

WE WANT

SAFETY

≠

NOT

SURVEILLANCE

**What Safety Means and
What Residents Want**



**THIS BOOK IS
\$FREE**

ABOUT THIS REPORT

An extended version of this zine, containing references, sources, and appendices, is available at http://urbanpraxis.org/?page_id=710om.

This report was prepared by a small team of researchers who were members of the Green Light Black Futures research working group, a sub-group of the coalition's Communication, Action, and Research and Education (CARE) Team.

Important contributions to this report were made by GLBF co-founders and members, through analyzing survey data, editing and providing feedback, and the contribution of statements reflecting members' experiences within the coalition and within their professional and other community roles addressing surveillance technology in the city. Listening sessions were held with community members, former GLBF members, and

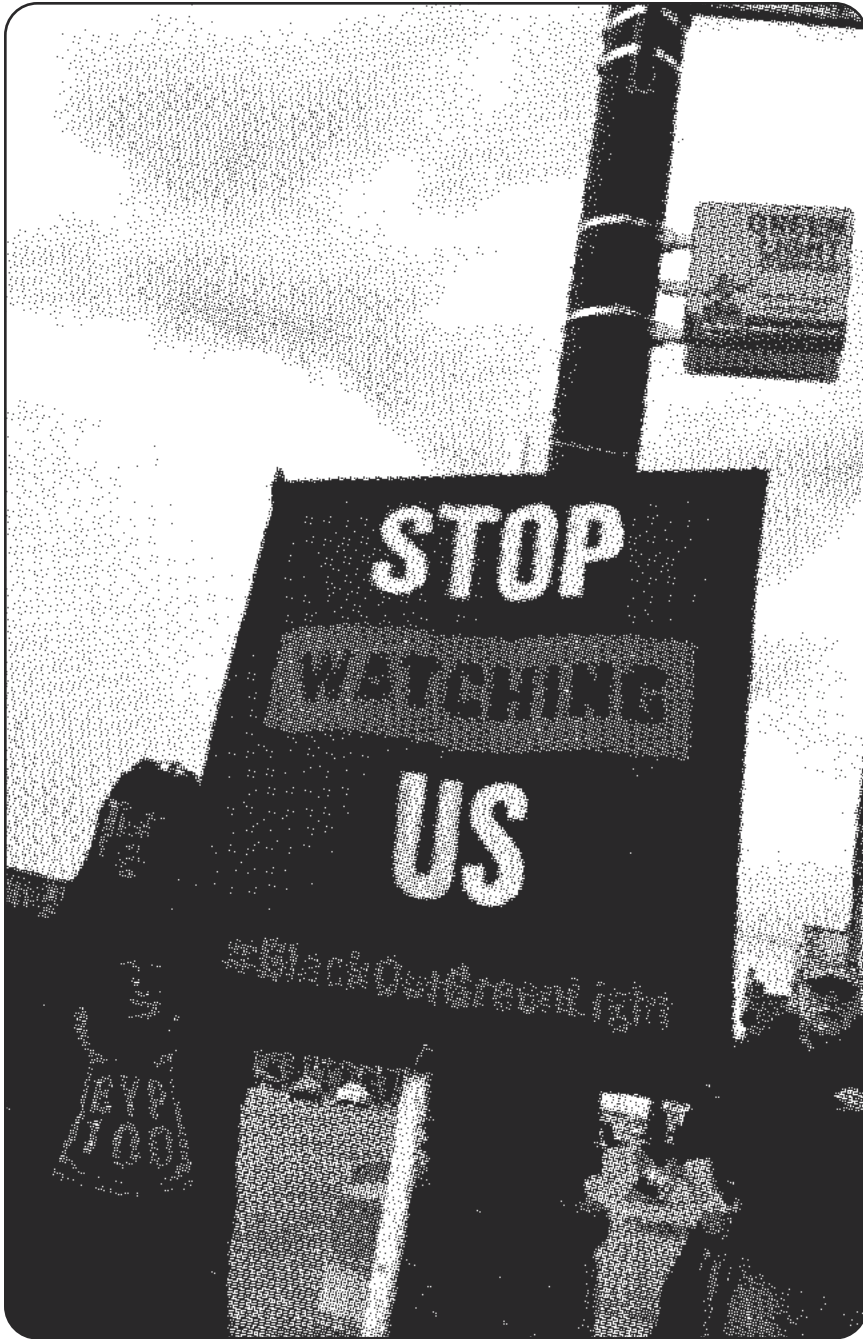
organizers currently working on issues of surveillance and community safety in Detroit. This included members of the Divest/Invest Coalition, Detroit Independent Freedom Schools Movement, Detroit Coalition for Police Transparency and Accountability, Detroit Justice Center, National Stop ShotSpotter Campaign, Green Chairs Not Green Lights, the Boggs Center, Freedom Freedom Growers, Birwood House, the ACLU, and the Metro Detroit Restorative Justice Network, all of whom reviewed the report and offered important feedback. The writing and research of this booklet were collaboratively completed by Rae Baker, Peter Blackmer, Alex Jiahong Lu, Rebecca Smith, and PG Watkins.

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Amanda Hill, a Green Light Black Futures member, holds up a sign at a Sept. 2019 direct action protest—a Black Brunch action—to raise awareness about PGL and pressure businesses not to participate. Photo: Green Light Black Futures Coalition.

1 INTRODUCTION

Detroiters want to feel safe in their homes, their neighborhoods, and while moving through the city.

Surveillance technologies like Project Green Light, ShotSpotter, Ring doorbells, and more policing can sometimes make Detroiters *feel safer*, but surveillance does not reduce “crime” in the city. Surveillance technology does not prevent violence or threats to personal safety and property, and it deprives communities of resources that could address these problems at their roots. Defining safety only in terms of “crime” does not include all of the

ways that Black life, people, communities, and spaces are threatened and harmed by surveillance and policing.

For decades, disinvestment, suburbanization, white flight, neighborhood demolitions, and other drivers of systemic racism have drained the resources needed to create a safe, healthy, and thriving city for all Detroiters. Unemployment, underfunded schools, foreclosures and evictions, water shutoffs, shuttered community and recreation centers, and closed healthcare facilities have destabilized neighborhoods and contributed to vacant blocks, interpersonal violence, uneven access to basic necessities within

communities, and further disinvestment. But instead of reinvesting in real sources of public safety like housing, education, healthcare, employment, infrastructure and job training, the city has increasingly turned to policing and surveillance.

Police surveillance technologies like cameras, facial recognition software, and data monitoring have historically been used by people in power to protect their property and status by containing and controlling Black and brown people. Since the election of Detroit's current mayor, Mike Duggan, the first white Mayor of the US's largest majority-Black city in over forty years, massive investments have been made annually to fund the Detroit Police Department (DPD) and expand the city's surveillance systems. This surveillance technology is used not only by the DPD, but also by a vast network of government agencies and private companies. History has shown that forms of technology that criminalize communities will not prevent violence or create a culture of safety, despite what police departments and city councils promise.

In October of 2018, the Detroit chapter of the national organization Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100) launched a campaign to challenge the recent expansion of police surveillance through Project Green Light, the city's public-private business partnership program. Months later, the campaign turned into Green Light Black Futures (GLBF), a Black-centered coalition dedicated to fighting against the use of hyper-surveillance, over-policing, and facial recognition technology in Detroit.

The coalition, led by young, queer Black members launched a city-wide call to shift the responsibility of safety: *into* the hands of community members, and *out* of the hands of the Detroit Police Department and the Project Green Light program. Between 2019 and 2021, GLBF built a coalition of local and national organizations, individuals, and community members, who mobilized neighbors, created media to shift harmful pro-Project Green Light narratives, and hosted community events, trainings and workshops about safety, justice, and abolition across Detroit.

CRIMINALIZING COMMUNITIES ISN'T SAFETY

Forms of
technology that
criminalize
communities
will not prevent
violence or create
a culture of safety.



Green Light Black Futures members march through Corktown in Sept. 2019 for Black Brunch direct action. Organizers entered participating businesses with signs and leaflets to speak with proprietors and customers. Photo: Green Light Black Futures Coalition.

