SUMMARY

ST. PAUL AREA CHAMBER

2023 PUBLIC SAFETY SURVEY

ABOUT THE SURVEY

Beginning in 2022, the St. Paul Area Chamber partnered with Rapp Strategies, Inc. and the Morris Leatherman Company to conduct a multi-year project to survey residents' attitudes about public safety and the impact of crime in St. Paul. The project features two annual surveys: A representative phone survey of randomly selected adult residents in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and City of St. Paul, and a self-selected online survey of Downtown St. Paul employees.

This report includes key takeaways from the 2023 results and comparisons to results from 2022 when applicable. Changes between years in the share of respondents who answered a specific way are shown by +/- indicators.

SCIENTIFIC PHONE SURVEY

Methodology - In both 2022 and 2023, the phone surveys randomly selected a sample of 800 adult residents in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and a balloon sample of 400 St. Paul residents. Professional interviewers conducted the 2023 survey by telephone between August 1 and 12. The results of the metropolitan telephone samples are projectable to all Twin Cities Metropolitan Area residents within 3.5% in 95 out of 100 cases. The results of the St. Paul balloon telephone samples are projectable to all St. Paul residents within 5.0% in 95 out of 100 cases.

In the analysis of this survey, each sample was divided into two subgroups based on their beliefs of the severity of public safety issues. **Less-concerned residents** are those who meet the following criteria:

- Crime is not a top two issue facing St. Paul (infrastructure was picked as the top issue);
- Crime is not increasing; and
- The city of St. Paul is doing an excellent or good job of dealing with crime.

52% of Metro residents and 57% of St. Paul residents are coded as **less concerned**, based on these questions. Consequently, 48% of Metro residents and 43% of St. Paul residents are considered **more concerned** about public safety.

This distinction helps us better understand the drivers of other opinions in this survey. For example, 32% of those who are **less concerned** about public safety in St. Paul still believe the issue will be very important to them in the November 2023 election. At the same, 63% of those who are **more concerned** say the issue will be very important, demonstrating the potential impact of crime on the city council races.

01 ▶ **Key Takeaway:** Fewer respondents see crime as a top issue facing St. Paul, but most respondents do not think that the threat of crime has decreased.

Prevalence: **More than 8 in 10 respondents believe crime has either increased or stayed about the same since August 2022.**

30% of St. Paul residents and 36% of metro-area respondents say that crime is increasing in St. Paul, while 51% and 53% think it has stayed the same.

73% of the St. Paul residents who see crime as an increasing problem say they know someone who has been a victim of crime in the last three years.

Severity: **The share of St. Paul residents who view crime as one of the top two issues facing the city fell from 38% to 23%.**

Among St. Paul residents who believe crime remains a top two issue facing the city (n=92):

77% See crime as an increasing problem.

83% Say they know someone who has been a victim of crime in the last three years.

02 ▶ **Key Takeaway:** Crime continues to impact the decisions that **more-concerned** respondents make to work, play and do business in St. Paul.

Over 60% of **more-concerned** St. Paul residents reported that crime is influencing which areas of St. Paul they visit, where they choose to eat and drink and where they choose to do business. Crime is having similar impacts on **more-concerned** residents in the surrounding metro who visit St. Paul, but on a lesser scale, possibly due to decreased proximity to the city and less frequent visits to the city.

Fundamentally, the share of **more-concerned** metro-area residents who report that crime is influencing their decisions in these areas fell from 2022. The most significant improvements were seen in the areas of dining and hospitality, though these results may be impacted by changes to pandemic-related restrictions and fears.

