives in the city due to its location at a confluence of rivers, freeways, railroads, and the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. With a residential population of almost 20,000 and a daytime population approaching 150,000, Tukwila is a unique urban area.

Demographics of the population living in Tukwila show they primarily reside in apartments, with 52.4% of the housing units in the city classified as multi-unit structures¹. Also, over one

¹ U.S. Census Data 2009-2013 (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/53/5372625.html>)

quarter of the population (25.4%) have incomes that put them below the poverty level². The city is home to a large immigrant community as evidenced by the make-up of students in the Tukwila School District, where 80 different languages are spoken³.

Overshadowing the positive qualities of Tukwila are its comparatively high crime rates. In an effort to restore police funding lost during the U.S. economic downturn of 2008, the Tukwila Police Department presented a Crime Reduction Initiative Proposal in August of 2012 to the city council. That proposal illustrated Tukwila's high crime rate by comparing crime rates to those of neighboring cities using data from 2011 (*Figure 1*). At 163 crimes committed per 1,000 residents, Tukwila had a much higher crime rate than the State (38 per 1,000), the County (43 per 1,000), and its neighboring cities. Tukwila's violent crime rate, at 10 crimes per 1,000 residents, was nearly three times higher than the county average and more than twice that of the next highest city, SeaTac, which shares Tukwila's western border.

Two locations in the city had the highest concentration of criminal activity. The first was along the TIB corridor between S. 152nd Street and S. 140th Street and the second was the CBD. As for violent crimes, most were concentrated in the same section of TIB and, to a lesser degree, in and around the CBD (*Figure 2*).

² Ibid.

³ Puget Sound Educational Services District (<https://www.psesd.org/news/the-most-diverse-district-in-the-nation-a-closer-look-at-tukwila-school-district/>)

Subjectively, it was believed that three adjacent motels in the 14400 block of Tukwila International Boulevard were the locations responsible for most of the crime. The area had a regional reputation with the public as a “seedy” place of cheap motels populated by drug dealers, drug users, and prostitutes. This characterization was backed up by data showing the same three motels, identified as The Great Bear Motor Inn, The Boulevard Motel, and The Spruce Motel, had the highest calls for service per room of all hotels/motels in the city. In addition the same motels made up three of the top five properties for police case reports taken on the TIB corridor. Typical calls handled by police at these locations included warrant arrests, robberies, assaults, prostitution, drug offenses, and thefts (*Figure 3 and Figure 4*).

The section of the TIB corridor containing the three motels had long been considered a problem location. Earlier, in the year 2000, the locale was designated an “Urban Renewal Area” by the city. The city was intending to use a state statute allowing for community renewal of areas struggling with crime and blight and was considering the use of negotiation and/or condemnation to acquire property in furtherance of that effort. City staff, including Police, Fire, Code Enforcement, and Economic Development had identified seven properties for acquisition, which included the three motels plus two others. New resolve from the city to address crime and disorder along Tukwila International Boulevard and to change the enduringly negative perception of the area lead to the support of this project.

Analysis

In mid-2012, The Tukwila Police were involved in a short-term crime reduction task force led by the ATF to address gang related criminal activity in Tukwila and surrounding jurisdictions. As a result of the work conducted during that partnership, an unusual pattern of activity between three specific motels was discovered. This pattern included two of the three motels in the 14400 block of Tukwila International Boulevard (Great Bear Motor Inn and Boulevard Motel), and a third motel, the Travelers Choice Motel, located one block south and half a block east of Tukwila International Boulevard. These three motels are collectively known as the “Target Motels” (*Figure 5*).

Investigators learned that the three target motels were controlled by the same ownership group; that the owners and managers were charging fees for entry onto their properties to direct people to drug sales and prostitution locations inside certain rooms (including charging prostitutes an additional “overhead” fee based on the amount of visiting customers), and that they were actively facilitating fraud by illegally accepting and taking food stamp debit cards as payment from motel guests and visitors. At the conclusion of the task force project, the Tukwila Police detectives and the ATF agents continued their partnership with the aim of investigating the organized criminal activities they had uncovered among the motel owners.

The investigation had several components:

- Historical analysis of specific crimes in the motels.
- Interviews of cooperating individuals including crime victims and criminal suspects.

- Use of confidential informants and undercover officers to engage in covert transactions.
- Financial analysis of the owners' bank accounts.
- Search warrants.