From 2019 until 2021, GLBF designed and disseminated a Community Safety Survey, which was distributed by members at community events, through door knocking and street canvassing, and digitally through an online survey link. It aimed to gather community opinions, document community members' experiences of the use and effects of Project Green Light, and to share understandings of safety

across Detroit's neighborhoods. Responses contributed to the survey are compiled in this report alongside research and analysis of local policy, budgetary and political contexts, and histories of surveillance and resistance to pervasive policing in Detroit. The coalition is no longer organizing together today, though many past members continue to be dedicated to and engaged in abolitionist projects and organizing.

REPORT OBJECTIVES

This report was created to center the knowledge, opinions, and expertise of Detroiters through sharing the results of GLBF's Community Safety Survey, and as a response to the lack of community input Detroit residents have had about the sweeping use of surveillance technologies in the city.

While community organizations, activists, and residents have consistently uplifted community concerns about surveillance, past evaluations by the Detroit Board of Police Commissioners (DBOPC) and the Detroit City Council have not comprehensively addressed or incorporated community members' understandings of safety. The

only external evaluation to date of PGL's effectiveness at providing safety, "Project Greenlight Detroit: Evaluation Report" (2020), was written by faculty in the Department of Criminology at Michigan State University, many of whom are former law enforcement personnel. These evaluations have largely excluded the experiences of long-term Detroiters and community activists.

By presenting and contextualizing the results of the Community Safety Survey, in combination with additional research and interviews with organizers and community members in 2020-22, this report is intended to inform our actions as neighbors, the decisions we make together about safety in our communities, and to educate elected and paid officials who make decisions about policing and the use of surveillance technology in the city.

2

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PROJECT GREEN LIGHT

The origins of PGL can be traced back to the period of emergency management in Detroit (2013-2014).

In response to a financial crisis in Detroit caused by decades of systemic racism, Gov. Rick Snyder suspended democracy and appointed Kevyn Orr as Emergency Manager with autocratic control of the city. Orr infamously used his power to declare bankruptcy on behalf of the city over the objection of residents, activists, and officials. One of his first moves was to appoint James Craig as police chief in 2013.

Under Craig's leadership, DPD expanded its surveillance

system to make the city attractive to investors. In collaboration with wealthy downtown moguls like Dan Gilbert (Quicken Loans/Bedrock), the Ilitch family (Little Caesars), DTE, and General Motors, Craig spearheaded the creation of a state-of-the-art command center for DPD's surveillance and intelligence operations called the Real Time Crime Center (RTCC). Over the next five years, the RTCC grew from four intelligence consoles with twenty-six staff members to a 9,000 square-foot command center with two satellite locations. It also laid the groundwork for cooperation with county, state, and federal law enforcement.

While the RTCC was being built, DPD launched PGL. In January 2016, while the RTCC was being built, DPD launched PGL by installing

BLACK COMMUNITIES, WHO HAVE BEEN UNDER-RESOURCED AND IGNORED FOR DECADES WANT TO BE SEEN, NOT WATCHED.

Tawana Petty

high-definition cameras at eight gas stations, which streamed live video footage to the RTCC. Participating businesses purchased high definition cameras, high-speed internet, PGL signage, window decals, and a flashing green light to advertise their participation in the program. In exchange, DPD promised to "virtually patrol" partner locations, increase patrol visits, monitor incidents on camera feeds, and give priority response time for 9-1-1 calls. Receiving priority response to 9-1-1 calls in exchange for 24/7 surveillance footage was an attractive proposition for some in a city with notoriously slow emergency response times. This pay-to-play system has sold promises of protection to those who can afford it, and incentivized the continuous monitoring of

Detroiters. As of July 2022, PGL has grown to over 800 businesses, apartment buildings, churches, healthcare offices, and other commercial and buildings and corridors across the city.

The growth of PGL and expansion of Detroit's surveillance system through the use of facial recognition technology, gunshot detection systems, and data analytics software has come amidst national protests against police violence and systemic racism. Detroiters have consistently raised concerns about the impacts of police surveillance on Black communities in the city as part of this national struggle. In the words of veteran organizer Tawana Petty, "Black communities, who have been under-resourced and ignored for decades, want to be seen, not watched."



SURVEILLANCE LOOKS LIKE

BEING

WATCHED,

NOT

SEEN

SURVEILLANCE INFRASTRUCTURE

casts a vast, pervasive, predatory web

TOOLS of the System

Beyond green lights at gas stations, many other



WHY IS DPD AT WAR WITH DETROITERS?

DPD regularly brings implements of war—tanks, body armor, helicopters, tear gas—in—to neighborhoods.

89%

of ShotSpotter alerts fail to identify gun-related incidents

SHOTSPOTTER FAILS MOST OF THE TIME

sources feed into the city's surveillance infrastructure, as well

SUCH AS



THINK YOU'RE EXEMPT?

THINK AGAIN

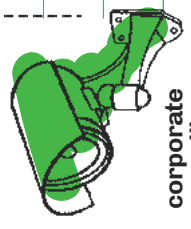
Facial recognition technology often misidentifies people, especially Black faces. Just ask Robert Williams, who was wrongfully arrested by DPD in 2020 because of a faulty facial recognition match.



FAILURE RATE

96%

FAILURE RATE



corporate surveillance systems



Shot Spotter devices

residents' private surveillance systems

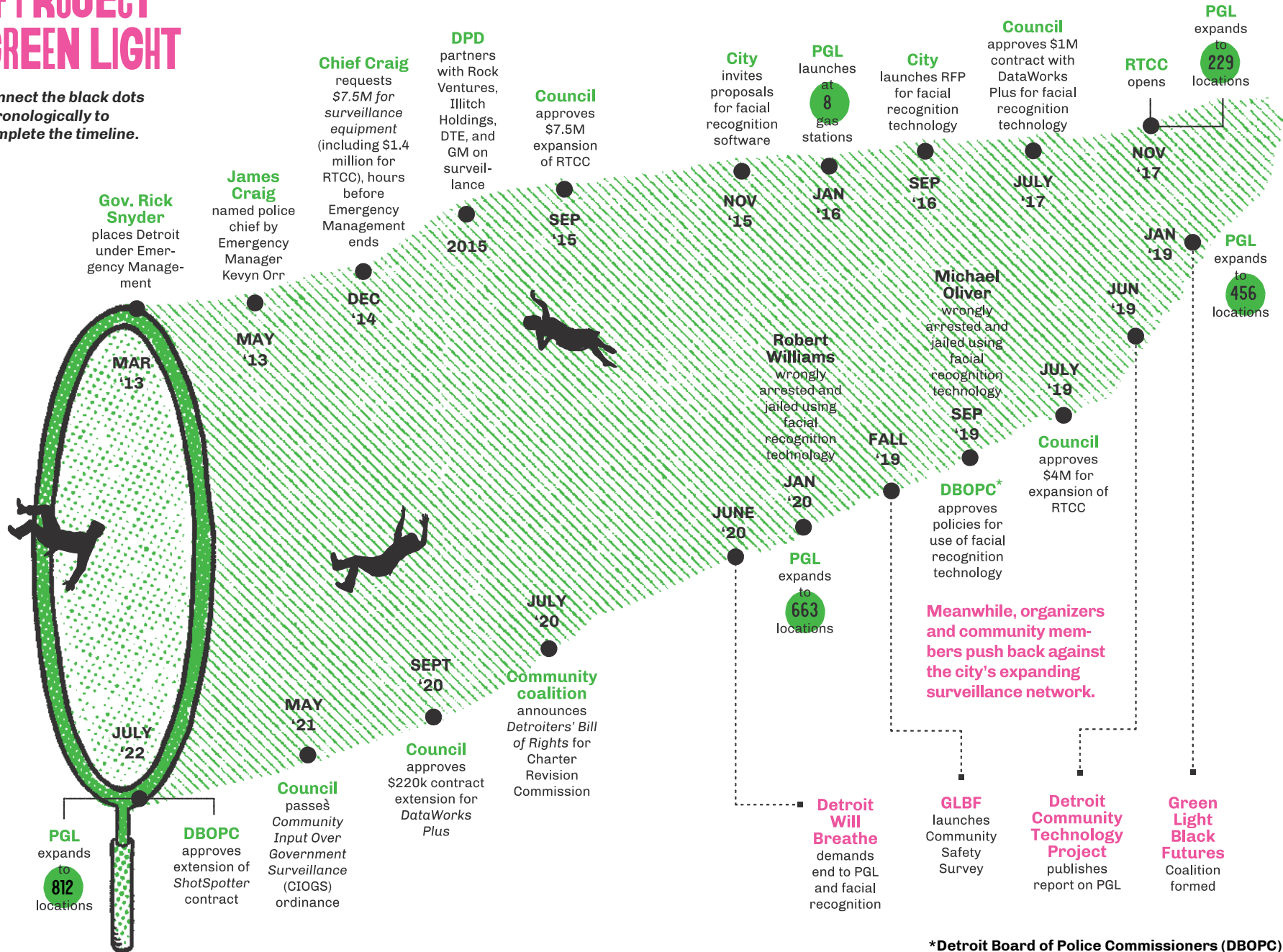


SURVEILLANCE DOES NOT PREVENT, SOLVE, OR REDUCE HARM

But it does rob Detroiters of privacy, rights, freedoms, and public funding that could actually cultivate safety.