	More-concerned St. Paul respondents		More-concerned Metro-area respondents	
	Crime strongly impacts decisions	Crime is a factor in decisions	Crime strongly impacts decisions	Crime is a factor in decisions
Visiting certain neighborhoods	40% (+3)	72% (-11)	29% (-6)	64% (-15)
Going out for dinner/ drinks after events	29% (+6)	58% (+4)	14% (-9)	49% (-6)
Choosing where to shop, do business	27% (+1)	64% (+0)	14% (-5)	42% (-13)
Choosing restaurants, bars, taprooms	21% (-17)	63% (-16)	15% (-14)	59% (-9)

Other impacts (crime is a factor in decisions): Attending concerts/plays in St. Paul (46% St. Paul/36% Metro); attending Winter Carnival events (38% St. Paul/22% Metro); attending Wild/Saints/Loons/State Hockey Tournament games (47% St. Paul/33% Metro).

03 ▶ **Key Takeaway:** Concerns about personal safety are greater during the evening than the day, and have changed little since 2022.

While a majority of all respondents reported feeling safe during the day in Downtown St. Paul, less than half reported feeling safe in St. Paul during the evening. Despite the previously demonstrated decrease in the share of **more-concerned** residents who change their behavior due to crime, there was little change to the share who reported feeling safe in Downtown.

	Feel safe downtown during the day			Feel safe downtown in the evening		
	Yes	No	Don't go out	Yes	No	Don't go out
More-concerned St. Paul residents	63% (+0)	27% (+4)	8% (-6)	43% (+0)	38% (-1)	16% (-1)
More-concerned metro-area residents	54% (+2)	20% (-4)	25%(+2)	32% (-14)	37% (+6%)	29% (+7)

04 ▶ **Key Takeaway: More-concerned** St. Paul residents have grown more convinced that crime is negatively impacting key aspects of economic vitality in St. Paul.

More-concerned St. Paul residents increasingly believe that crime is having an impact on most indicators of economic health. These residents believe the strongest impacts are to property values, tourism, and resident retention, though the most significant increases in concern from 2022 were seen for resident retention and employers' ability to recruit employees in the area.

More-concerned St. Paul residents

	Crime is having a strong impact	Crime is having at least some impact
Property values	44% (+4)	70% (-11)
Tourism	36% (+5)	71% (+6)
Resident exodus	33% (+13)	69% (+9)
Recruiting employees	30% (+13)	65% (+17)
Hospitality success	26% (-4)	74% (+0)
New business interest in St. Paul	25% (-2)	58% (-9)
Business investment	21% (+5)	54% (+6)

05 ▶ **Key Takeaway: More-concerned** St. Paul residents increasingly believe that a lack of law enforcement officers is contributing to crime, but recognize that several factors play a role.

Respondents were asked to score a range of factors on a scale of 1 to 5 based on how likely they believe each factor contributes to increased crime. Higher numbers reflect a stronger factor.

Compared to 2022, only a lack of law enforcement officers rose in popularity as a likely cause of crime among **more-concerned** St. Paul residents.

However, no single issue was agreed upon by these respondents as "the" dominant cause of crime. Rather, respondents consistently identified a mix of social factors and challenges as causes.

Perceived cause of crime	More-concerned St. Paul respondents	More-concerned metro-area respondents
Not enough officers	4.18 (+0.51)	3.89 (-0.03)
Lack of mental health services	3.91 (-0.14)	3.91 (-0.29)
Not enough support for police	3.89 (+0.15)	3.86 (-0.10)
Lack of family structure	3.75 (-0.31)	3.41 (-0.71)
Lenient judges/prosecutors	3.72 (+0.05)	3.41 (-0.46)
Lack of homeless shelters	3.44 (-0.40)	3.58 (-0.35)
Lack of jail space	2.96 (-0.73)	3.01 (-0.90)

SUPPORT FOR POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO CRIME

Results included in takeaways 06 and 07 apply to the entirety of the phone survey's sample.

06 ▶ **Key Takeaway:** Respondents still agree with a multi-dimensional approach to crime, though support for law enforcement grew in importance.

St. Paul respondents showed strongest support for solutions to crime that expand social and mental health services, but support for police and additional officers gained popularity in 2023. This contrasts the attitudes of metro-area respondents, who clearly prioritized greater support for law enforcement over improved social and mental health services.