Using the above techniques, the investigation was able to prove the owners engaged in, encouraged, and made significant cash profits from criminal activity at the target motels. The investigation was accepted by the U.S. Attorney's Office and probable cause was developed to charge the owners with federal crimes including Maintaining a Drug Involved Premises, Distribution of Controlled Substances, and Money Laundering.

The historical analysis showed 42 drug related incidents at the three motels from 2009 through August 15, 2013 (6 incidents at the Travelers Choice, 3 at the Great Bear, and 33 at the Boulevard). During the same time frame both violent crime and prostitution occurred in the motels. There were 44 assaults (27 at the Boulevard, 15 at the Travelers Choice, and 2 at the Great Bear), 6 rapes (1 at the Boulevard, 3 at the Travelers Choice, and 2 at the Great Bear), and 13 robberies (11 at the Boulevard, 1 at Travelers Choice, and 1 at the Great Bear) along with other illegal activity. In addition to violent crimes, there had been numerous arrests for prostitution, including 9 arrests resulting from individuals violating their Stay Out of Area of Prostitution (SOAP) orders.

The cooperating individuals, confidential informants, and undercover officers independently reported that the target motel owners knowingly allowed and facilitated the illegal activity.

These sources of information explained how non-renting visitors were charged a \$10 cash fee

by either an owner or a staff member to enter the property and, if needed, would be directed to rooms to obtain drugs or a prostitute. A number of times, a motel owner or staff would later tell a renter that they owed additional money beyond the normal rental fee (usually \$40 to \$60 per night) based on the number of customers who visited their rooms. Four sources said they had paid additional fees between \$90 and \$500 to stay at the motels. On two occasions, a motel owner successfully used a food stamp card provided by an undercover officer to obtain products for the motel, paying a percentage back to the undercover officer for use of the card. The confidential sources reported – with few exceptions - that no ordinary travelers stay at the target motels and, as one source stated, she “felt sorry” for a couple who happened to stay at one of the motels, unaware of the illegal activity taking place.

Also of significance to the investigation was proving the owners had knowledge of the criminal activity. The city has two ordinances aimed at officially notifying and addressing problem properties: Safety in Overnight Lodging and the Chronic Nuisance Ordinance. Under these programs, owners and managers of locations with high police call activity are contacted by the police department’s crime prevention unit, made aware of the problems, and then engaged to help identify causes of crime and find ways to reduce or prevent it. In this situation, all owners of the target motels were less than cooperative and, despite repeated notifications, none of them ever sought out help or advice from the city to remedy their crime issues. All the owners, to some degree, argued and complained about the city’s method of measuring crime at the motels while at the same time displaying a façade of cooperation.

Other incidents also demonstrated awareness by the owners. Between 2009 and 2013 there had been at least three dead bodies found at one of the motels, two at a second motel and one at the third. Either toxicological or physical evidence of drug use was found in each occasion. Investigators also found instances where individuals who had been trespassed from a target motel were later allowed to return, sometimes at a higher rate, or were relocated to another one of the target motels. In one incident, a patrol officer saw a person he knew to be on supervision from the Washington State Department of Corrections enter a target motel. The officer spoke to the on-duty manager and learned that the original person he saw, and another subject the officer knew had been involved in narcotics trouble at the same motel, was being allowed to stay. When asked why, the manager said it was the owner's decision about who stayed on the property. Incredibly, one of the owners himself admitted to police during an assault investigation that he was running a haven for drug sales and prostitution and stated normal people will not come to his hotel, so he has to do business with "crack heads and prostitutes to make money."

Drugs purchased by undercover officers ("UCs") and confidential informants ("CIs") also showed that the owners of the target motels knowingly allowed drug trafficking and often aided in the transactions. A majority of these dealings took place after various meetings with police crime prevention staff and after notices were issued under the programs listed above. On many occasions, owners from each of the target motels directly facilitated and assisted the UCs and CIs with purchasing drugs from inside their properties by directing them to specific motel rooms or identifying individuals with drugs for sale.

The financial portion of the investigation showed 58% of the monthly deposits into motel bank accounts were cash receipts. At the same time, the owners made a significant amount of cash deposits into many different personal bank accounts. Just enough cash was deposited into the motel bank accounts to cover operating expenses such as mortgage payments, taxes, and utilities. Investigators were never able to uncover a legitimate source for the unexplained cash deposits and, with a vast majority of the rooms rented by drug dealers and prostitutes, probable cause was developed to believe the cash came from illegal activity. Of note was the lack of payments from the motel accounts to the owners in the form salary or profits. Instead of depositing all of the cash into the motel business accounts and paying themselves salaries or profits, the owners deposited significant sums of cash into the personal bank accounts to conceal the illegal source of their funds.