A TIMELINE OF PROJECT GREEN LIGHT

Connect the black dots chronologically to complete the timeline.



*Detroit Board of Police Commissioners (DBOPC)

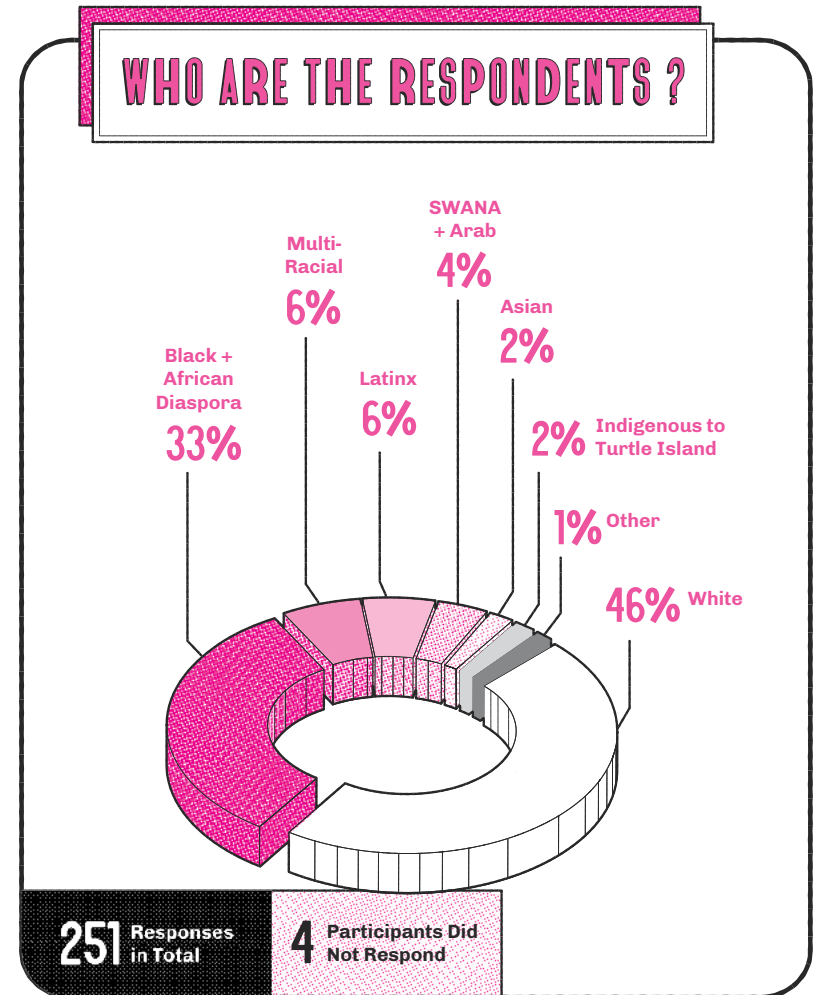
3 GLBF COMMUNITY SAFETY SURVEY

The Green Light Black Futures Coalition Community Safety Survey was developed by the Committee for Action, Research & Education (CARE) Team in the fall of 2019.

Coalition members developed questions about what Detroiters prioritized most on topics of personal and community safety, community members' knowledge of Project Green Light, and how Detroiters organize for safety in their communities. Over the course of two years (2019-2020), physical copies of the survey were distributed through canvassing

outreach and street teams, and collected at every action and event organized by the coalition. Links to the online survey were also distributed and results collected during this time.

Through our analysis of survey responses, we found that 35% of the respondents identified as Black or African-American, and 84% of those who took the survey lived within the city of Detroit. Because of the widespread reach of the survey online and the number of people who lived beyond the city limits and were actively engaged during and after 2020's uprisings, 14% of the opinions represented in



Because we know that these figures do not proportionally reflect Detroit's demographics, we have centered the responses of Black Detroiters in the quotes that are highlighted in this report.

survey responses were from people who lived outside of the city of Detroit.

This survey reveals community perceptions of safety at the personal, neighborhood and community, and

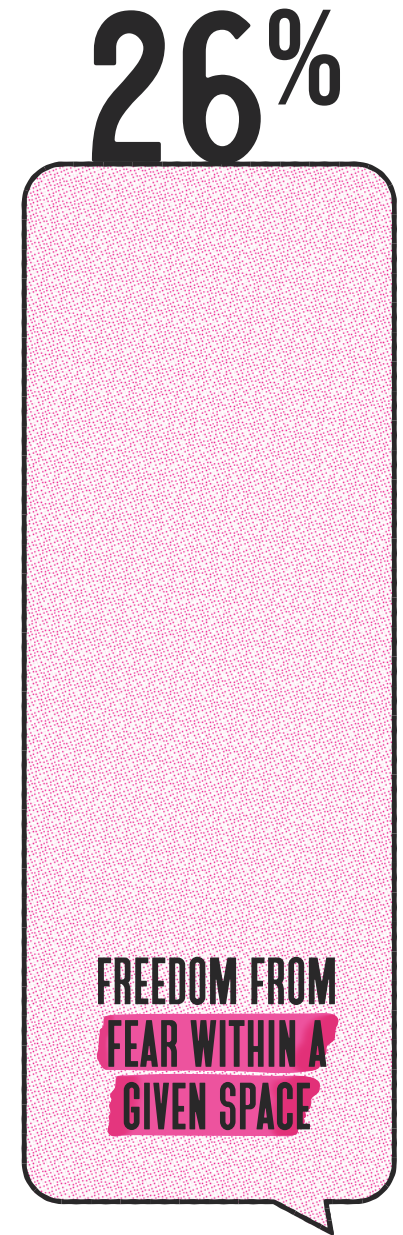
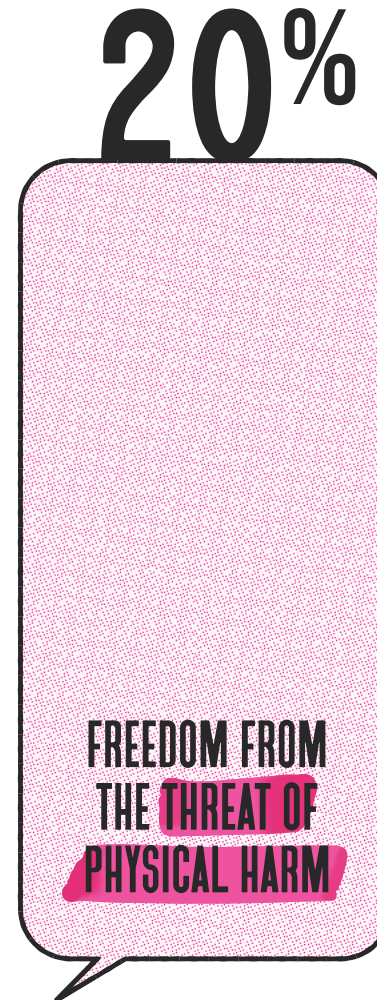
civic levels. It shows that to community members, safety means having control over our environments, and the freedom to move through them without the threat of harm to us or our loved ones.

SAFETY IS FREEDOM FROM BODILY HARM AND VIOLENCE

SURVEY QUESTION

What does safety mean to you?

177 RESPONSES



Many respondents also emphasized freedom of movement and mobility as important for feeling safe. They describe that having choice, freedom, and control over how they move through their immediate environment is essential to feeling safe, especially for those with marginalized identities of race, gender, and/or queerness.

