



## Oak Park police will analyze crime block by block

Breaking down crime by location could reveal what attracts criminals to certain areas

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By **Devin Rose**  
Staff Reporter

In order to determine why criminals are attracted to certain areas of the village, the Oak Park Police Department has for the first time begun to analyze crime by the block — the smallest unit they have ever measured.

Oak Park Police Chief Rick Tanksley said a crime analyst in the department is keeping a database of approximately 625 blocks in the village and what types of crimes are occurring in each one. The department typically breaks down its crime statistics by beat, but getting down to the block level will allow them to see where it is most concentrated, which could then affect how officers in each of the eight beats are deployed, Tanksley said.

Tanksley recently attended a conference at George Mason University in Virginia, where he heard a talk by Professor David Weisburd, director of the school's Center for Evidence Based Crime Policy.

According to an Oxford University Press summary of his most recent book, *The Criminology of Place*, Weisburd and colleagues conducted a 16-year study of crime in Seattle.

They discovered that half of all the city's crimes each year occur on just 5-6 percent of its street segments, but the crime hot spots are not concentrated in a single neighborhood.

Tanksley said if this same research were conducted in Oak Park, police could determine ways the public, as well as officers, might respond differently. Is there more crime because a certain block has poor lighting? Do certain types of stores lend themselves to theft?

The idea for the study began about two years ago, Tanksley said, when he and former Village Manager Tom Barwin thought it would be helpful to look at some of the sociological factors that lead to crime. They wanted to determine what level of education and family makeup of offenders in order to come to conclusions about what society could do to eliminate crime.

Police generated a map showing where Oak Park arrestees live. The map showed they didn't travel far from their homes to commit crimes — many came from the West Side and neighboring suburbs — but more research is needed to determine the sociological factors underlying the crimes.

Tanksley said he hoped to begin analyzing the data in the coming weeks.