Response

The year-long investigation was sent to a Federal Grand Jury that issued indictments for the motel owners and other individuals for various drug crimes. In addition, a court order was granted to seize the three motel properties and other assets including cash, bank accounts, vehicles, and personal residences.

On August 27th, 2013 a large scale police operation took place that resulted in the simultaneous physical seizure of the target motels, the physical arrests of the owners and other offenders, the seizure of evidence, and the seizure of other assets and proceeds from the criminal activity and the execution of search warrants at multiple locations:

- The Great Bear, Boulevard, and Travelers Choice motels were seized by the U.S. Marshall Service and boarded up.
- Nineteen people were arrested.
- 2 vehicles were seized.
- A private residence was seized.
- 10 firearms were recovered.
- \$250,000 in cash and in bank accounts was seized.

The Tukwila Police Department (with the assistance of the Tukwila Fire Department) planned and coordinated the take-down. Called “Operation Taking Back Our Boulevard,” this was one of the largest pre-planned law enforcement events to date in Washington State. The raid utilized 411 law enforcement officers, lasted 16 hours, and took almost a month to plan. The complexity of the operation can be seen in the organization chart created for the event (*Figure 6*).

Considerations in the planning process for the event included:

- Transportation, feeding, and relief for all personnel and involved citizens.
- Safely securing and vacating every room in all three motels.
- Properly documenting the occupants and property found in every motel room and search location.
- Locating and arresting criminal suspects.
- Executing search warrants.
- Safeguarding evidence and personal property.

- Command post operation.
- Medical support.
- Personal protective equipment.
- Media and press information.

Another consideration was providing humanitarian assistance for uninvolved citizens who were staying at the motels and displaced by the raid. Utilizing a nearby church as a processing facility, 31 adults and 11 children were provided emergency housing assistance, food, and transportation to assist in their relocation.

In addition to utilizing nearly every city department, other assisting law enforcement departments included the U.S. Department of Justice, FBI, U.S. Marshals, DEA, IRS, Department of Corrections, Valley SWAT, Valley Civil Disturbance Unit, King County SWAT, SCORE Jail, Seattle P.D., Bellevue P.D., Port of Seattle P.D., and the Washington State Patrol. Additional assistance was provided by State Child Protective Services, State Department of Social and Health Services, State Department of Corrections, local fire departments, local ambulance services, and local churches (*Figure 7*).

The motel raid was a model of law enforcement coordination and community collaboration. At the end of the day, no citizens, officers, or suspects were injured and, other than handcuffing, police did not need to use force in detaining or arresting subjects.

Assessment

As a result of the operation, all three motel owners plead guilty to federal charges of Maintaining a Drug Involved Premises. They forfeited their interests in the motels and in approximately \$355,000 of assets seized during the raid. Each owner was sentenced to federal prison, with terms ranging from 1 year to 18 months. The City has since purchased all three seized motels (Great Bear, Boulevard, and Travelers Choice) from the federal government. The city also purchased the other problem motel (the Spruce Motel) within the same block using its condemnation authority under the state Community (Urban) Renewal Act. The next steps in the urban renewal plans are to demolish and sell the motel properties and to redevelop and revitalize the area. All four motels are currently scheduled for demolition in 2015.

The criminal investigation and civil seizure of the target motels produced a strong positive impact on violent crime rates, but yielded some mixed results in terms of property crimes. Data on calls for service, case reports, violent crime (murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) and property crime (burglary, residential burglary, and auto theft) were tabulated for the one year period before and after the motels were shut down. Figures were evaluated citywide, on a smaller geographic scale using several reporting districts (RDs) that make up the TIB corridor⁴, and in the single RD containing the target motels⁵ (*Figure 8*).

Citywide, calls for service were down 4.3%, case reports were down 5.1%, and violent crime was down 11.7%, however property crimes increased 13.3%. Along the TIB corridor, calls for service decreased 28.3%, case reports dropped 31.8%, violent crime fell 40.2% and property

⁴ Reporting districts 240, 270, 280, 290 comprise the Tukwila International Boulevard corridor.