**SAFETY IS
“PERSONAL
DISTANCE FROM
A LIKELIHOOD OF
BECOMING THE
VICTIM OF A VIOLENT
CRIME...INCLUDING
POLICE BRUTALITY.”**

Survey Respondent

**SAFETY MEANS
FREEDOM FROM BEING
“KILLED, ATTACKED,
ROBBED, FOLLOWED,
WATCHED.”**

Survey Respondent

**“SAFETY MEANS
BEING FREE TO COME
AND GO AND WALK
MY NEIGHBORHOOD
WITHOUT FEAR OF
BEING BOTHERED,
HARRASSED,
ASSAULTED,
ACCUSED, MADE TO
FEEL LIKE I DON'T
BELONG BY ANYONE.”**

Survey Respondent

**SAFETY MEANS
“FREEDOM AND
PEACE OF MIND FOR
ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE
IN ALL KINDS OF
SPACES.”**

Survey Respondent

What does safety mean to you?

“BEING ABLE TO RELY ON NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS FOR HELP WHEN NEEDED, HAVING A PLACE TO SLEEP, EAT, GO TO THE BATHROOM. NOT BEING NEAR, QUESTIONED BY OR WATCHED BY POLICE, KNOWING AROUND ME THAT THE YOUNG PEOPLE, HOMELESS PEOPLE, SPANISH SPEAKING PEOPLE ARE NOT GOING TO BE MESSED WITH BY POLICE, FEELING COMFORTABLE TO SAY HI TO PEOPLE WALKING BY.”

Survey Respondent

**RELYING ON
FRIENDS
AND FAMILY,
NOT POLICE**

What does safety mean to you?

“SAFETY TO ME MEANS STAY[ING] SECLUDED FROM POTENTIAL DANGERS AROUND ME. AND LEARNING PREVENTIONS TO SITUATIONS THAT OTHERS GO THROUGH ON A DAILY BASIS. STAYING AS DISCREET AS POSSIBLE IN ATTEMPTS TO NOT ATTRACT ANY UNWANTED OR UNWARRANTED ATTENTION FROM THE POLICE...

AVOIDING

POLICE

STAYING

‘LEGAL’

...NOT BECAUSE I HAVE SECRETS. BUT BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO PUT MYSELF IN ANY SITUATIONS I'VE SEEN IN MY LIFE FROM OTHERS. SAFETY MEANS DOING EVERYTHING LEGAL AND PROPERLY ARMING YOURSELF BECAUSE AT THE END OF THE DAY A SURVEILLANCE CAMERA ISN'T GOING TO HELP AT THAT EXACT MOMENT WHEN I DON'T FEEL SAFE.”

Survey Respondent

””

POLICE MAKE BAD SITUATIONS WORSE

In our survey, community members discussed varied reasons for calling the police.

SURVEY QUESTION

If you don't call the police, why not? What do you do instead?

144 RESPONSES

17%

POLICE RESPONSE CAUSES UNNECESSARY ANXIETY, UNSAFETY, VIOLENCE, AND DISTRUST

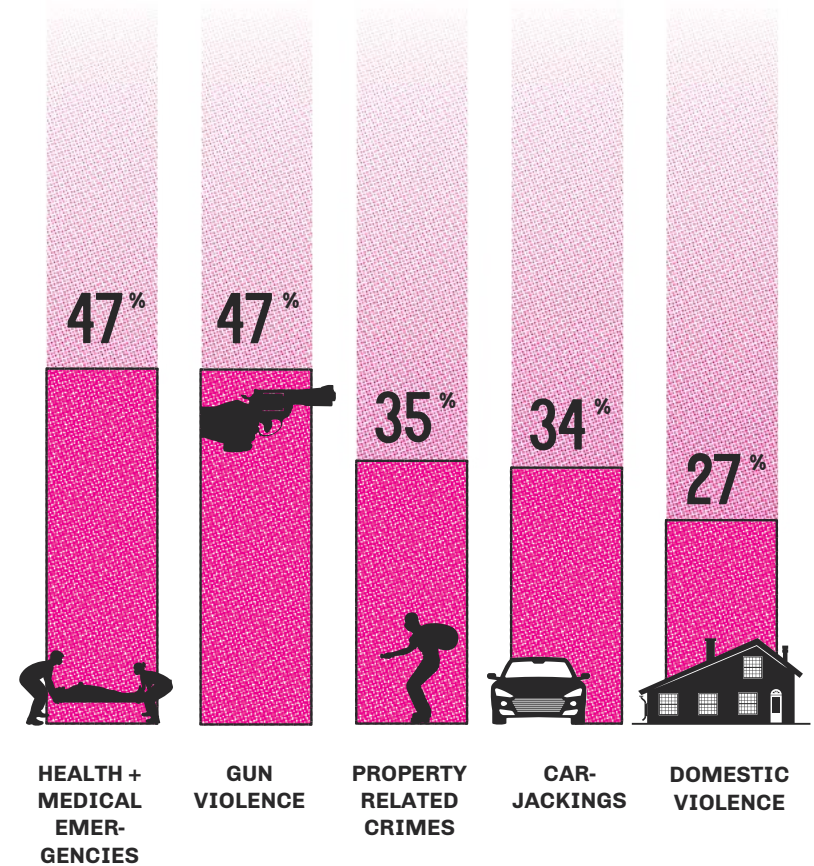
23%

POLICE OFFER LITTLE HELP AND OFTEN ESCALATE THE SITUATION

SURVEY QUESTION

If you do call the police, what reasons might you call in for?

116 RESPONSES



**If you do not call the police, why not?
What do you do instead?**

“POLICE ESCALATE NON VIOLENT CALLS.

ALL POLICE DON'T PROTECT AND SERVE. MOST HARASS AND ONE CAR MAY BE CALLED BUT THEIR PARTNERS MAY JUST SWING [BY] BECAUSE THEY'RE BORED AND HARASS INNOCENT PEOPLE. FLASH THEIR HIGH BEAM FLASHLIGHT INTO ONCOMING CARS. MOST IMPORTANTLY THEY DON'T COME IMMEDIATELY THEY TAKE HOURS TO COME OUT TO [A] CALL.”

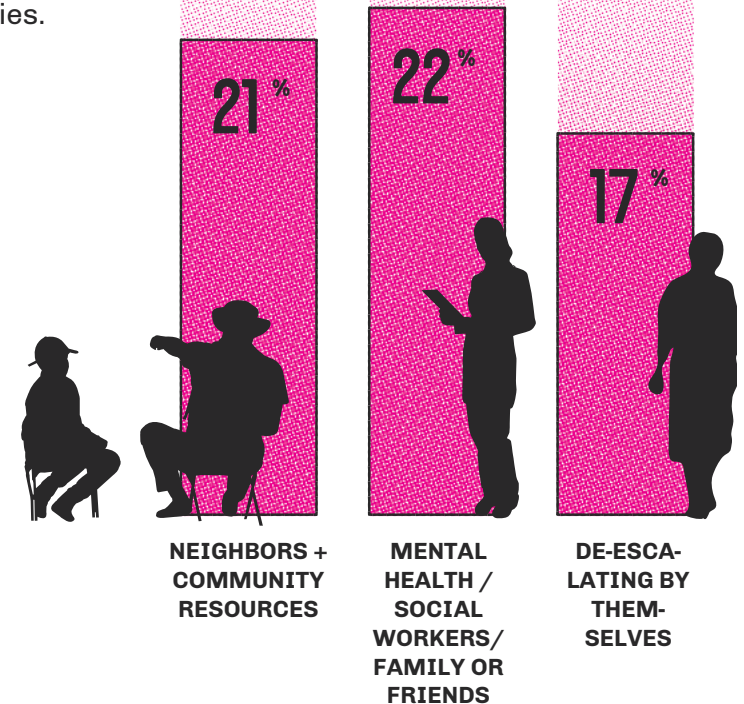
Survey Respondent

SURVEY QUESTION

If you don't call the police, why not? What do you do instead?

144 RESPONSES

These responses all show the importance of strengthening alternative resources within communities.



**If you do not call the police, why not?
What do you do instead?**

“I LIVE IN A MAJORITY BLACK NEIGHBORHOOD AND I DON’T TRUST RACIST COPS NOT TO USE VIOLENCE SINCE THAT SEEMS TO BE THEIR ONLY SOLUTION. INSTEAD THERE HAVE BEEN MULTIPLE TIMES WHEN I’VE RELIED ON TALKING TO NEIGHBORS FACE TO FACE OR USING OUR COMBINED SKILLSETS AS A BLOCK TO SOLVE PROBLEMS AND CONFLICTS WHEN THEY ARISE, LIKE WHEN A NEIGHBOR’S ACQUAINTANCE STOLE OUR PRIDE FLAG, OR WHEN WE FOUND AN ABANDONED CAR BLOCKING OUR DRIVEWAY AND WE WORRIED THE DRIVER WAS IN DANGER.