	St. Paul respondents		Metro-area respondents	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
More funding for social, mental health needed to address crime	70% (+15)	89% (+5)	52% (+4)	80% (+0)
Reforms should address bad cops, avoid impacting entire force	50% (-1)	88% (-1)	48% (+3)	85% (-1)
Police need more support from mayor, city council	55% (+12)	83% (+0)	63% (+21)	83% (+3)
Police need major reforms to rebuild community trust	45% (+2)	80% (+0)	32% (-12)	82% (+4)
More officers needed on streets to slow the crime wave	48% (+14)	77% (+12)	48% (+16)	90% (+22)

07 ▶ **Key Takeaway:** St. Paul residents gave mixed reviews of how well the city is protecting visitors and residents from crime. Residents were more satisfied with how the city is handling crime than in 2022, yet confidence in the city's plan to improve public safety dropped.

Belief that St. Paul does an "excellent" or "good" job of protecting people from crime rose from 2022 to 2023 despite widespread belief that crime levels are not decreasing. This positive evaluation is at odds with the fact that respondents demonstrated less confidence in the City's plan to address crime than in 2022. Respondents' perceptions of crime and the City's efforts to address it may be changing due to changes in their own behavior, such as less time in the city, less frequent travel, and choosing different businesses to patronize.

Amidst these conflicting attitudes, St. Paul residents remained split over whether the St. Paul Police Department should receive more funding. Forty-five percent thought the department should receive more, compared to 11% who thought it should receive less. The thirty-four point difference is the same as 2022.

How does the city of St. Paul do at protecting residents and visitors from crime?

	St. Paul residents	Metro-area residents
Excellent	12% (+8)	9% (+4)
Good	51% (+17)	53% (+20)
Fair	23% (-28)	31% (-16)
Poor	13% (+2)	6% (-7)
Unsure	1% (+0)	1% (-1)

Are you confident that the city of St. Paul has a successful plan to improve public safety?

	St. Paul residents	Metro-area residents
Strongly Yes	14% (+1)	15% (+2)
Yes	38% (-5)	32% (-15)
No	35% (+14)	39% (+24)
Strongly No	5% (-2)	5% (-4)
Unsure	9% (+3)	9% (-8)

SURVEY OF ST. PAUL'S DOWNTOWN WORKFORCE

An online survey separate from the scientific phone survey was conducted to measure attitudes and perceptions about crime among Downtown employees. Participating St. Paul Area Chamber members encouraged their employees to complete the survey between August 7 and August 21. The survey received 1,557 complete responses. Participants were self-selected, so results contained in this report cannot be considered representative of Downtown St. Paul's workforce. Results are compared to 2022 when applicable.

08 ▶ **Key Takeaway:** Downtown employees are significantly more likely to see crime as a growing and permanent problem.

Prevalence: Sixty-three percent of surveyed employees believe crime has increased since August 2022, compared to just 30% of St. Paul residents.

24% of employees believe crime levels have remained about the same since 2022.

51% of the employees who see crime as an increasing problem say they know someone who has been a victim of crime in the past year alone.

Severity: Seventy-seven percent of employees believe that the current level of crime in St. Paul is most likely a permanent problem.

68% of employees believe that recent increases in crime are permanent.

09 ▶ **Key Takeaway:** Aggressive panhandling and encampments once again top the list of factors likely to make employees feel unsafe.

Employees were asked to score a range of issues on a scale of 1 to 5, relative to how unsafe each issue makes them feel while in Downtown St. Paul. Visible, perceived indicators of lawlessness such as aggressive panhandling and encampments of individuals experiencing homelessness were the most commonly identified issues making employees feel unsafe, and at similar intensities to 2022.

The only significant increase from 2022 was how intensely trash and graffiti impact employees' sense of safety, possibly resulting from the higher number of employees working in-office in 2023.