⁵ Reporting district 240 contains the target motels.

crime was down 20.8%. The immediate area around the motels saw a 38.9% decrease in calls for service, a 41.9% decrease in case reports, a 43.9% drop in violent crime, but saw an unusual increase of 18.4% in property crime (*Figure 9*). It is rather surprising and not understood as to why property crime spiked in the area directly around the motels yet dropped along the TIB corridor. Crime trends in this area will continue to be evaluated.

The Tukwila Police Department could not have been successful in closing the motels and prosecuting the owners without strong regional cooperation. Prior cultivation of long-term relationships across the spectrum of organizations, to include local, state, and federal law enforcement, government entities, and private organizations, proved invaluable to this mission.

The elimination of the motels generated approving communications from citizens. The positive public feelings over this unprecedented event are best summarized by a make shift sign posted in a nearby lot on the day of the raid, “Thank you for cleaning up “our” city! God Bless!” (*Figure 10*)

Agency and Officer Information:

- **Key Project Team Members**

- Commander Dennis McOmber – Tukwila Police Department
- Sergeant Doug Johnson – Tukwila Police Department
- Detective Keith King – Tukwila Police Department
- Detective David Cruz – Tukwila Police Department
- Special Agent Joel Miller Jr. – Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)

- **Project Contact Person**

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Figure 1:

Crime Rates in Tukwila and Regional and State Benchmarks, 2011

City	Population	Total Crimes Committed	Total Crime Rate	Violent Crime Total	Violent Crime Rate	Property Crime Total	Property Crime Rate
Tukwila	19,050	3,110	163.3	193	10.1	2,917	153.1
*Tukwila (without CBD)	19,050	1,351	70.7	168	8.8	1,183	61.9
SeaTac	27,110	1,601	59.1	125	4.6	1,476	54.4
Auburn	70,705	4,105	58.1	279	3.9	3,826	54.1
Burien	47,660	2,586	54.3	223	4.7	2,363	49.6
Federal Way	89,370	4,509	50.5	245	2.7	4,264	47.7
Renton	92,590	4,563	49.3	295	3.2	4,268	46.1
Kent	118,200	5,584	47.2	577	4.9	5,007	42.4
Des Moines	29,680	1,146	38.6	90	3.0	1,056	35.6
King County	1,966,075	84,892	43.2	6,776	3.4	78,116	39.7
Washington State	6,761,195	258,996	38.3	19,568	2.9	239,428	35.4

Source: Tukwila Police Department, 2011; Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, 2011; BERK, 2012

Note: Rates per 1,000 population

*Tukwila (without CBD) shows crime rates in Tukwila excluding all crimes committed in the CBD.

Figure 2:

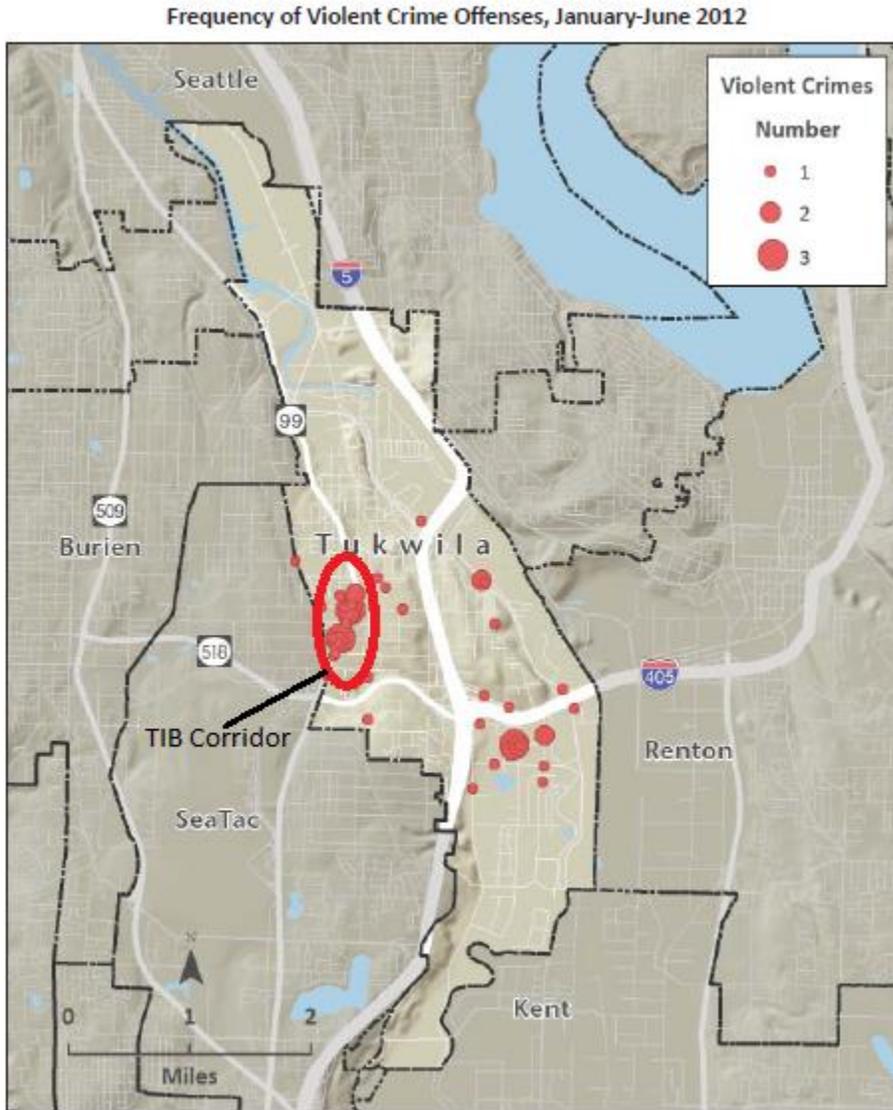


Figure 3:

**Police Case Reports in the Community Renewal Area
Top Ten Properties Ranked by Total Case Reports 2008-2012**

Rank	Name	Address	Felony	Misdemeanor	Other	Total
1	Tukwila Trading Co.	3725 S. 144 th St.	68	201	36	305
2	Great Bear Motel	14420 Tukwila Int. Blvd.	82	137	51	270
3	Boulevard Motel	14440 Tukwila Int. Blvd.	104	117	42	263
4	Spruce Motel	14442 Tukwila Int. Blvd.	53	117	51	221
5	Bartell's/Laundry	14227 Tukwila Int. Blvd.	29	158	17	204
6	Southgate Mobile Home Park	14005 42 nd Ave. S.	30	32	50	112
7	7-11	14207 Tukwila Int. Blvd.	22	54	25	101
8	Knights Inn	14110 Tukwila Int. Blvd.	38	33	25	96
9	Normandy Court Apts.	14225 42 nd Ave. S.	35	34	26	95
10	Chevron/Espresso	14415 Tukwila Int. Blvd.	35	48	10	93

Figure 4:

**Calls for Service Police Department
2/2012 – 1/2013**

Property Name	CFS	No. of Rooms	CFS/Room
Boulevard Motel	213	28	7.61
Great Bear	208	35	5.94
Spruce Motel	201	40	5.03
Jet Inn	91	32	2.84
Traveler's Choice	95	34	2.79
Riverside Residences	212	118	1.80
Travelodge	126	72	1.75
Knights Inn	103	70	1.47
Econolodge	41	47	0.87
Doubletree Suites	178	221	0.81
Courtyard by Marriott APW	38	149	0.26
Courtyard by Marriott WVH	46	211	0.22
Ramada	8	38	0.21

Figure 5:



Figure 6:

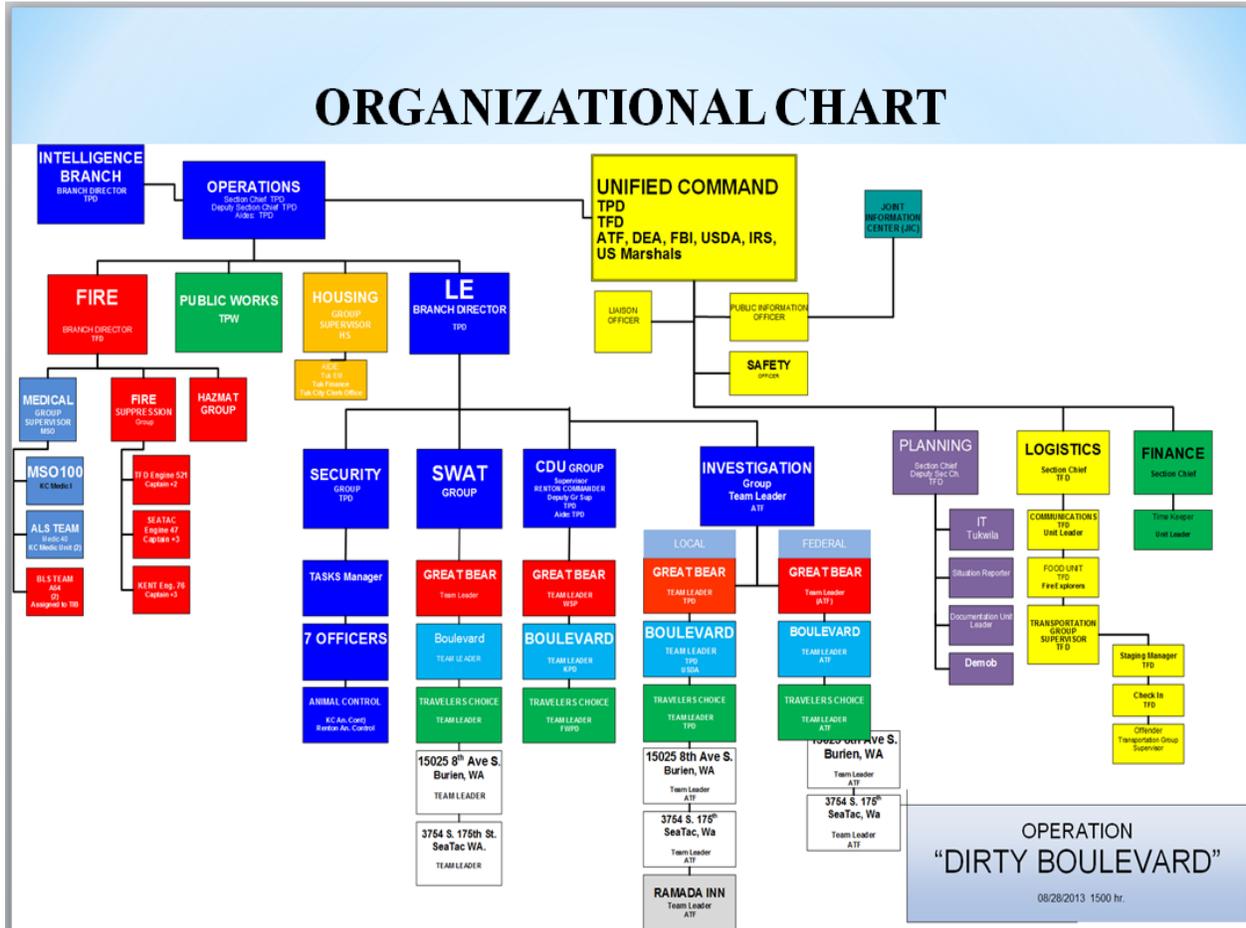


Figure 7:



Operation Taking Back Our Boulevard Interagency Coordination

- > City Resources
 - ✓ Police
 - ✓ Fire
 - ✓ Emergency Management
 - ✓ Public Works
 - ✓ City Hall
 - ✓ IT
 - ✓ Human Services
 - ✓ Finance
 - ✓ Parks and Rec
 - ✓ DCD
- > Regional
 - ✓ Valley Communications
 - ✓ Bellevue PD
 - ✓ Seattle PD
 - ✓ Seattle SWAT
 - ✓ Valley SWAT (Auburn, Federal Way, Kent, Port of Seattle, Renton, Tukwila)
 - ✓ Valley CDU (Auburn, Federal Way, Kent, Port of Seattle, Renton, Tukwila)
 - ✓ King Co. Medic 1
 - ✓ Kent Fire Dept.
 - ✓ Kent Emergency Manager
 - ✓ Sea-Tac Fire Dept.
 - ✓ Renton Animal Control
- > Regional Cont.
 - ✓ King Co Sheriff
 - ✓ King Co Metro Police
 - ✓ King Co SWAT
 - ✓ King Co Animal Control
 - ✓ King Co Radio
 - ✓ Washington State Patrol
 - ✓ Department of Social and Health Services - Child Protective Services
 - ✓ Department of Corrections
 - ✓ AMR Ambulance Service
 - ✓ TriMed Ambulance Service
 - ✓ Tukwila Fire Explorers
 - ✓ Tukwila Police Explorers
 - ✓ United Methodist Church
 - ✓ Starbucks
- > Federal
 - ✓ Alcohol Tabaco and Firearms
 - ✓ Department of Justice
 - ✓ U.S Marshalls
 - ✓ Drug Enforcement Administration
 - ✓ Federal Bureau of Investigations
 - ✓ Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General
 - ✓ Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigations
 - ✓ Department of Homeland Security