BOTH SITUATIONS WERE RESOLVED AND PROVIDED OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY BECAUSE WE REITERATED IN CONVERSATIONS WITH NEIGHBORS THAT WE DON’T CALL THE POLICE UNLESS SOMEONE IS SERIOUSLY INJURED, DYING, OR DEAD.”

Survey Respondent

Detroit’s communities have consistently fought back against police violence and worked to create alternative forms of safety.

During the national Black Lives Matter movement, organizations like GLBF and Detroit Will Breathe (DWB) took these concerns to the streets, neighborhoods, and City Hall to demand safety from police violence for Detroiters.

DWB emerged following the police murder of George Floyd in 2020, marching for over a year to demand the defunding and demilitarization of DPD, ending Project Green Light and facial recognition, and reinvesting in housing, water, healthcare, and disability justice as pillars of safe communities.

Over the past several years, organizations like the Detroit Safety Team (DST) and Metro Detroit Restorative Justice Network (MDRJN) have responded to community needs by creating ways to keep communities safe that do not rely on policing. DST offers training services in Safety Training, Community Building, and Restorative Processes. DST is also

building a City-Wide Safety Team through its Neighborhood Fellowship Program, which brings together cohorts of city residents to receive training in mediation, intervention, and de-escalation practices through restorative justice programs.

MDRJN, a project of the Detroit Justice Center, advocates for expanded access to restorative justice, and promotes it as a viable alternative to punitive justice, one that centers the needs of those impacted by harm. MDRJN is developing a Community-Based Restorative Justice Toolkit to be used by local communities, faith groups, direct service providers, and local community organizers/activists.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

“emphasizes bringing together everyone affected by wrongdoing to address needs and responsibilities and to heal the harm to relationships and community, to the degree possible.”

Fania E. Davis, Race and Restorative Justice

**If you do not call the police, why not?
What do you do instead?**

**“THE POLICE ALMOST NEVER HELP...
THEY DON'T RESOLVE CASES OR DO ANY
INVESTIGATION. AND I'VE BEEN STOPPED
FOR WALKING WHILE BLACK SO MANY
TIMES I JUST DON'T TRUST THEM. SOME
ISSUES I'VE HAD ARE NOT IMPORTANT
ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT. LIKE GETTING
SOMETHING STOLEN. OTHER TIMES
WHEN PEOPLE ARE MISSING I JUST CALL
AROUND FOR THEM, I.E. HOSPITALS OR
JAIL. AND I'VE GOTTEN IN BETWEEN FOLKS
FIGHTING BEFORE. THERE WAS A TIME
WHEN I'D THREATEN TO CALL THE COPS TO
GET PEOPLE TO STOP FIGHTING WITHOUT
EVER INTENDING TO CALL, BUT I DON'T DO
THAT ANYMORE.”**

Survey Respondent

**POLICE
ALMOST
NEVER
HELP**

SAFETY COMES FROM INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY

Interpersonal relationships allow community members to look after one another, and to count on each other when they need support. Residents describe that being known, seen and understood is the opposite of police surveillance. Specifically, safety means “knowing that folks are looking out for me,” as opposed to “being watched through surveillance.”

This is safety that comes from the community itself, through community-based care. The importance of community institutions for safety has shaped the approach of organizations like the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality (DCAPB) and their Peace Zones 4 Life (PZ4L) program. PZ4L creates community-based approaches to safety and the prevention of police violence by de-escalating conflicts and developing community institutions to create “self-sustaining communities” which promote safety and prevent “crime.”

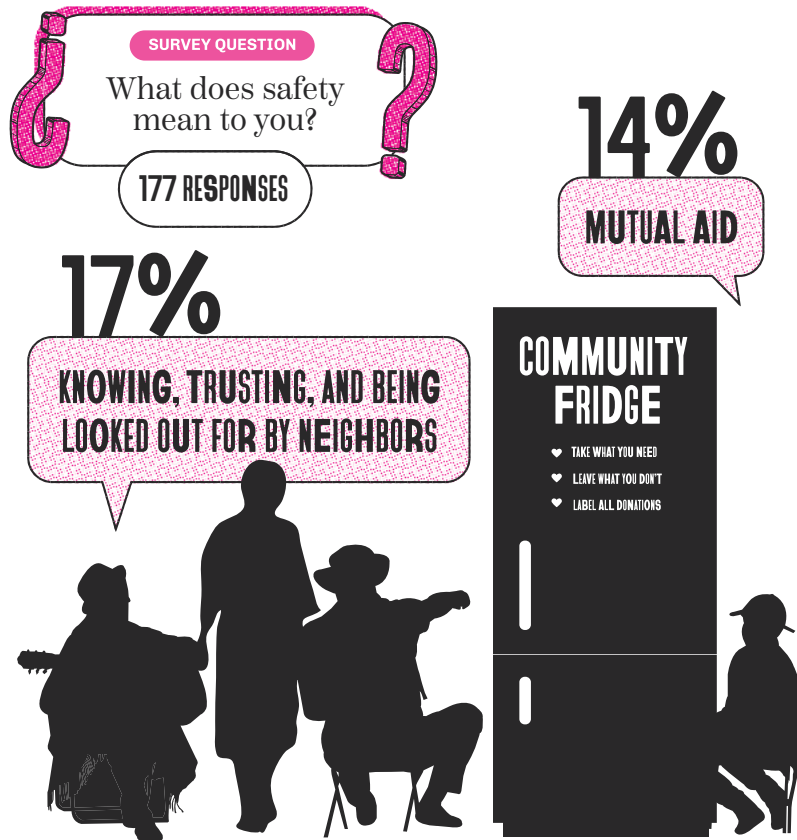
Creating Peace Zones begins with an assessment of challenges, needs,

What does safety mean to you?

“HAVING A NETWORK OF PEOPLE NEAR ME THAT I CAN TRUST IF I NEED HELP...

SAFETY IS NOT FEELING ISOLATED...PEOPLE WHO HAVE YOUR BACK AND WILL TAKE YOU IN WHEN YOU NEED SOMETHING—LIKE WHEN YOU’RE AFRAID OR SICK OR HUNGRY. IT’S KNOWING THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU AND THAT THEY CARE ABOUT YOUR WELL-BEING AND GROWTH AND YOU FEEL THE SAME ABOUT THEM (AND YOU’D HAVE THEIR BACK, TOO). THE PROXIMITY THING IS IMPORTANT.”

Survey Respondent



and opportunities in the community, through which leaders and organizers are identified. The practice of de-escalation and mediation are carried out at conflict resolution centers in neutral places (like churches and community centers), while groups of young folks are trained to keep the peace in the community. PZ4L incorporates art and storytelling

projects to chronicle neighborhood challenges and celebrate community heroes to “connect individuals and catalyze change.” The concept of Peace Zones, organizer Shea Howell explained to us, shifts conversations away from control and punishment to drawing from community traditions to “create peaceful relationships among us.”

What makes you feel safe in your neighborhood?

“**ME KNOWING THE PEOPLE IN MY COMMUNITY MAKES ME FEEL SAFER**

THAN OTHER PLACES BECAUSE YOU HAVE PEOPLE NOT CONNECTED TO ME OR MY FAMILY IN ANY WAY THAT WATCHED ME GROW [AS A] HEAVY POLICE PRESENCE AT THE BUSINESS I GO TO ON A DAY TO DAY BASIS AND THAT I KNOW THE COMMUNITY AROUND ME.”

Survey Respondent



Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality organizer Sandra Hines (left) sits with children and organizer Kim Redigan (right) during a Peace Zones 4 Life event at Freedom Freedom Growers in 2016. Photo: Zak Rosen/Michigan Radio.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURES BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

Community members highlighted the importance of physical and social infrastructures in supporting safety, by allowing community members to use shared spaces, and by helping interpersonal relationships to grow.