Issue	Score
Panhandling and harassment	3.92 (+0.13)
Encampments in or near Downtown	3.71 (+0.07)
Trash and graffiti in public spaces and skyways	3.31 (+0.31)
Lack of activity/empty spaces	3.29 (+0.08)
Lack of police patrols	3.23 (+0.03)
News about crime	3.16 (-0.22)

10 ▶ **Key Takeaway:** Crime is still having significant impacts on employees' decisions whether to dine, shop, and travel within downtown St. Paul.

Employees reported that concerns about their safety are impacting their use of skyways and choices for dining, shopping, and health care at slightly higher rates than 2022. These concerns are representative of the entire employee sample.

Activity	Crime is strongly impacting decisions	Crime is a factor in decisions
Using skyways	42% (+6)	80% (+6)
Choosing restaurants, bars, taprooms	37% (+2)	77% (+1)
Choosing where to shop and do business	35% (+5)	75% (+6)
Attending after-work events/happy hours	30% (+5)	69% (+5)
Attending downtown concerts, theater, sporting events	22% (-3)	64% (+0)

11 ▶ Key Takeaway: There is agreement among Downtown employees that crime is impacting resident retention and economic vitality in St. Paul.

An overwhelming majority of employees believe that crime is having at least some impact on key measures of economic vitality in St. Paul. Concern either grew or remained similar for every single issue tested compared to 2022.

Indicator of economic vitality	Crime is a major impact	Crime is having an impact
Resident exodus	41% (+0)	84% (+2)
Hospitality sales	36% (+1)	82% (+2)
New business interest in St. Paul	34% (+2)	76% (+0)
Business investment	35% (+4)	83% (+4)
Tourism	33% (+3)	80% (+2)
Property values	29% (+1)	76% (+3)
Recruiting employees	30% (+3)	75% (+3)
Conventions	19% (+0)	66% (+1)
School attendance	19% (+2)	66% (+5)

CONCLUSIONS

1. **Crime continues to significantly influence how and where respondents who are more concerned about crime in St. Paul choose to work, play and do business despite fewer St. Paul residents identifying crime as a "top priority" for the city.** Considering that nearly all respondents believe crime rates have either stagnated or are still increasing, these impacts should be expected to continue, particularly among Downtown St. Paul workers who report the greatest changes to their behavior.

2. **Perceptions that St. Paul's economy is being negatively impacted by crime are growing.** Pessimism grew among **more-concerned** residents that crime is impacting several areas of economic vitality, particularly the city's ability to attract and retain new residents and employees.

3. **Belief that St. Paul does an "excellent" or "good" job of protecting people from crime rose significantly from 2022 to 2023, despite little belief that crime has improved and less confidence in St. Paul's plan to address crime.** This counterintuitive shift could be a result of changes in media coverage, post-pandemic shifts in work and travel, or behavior as a result of crime.

4. **Respondents do not believe that any single factor is chiefly to blame for today's crime levels, although the share of respondents who attribute a lack of support for police as an important cause grew in 2023.** This reflects the observed growth in popularity for more police support as a solution to crime.

5. **Preferred solutions to crime remain mixed. However, support appears to have coalesced around the need for strengthened support for social and mental health services and law enforcement.** St. Paul will likely need to continue to implement a multi-dimensional strategy to improve public safety if hopes to positively shift perceptions of public safety in the city.

6. **Relative to metro residents, St. Paul residents are less eager to strengthen support for law enforcement and more supportive of strengthened mental health and social services.** In particular, St. Paul residents are less likely to support increased funding for law enforcement.

7. **Downtown St. Paul employees demonstrated greater changes in behavior due to crime and were generally more pessimistic about the impacts of crime on St. Paul's economic vitality.** Otherwise, employee attitudes did not deviate substantially from those expressed by St. Paul and metro-area residents in the scientific phone survey. While these results cannot be considered representative of the city's workforce at large, they offer some indication that employees of St. Paul Area Chamber members share the same general attitudes toward crime's causes, impacts and required solutions.