Figure 8:

Tukwila International Boulevard Corridor
Reporting Districts (RDs)

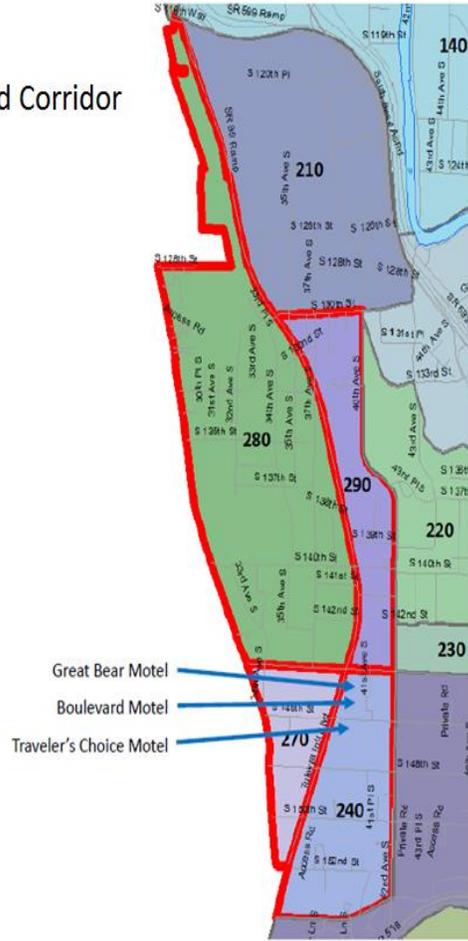


Figure 9:

One Year Before and After Taking Back Our Boulevard Operation

Calls for Service*

	8/27/12-8/26/13	8/27/13-8/26/14	Percent Change
Citywide	28166	26962	-4.3%
RD240	4047	2473	-38.9%
RD240/270/280/290	8936	6404	-28.3%

Case Reports

	8/27/12-8/26/13	8/27/13-8/26/14	Percent Change
Citywide	9512	9027	-5.1%
RD240	1112	646	-41.9%
RD240/270/280/290	2639	1801	-31.8%

Violent Crime Offenses (Murder, Rape, Robbery, Aggravated Assault)

	8/27/12-8/26/13	8/27/13-8/26/14	Percent Change
Citywide	205	181	-11.7%
RD240	41	23	-43.9%
RD240/270/280/290	117	70	-40.2%

Property Crime Offenses (Burglary 1-2, Residential Burglary, Auto Theft)

	8/27/12-8/26/13	8/27/13-8/26/14	Percent Change
Citywide	626	709	13.3%
RD240	38	45	18.4%
RD240/270/280/290	154	122	-20.8%

*Due to changes in the CAD system, CFS numbers may vary by up to 10%.

City Wide		TIB Corridor	
Calls For Service	↓ 4.3%	Calls For Service	↓ 30%
Cases	↓ 5%	Crime	↓ 30%
Violent Crime	↓ 12%	Violent Crime	↓ 40%

Figure 10:

On a very busy day, we at the Tukwila School District just wanted to say THANK YOU for all that you do to keep our community safe. Great job!

That area has been a disgusting, crime-ridden mess for at least 30 years. Thank goodness for you all and our Mayor who have obviously taken it seriously!! I hope they continue to clean up the highway, even beyond Tukwila.

As an employee and a resident of Tukwila, I cannot fully express my appreciation for this action. These properties have been a problem for the area for as long as I have lived here (1975). This is such a positive step for the entire community. Well-done and a big THANK YOU. It's going to make a HUGE difference. Very proud of Tukwila today!



Just wanted to add my congratulations to the Department and all the officers involved in today's police action. So many of us in the community are absolutely thrilled at the actions that have been taken to shut down the sources of so much crime. Kudos to all!

A thank you doesn't seem enough but, as are many of the residents of Tukwila, we are eternally grateful for the work you all do and for this huge dent made in the crime of our city.

I took a detour to work today just to drive by the motels. Sooo good to see this happen!!! I'm excited for the positive changes! :)

Congratulations and "THANK YOU" to the City for not just having "lip service" about their sincerity of taking back our community and to all agencies who teamed up to make this happen. - Thank you for your support.