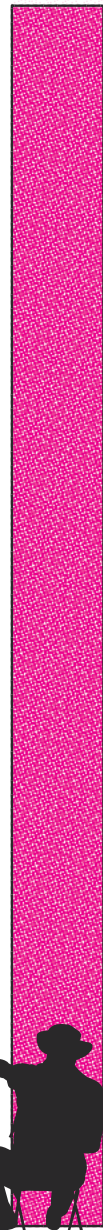
SURVEY QUESTION

What groups of people, resources, and/or services contribute to the safety you feel in your neighborhood?

173 RESPONSES

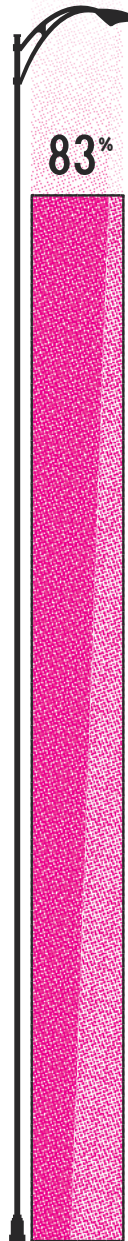


97%



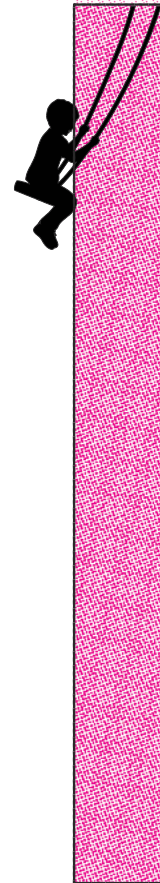
NEIGHBORS

83%



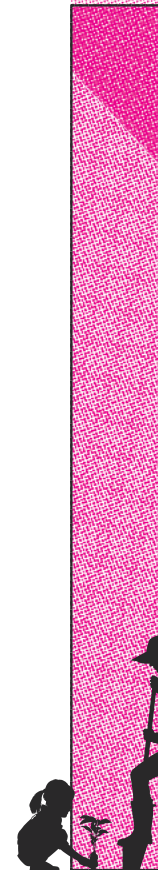
PARKS + PLAY-GROUNDS

70%



STREET LIGHTS

69%



CMTY FARMS + GARDENS

68%



SMALL BUSI-NESSSES

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

67%



BLOCK CLUBS

40%



HEALTH-CARE

Community members widely named streetlights as an essential component of safe environments, with the majority (144, 83.2%) including basic lighting infrastructure as critical

for neighborhood safety. Community members describe that streetlights and porch lights encourage communication and relationships with neighbors, which is essential for safety.

SURVEY QUESTION

What groups of people, resources, and/or services contribute to the safety you feel in your neighborhood?

173 RESPONSES

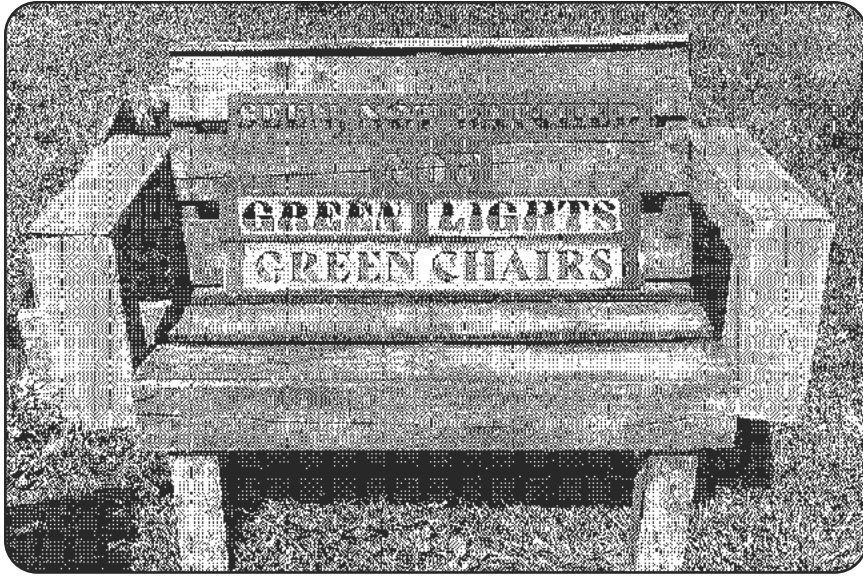
“FRIENDLY PEOPLE AND NEIGHBORS AROUND, STREET LIGHTS AND THE ACTIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN NEIGHBORS.”

Survey Respondent

“STREET LIGHTS, NEIGHBORS ON PORCHES THAT TALK TO EACH OTHER, LOTS OF GARDENS, PARKS WITH KIDS PLAYING IN THEM.”

Survey Respondent

Surveillance infrastructure is a black box: we're told that it keeps us safe, but the average person doesn't know much about how it actually works or the data it gathers. Good lighting infrastructure is the opposite: it allows community members to understand the environment and to make their own choices about how to stay safe within it.



A bench and stencils created for the Green Chairs Not Green Lights campaign, August 2020. Photo: Rebecca Smith.

In the same way that lighting helps community members to feel safe in their environment, the Green Chairs Not Green Lights project uses the design and placement of chairs and benches to create safety through community connections. Operating under the slogan of “return to front porches,” Green Chairs was launched at Freedom Freedom Growers in Detroit’s east side Jefferson Chalmers neighborhood in 2019 and encourages people to think back to the days when neighbors sat on their front porches to look out for one another, keep an

eye on the block, and create a strong social fabric in the community. Green Chairs envisions a city where people create ways of keeping each other safe and dealing with harm at a neighborhood level instead of relying on surveillance cameras and police. In public discussions of the project, organizer Myrtle Curtis-Thompson has said, “There has not been one person I’ve talked to about Green Chairs, Not Green Lights who hasn’t said, ‘I want to hear more. That sounds wonderful. We need more of that.’”



Myrtle Thompson-Curtis facilitates a workshop on Green Chairs Not Green Lights at Freedom Freedom Growers in Sept. 2019. Photo: Green Light Black Futures Coalition.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY MAKE COMMUNITIES SAFE

“SAFETY IS
FOR THE MOST
MARGINALIZED
PEOPLE TO
DETERMINE IN
ANY GROUP.”

When asked to define safety, out of 177 responses, 21 responses (11.9%) stressed that measures of safety should include every member of our society, especially those who have been historically marginalized because of race, gender, class, and / or queer identity. In one community member's words, “Safety is for the most marginalized people to determine in any group.” Some participants took this further, suggesting that collective safety requires individuals to actively combat systems of bias and oppression.

What does safety mean to you?

“SAFETY MEANS PROVIDING AN
EQUAL AND JUST
SOCIETY FOR ALL,
WHICH MEANS ACKNOWLEDGING
THE SYSTEMS OF BIASES THAT
PLACE PEOPLE OF COLOR AT A
DISADVANTAGE. IT MEANS NOT ONLY
ACKNOWLEDGING IT BUT ACTIVELY
COMBATING IT IN A REACTIVE MODE
OF ACTION BUT ALSO BUILDING NEW
AND JUST SYSTEMS IN A PROTECTIVE
MODE OF ACTION.”

Survey Respondent

NEW MEASURES OF SAFETY

MUTUAL AID

"Mutual aid focuses on helping people get what they need right now, as we work to get to the root causes of these problems."

Dean Spade,
author of *Mutual Aid*

The Green Light Black Futures Community Safety Survey shows that future conversations around what safety is, how safety is measured, and how to better support safety for the community have to be informed by the importance of human relationships, policing alternatives, and questions of social justice.

These survey responses show community members understand and value safety in a very different way than the limited framing of policing and crime rates. Because crime data exists to justify surveillance technology and policing it does not measure human infrastructure like personal relationships and mutual aid, physical infrastructure like community spaces and good lighting, or larger questions of social justice: the things that make us all safer. These true forms of safety are not only left out of the way that safety is often evaluated by the Detroit Police Department, the city, and law enforcement, they are directly threatened by surveillance, and particularly by biometric technology like facial recognition.



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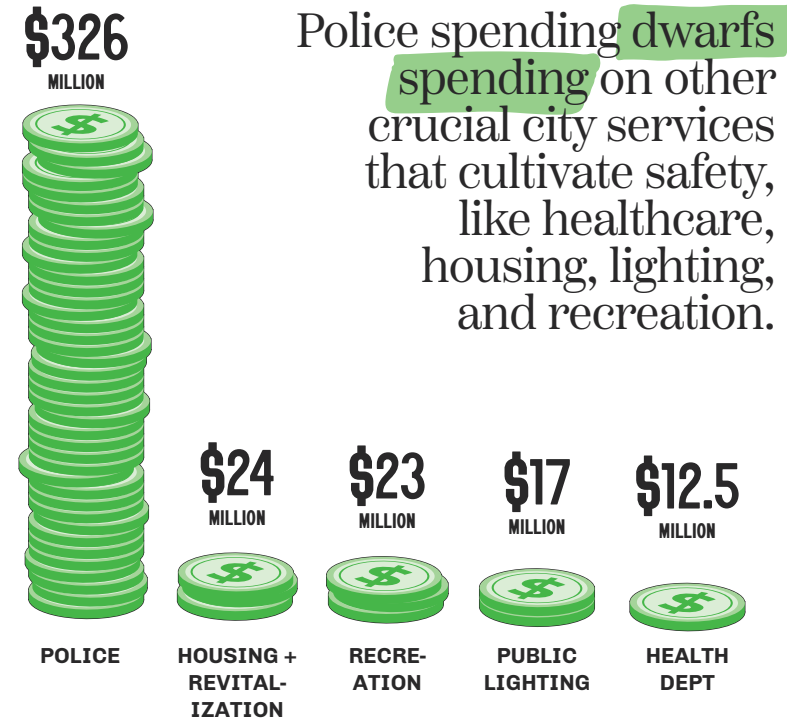
POLICE SURVEILLANCE THREATENS CIVIL RIGHTS

As the number of PGL locations has grown in spite of community concerns, the city has also invested tens of millions of dollars in software platforms for facial recognition, surveillance data analytics, and social media surveillance, as well as automated license plate readers, hi-tech traffic cameras, vehicle recognition sensors, audio devices to detect gunfire, cameras for helicopters, and other surveillance hardware

that feed into the Real Time Crime Center (RTCC).

These moving parts make it hard to calculate the total cost of Detroit's surveillance infrastructure, but a rough estimate based on available city contracts adds up to over \$30 million since 2014.

PGL's power comes from the RTCC. Researchers from the Electronic Frontier Foundation likened the city's surveillance system to a "nervous system belonging to a monstrous organism." The thousands of cameras for PGL serve as "the eyes, ears, nose, and fingertips," which send information back to the RTCC, "its never-sleeping surveillance brain."



Police spending dwarfs spending on other crucial city services that cultivate safety, like healthcare, housing, lighting, and recreation.

These figures represent budget allocations from the city's General Fund, which shows how much the city planned to spend on each department for the 2022 fiscal year. They do not reflect total expenditures, which vary based on supplemental funding from county, state, and federal agencies. Source: City of Detroit, FY 2023-2026 Four-Year Financial Plan.

This runaway spending shows a commitment to expanding the police state in Detroit without regard for civil rights or any evidence that such massive investments have actually made the city safer. Worse yet, Mayor Duggan and DPD have proposed using \$7.5 million in federal COVID relief funding to expand the controversial ShotSpotter gunfire detection program throughout

the city, another \$1.5 million to renew system software, and an undisclosed amount for vehicle recognition cameras. Reports from Chicago have shown that ShotSpotter has not curbed gun violence, but has led to police using discriminatory stop-and-frisk and excessive force in Black communities, including the fatal police shooting of 13-year-old Adam Toledo in 2021.

Facial recognition technology often misidentifies people, especially Black faces. Robert Williams, pictured below, was wrongfully arrested by DPD in 2020 because of a faulty facial recognition match.

FAILURE RATE
96%
FAILURE RATE

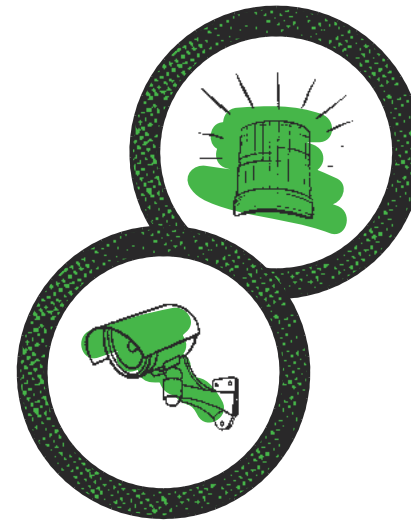


In spite of the \$30 million plus that the City of Detroit has invested in its surveillance infrastructure since 2014, surveillance has not been proven to prevent, solve, or reduce crime.

It has, however, criminalized Black Detroiters and transferred public resources to DPD and private corporations with little oversight or protections for civil rights. This massive investment in surveillance is dangerous for Detroiters on multiple levels.

When combined with facial recognition technology, PGL disproportionately targets, misidentifies, and criminalizes Black people.

Former police chief James Craig himself admitted facial recognition misidentifies people “96% of the time.” Misidentification has led to the wrongful arrests of at least two Black men (Robert Williams and Michael Oliver) in Detroit based on false identifications. “I lost my job and my car; my whole life had to be put on hold,” Oliver explained in statements to the media. “That technology shouldn’t be used by police.”



Detroiters have reported that the arrival of PGL cameras has increased police harassment in working-class Black neighborhoods—particularly in areas primed for gentrification.

The hyper-policing and surveillance of these neighborhoods make it hard “for any young Black person to walk down the street, let alone realize their dreams,” Detroitier Lloyd Simpson wrote in 2021.

Police surveillance has historically been weaponized against civil rights

“THEY’VE GOT CAMERAS EVERYWHERE, THEY’VE GOT FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY, IT MAKES IT VERY **INTIMIDATING** AND KEEPS PEOPLE FROM BEING POLITICALLY ACTIVE.”

Brian Silverstein,
organizer with
Detroit Will Breathe

activists, including the mass movements that emerged in 2020. “They’ve got cameras everywhere, they’ve got facial recognition technology, it makes it very intimidating”



and “keep[s] people from being politically active,” Brian Silverstein, an organizer with Detroit Will Breathe told us.

While cameras make some Detroiters feel safer in their neighborhoods, this investment in surveillance has come at the expense of Black

and brown Detroiters and is being driven by white businesses downtown and not the interests of the people.

“It is Downtown Detroit on the rebound,” attorney David Robinson explained to us, “the politics are there, so the hell with civil rights.”

**“IT IS DOWNTOWN
DETROIT ON THE
REBOUND...THE
POLITICS ARE THERE,**

**SO THE HELL WITH
CIVIL RIGHTS.”**

David Robinson, attorney



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CRIME DATA DOESN'T MEASURE SAFETY

Crime data is not objective

Despite all of the wide-ranging ways that community members define safety, and all of the ways that Detroiters describe feeling unsafe and threatened by Project Green Light and other forms of surveillance, the city and the DPD continue to make narrow claims that Project Green Light is 'working' based only on vague references to crime rates; claims that cannot be fact-checked or proven.

When they say "crime is down" or refer to "crime rates," are they talking about the number of arrests, or the amount of convictions? Which category of crimes are they referring to? Are these just crimes at Project Green Light locations? If more crimes are being reported because of constant surveillance, and more arrests are made, doesn't this actually increase the rate of crime and make the crime rate go up?

In 2020, researchers in the Department of Criminology at Michigan State University tried to analyze these variables, but even they were not able to prove that PGL had any significant impact on arrest or conviction rates.

"The findings on the impact on crime trends are difficult to interpret. We did not find clear and consistent indications of crime declines associated with Project Green Light participation."

"Project Greenlight Detroit: Evaluation Report." Circo et al, 2020.

The only type of crime the MSU report states as having a higher rate of arrests for these crimes, at PGL versus non-PGL locations (38.2% versus 18.7%) was car-jackings. Because of these factors, the authors state that, regarding crime in the city overall: "The findings on the impact on crime trends are difficult to interpret. We did not find clear and consistent indications of crime declines associated with PGLD participation."

Crime data perpetuates systemic racism

Why are we relying on crime data to tell us if we are safe in the first place? We are all so used to the idea that crime rates are an objective measure of safety in our communities, but crime data has not always been used this way.


The use of crime data became popular in the 1960s and 1970s, during the height of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. As cities and urban communities were becoming more populated by Black and brown people, crime data was used to describe conditions of safety, and to manage cities from a distance. This put responsibility for safety in the hands of governments and police, instead of communities on the ground.

Elizabeth Hinton and Khalil Gibran Muhammad have both written about how crime data and other statistics have been used, historically, to characterize Black people as a danger to public safety.

“Violent crime rates in the nation’s biggest cities are generally understood as a reflection of the presence and behavior of the black men, women, and children who live there.”

Khalil Gibran Muhammad

The use of crime data feeds into the false narrative of Black criminality that is used to justify the over-policing of Black communities, and leads to the overrepresentation of Black people within the prison population. Spread by police, politicians, media, and popular culture, these narratives pose Black people as dangerous. This lets police departments justify ever-growing budgets, framed as investments in public safety, despite how brutality and violence carried out by police unevenly impact and target Black and brown people. More policing leads to more arrests and higher crime rates, which leads to more policing, and technologies like Project Green Light.



Crime data is a distorted representation: it supports racist policing practices, and the racist characterization of Black people and communities as criminal and dangerous.


Crime data can't be trusted

Crime data is collected by the police, who have an interest in proving that policing is effective in reducing crime.

Crime data is used to determine department funding and promotions, and to support political careers, as was just demonstrated by former Detroit police chief James Craig in his failed attempt to run for governor. It is important to keep these factors in mind when police departments present crime data as evidence of increased safety in cities. Even the FBI warns that crime data should not be relied on as a measure of safety.

Crime data is a distorted representation: it supports racist policing practices, and the racist characterization of Black people and communities as criminal and dangerous. Crime data itself is a form of

violence, because it results in over-policing, criminalization, and the diversion of resources that could be put to better use addressing the root causes of violence. The narrative of crime data perpetuates the idea that safety can only be provided through policing, and ignores all of the meaningful forms of safety that are created by community members, on their own terms.



6 CONCLUSION


Policing and surveillance are funded at the expense of public safety in the city of Detroit.

As continued acts of police violence around the nation have fueled the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement, Detroiters have organized against the harms of policing and the expansion of surveillance in the city. While Detroit police, city officials, and mainstream media have tried to alienate activists and silence criticism of Project Green Light and police violence, younger generations of Detroiters have built upon the legacies of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements to demand an end to police violence by investing time and energy into their neighborhoods

and communities, and developing alternative forms of public safety. Like their activist elders, Detroiters have adopted a range of approaches to organizing for community safety, including policy advocacy, direct action protest, mutual aid efforts, and community-based alternatives to policing.

The Safety Survey data shows that long-time Detroiters know better than anyone what they need to feel safe in their neighborhoods—and it isn't more police surveillance. If city officials are really interested in public safety, it's time they start listening to Detroiters and investing in communities who have shown the collective capacity to envision and create a safe and vibrant city.

If city officials are really interested in public safety, it's time they start listening to Detroiters and investing in communities who have shown the collective capacity to envision and create a safe and vibrant city.



7 RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR POLICING AND CITY GOVERNMENT



City officials should **defund and discontinue support for** the Real Time Crime Center, Project Green Light, and other parts of the Detroit Police Department's surveillance infrastructure.



City Council should **terminate all contracts** with private surveillance companies, including but not limited to: Motorola Solutions, DataWorks Plus, and ShotSpotter.



City Council should **adopt the provisions of the Detroiters Bill of Rights** proposed by the Charter Revision Commission in 2020, including demilitarizing the police, restricting the use of surveillance technologies owned and operated by public agencies in Detroit including the police, and restructuring the Board of Police Commissioners to reflect true accountability to the community.



Green Light Black Futures members and supporters march through Corktown during a Sept. 2019 Black Brunch action where organizers called for divesting from surveillance and investing in real sources of community safety like foreclosure prevention, employment, and water affordability. Photo: Green Light Black Futures Coalition.



City Council should **create and fund community response teams** so that wellness checks, substance use, and mental health issues do not get dispatched through DPD.

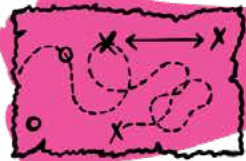


City Council should **invest in services** that preserve and increase the quality of life of residents, such as clean and affordable drinking water, a strong school district, food accessibility, permanently affordable housing, reliable and accessible public transportation, and public health initiatives.

FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS



If you are a manager or leader in your workplace or organization, **prioritize the creation of training opportunities** for employees and members that address crisis de-escalation and conflict resolution. If you are an employee, demand the need for this kind of training in your workplace.



Establish **crisis and emergency response plans** within your workplace, school, church congregation, apartment building, or non-profit that prioritizes conflict de-escalation, open communication, and addressing the needs of those in conflict, without calling the police.



Get involved with organizations, like the Detroit Safety Team and the Metro Detroit Restorative Justice Network, that work with transformative and restorative justice frameworks and apply these modes of non-violent resolution in the community.



Reach out to your neighbors to talk about the dangers of surveillance and police brutality, and establish a plan for how to deal with conflict in your neighborhood.



Do not enroll in Project Green Light. If you own a business, property, or lead an organization, talk to your customers, residents, congregants and other community members to find alternative ways to keep your location safe.

FOR JOURNALISTS AND RESEARCHERS



Investigate relationships between surveillance operations and civilian complaints of police misconduct in Detroit. The 2021 McArthur Justice Center report on ShotSpotter in Chicago could be used as a model for this kind of inquiry.



Give **equitable attention** to community concerns about surveillance. Use your work to amplify the voices of community organizers who are creating safe neighborhoods without relying on surveillance, policing, and incarceration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work of challenging police violence and, by extension, resisting the pervasive surveillance of Black and brown neighborhoods always starts in communities, and has been ongoing in Detroit for decades.

The fight against police brutality and the evolving technologies of policing is a central pillar of the Black Radical Tradition that must be informed and led by the experiences of communities who are most deeply impacted by policing and criminalization.

The authors of this report want to acknowledge the labor, creativity, and leadership of everyone who contributed to the Green Light Black Futures coalition while it was active, especially in the coalition's dedication to political education work and

the creation and dissemination of the Community Safety Survey that is featured in this report.

We thank the organizers and activists who contributed statements or interviews to this report, including Shea Howell, Philip Mayor, Rodd Monts, David Robinson, Eric Williams, and Brian Silverstein. We also thank Piper Carter, Dr. Gloria Aneb House, Nancy Parker, Myrtle Thompson-Curtis, Kim Sherrobi, Amanda Hill, Angel McKissick, PG Watkins, and Rumi Weaver for their participation in listening sessions and feedback that helped shape this report. Lastly, we offer special acknowledgment to the work of Tawana Petty, the Detroit Community Technology Project, and the countless activists, journalists, educators, and community members who are committed to ending police brutality and surveillance culture.

“Malcolm X lauded the importance of the grassroots, as evinced in his famous (1963) ‘Message to the Grassroots’ speech in Detroit. Lost in the latest media frenzy over police brutality are the hundreds of grassroots organizations that have been doing the work, are doing the work, and will continue to do the work long after the #hashtags and the emails and the Twitters have faded and reporters and editors have moved on to the next ‘Big Thing.’”

Ron Scott, “How to End Police Brutality,” 2015.

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

ACLU of Michigan	www.aclumich.org
Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality	www.facebook.com/groups/dcapb
Detroit Coalition for Police Transparency and Accountability	www.detroitcpta.org
Detroit Community Technology Project	www.detroitcommunitytech.org
Detroit Justice Center	www.detroitjustice.org
Detroit Safety Team	www.redefinesafety.org
Detroit Will Breathe	www.detroitwillbreathe.info
Divest/Invest Coalition	www.detroitjustice.org/just-cities-lab
Feedom Freedom Growers	www.facebook.com/feedomfreedom
Green Chairs Not Green Lights	www.greenchairsnotgreenlights.org/
James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership	www.boggscenter.org
Metro Detroit Restorative Justice Network (MDRJN)	www.metrodetroitrj.org



2022

THIS BOOK IS
\$FREE

DETROITERS
WANT TO
BE

SEEN

NOT

WATCHED

WHAT PEOPLE, RESOURCES OR
SERVICES ARE NEEDED IN YOUR
NEIGHBORHOOD TO INCREASE
YOUR FEELING OF SAFETY?



**SURVEILLANCE
DOES NOT**

**PREVENT, SOLVE,
OR REDUCE HARM**

WHAT
DOES
SAFETY
MEAN
TO
YOU?