

Hagerstown Forward: A Framework for a Youth Engagement and Violence Reduction Initiative



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Introduction

Hagerstown is at a critical juncture where escalating crime and youth disengagement threaten the long-term vitality of our community. The challenges we face demand more than a reactive response; they require a proactive, strategic investment in our young people and our collective future. This proposal outlines a comprehensive plan for a youth engagement and violence reduction initiative designed to address Hagerstown's specific needs by adapting a data-proven model that has achieved significant success in the City of Baltimore.

1.0 The Challenge in Hagerstown: A Call for Proactive Intervention

To design an effective intervention, we must first understand the specific nature of Hagerstown's public safety challenges and listen to the concerns of its residents. A clear-eyed assessment of both quantitative crime data and qualitative community sentiment provides the critical foundation for a targeted, impactful strategy.

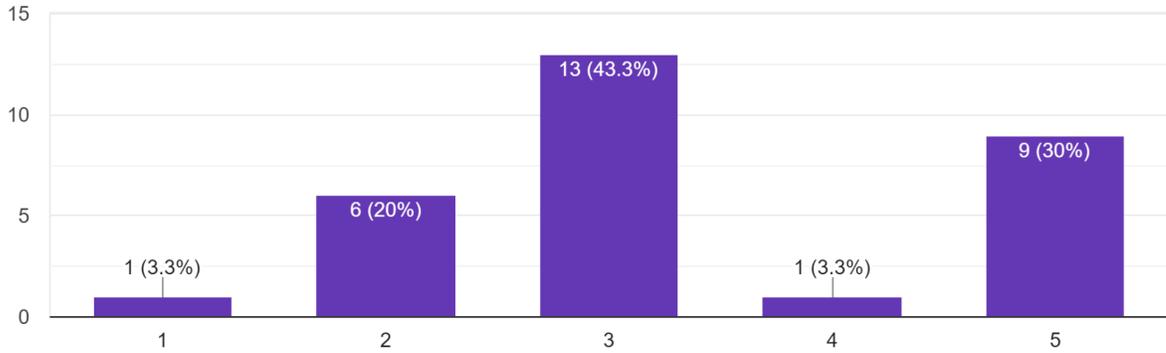
According to data from NeighborhoodScout, Hagerstown's crime rate is 30 per one thousand residents. This rate is alarmingly high; more than 86% of communities in Maryland have a lower crime rate. Analysis reveals that Hagerstown's violent crime rate is "one of the highest in the nation" for a community of its size, while its property crime rate is also "above average," signaling a comprehensive public safety challenge. NeighborhoodScout states that Hagerstown is safer than only 10% of cities in the United States.

These statistics are mirrored in the direct feedback from residents. The 2024 "Hagerstown Area Crime Study" conducted by Radio Free Hub City reveals a community deeply concerned about public safety, with specific anxieties concentrated in the "city core downtown of Hagerstown." The study's key findings articulate a clear mandate from the community:

- **Pervasive Concern Over Serious Crime:** The most common survey responses indicated that residents are "very concerned regarding drug crimes" and "very concerned regarding violent crimes." Notably, the survey data reveals that resident concern is most acute regarding drug-related offenses, which registered the highest level of extreme concern (15 residents selected the highest concern level for drug crimes, compared to 9 for violent crimes).
- **Geographic Concentration:** The majority of these concerns are focused on the city's downtown core, identifying a clear "hot spot" for intervention.
- **A Call for New Solutions:** In open-ended responses, residents articulated a desire for a multi-faceted approach to fixing crime, including an increased police presence, greater community empowerment and resources, and improved accountability and communication from local government.

How concerned are you regarding property crimes (i.e. burglary, theft) in your neighborhood? 1= least concerned, 5 = most concerned

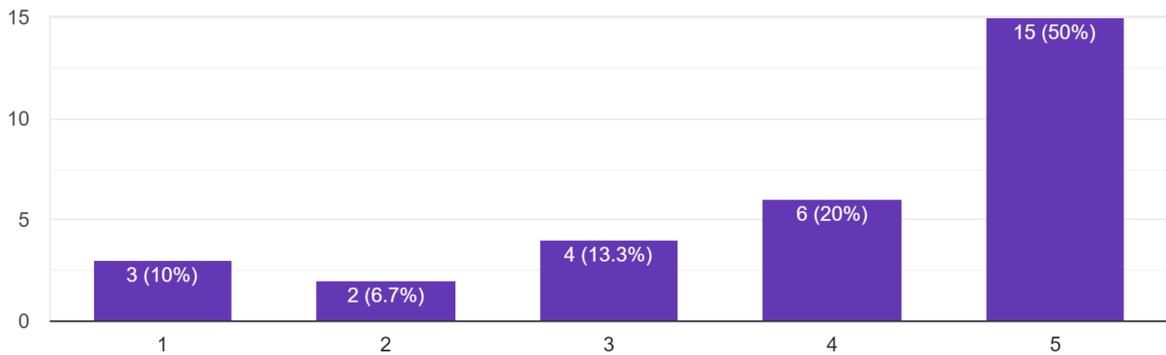
30 responses



With “3” being the most common response, Hagerstown area residents only appear to be moderately concerned regarding property crimes. *2024 Hagerstown Area Crime Study, Radio Free Hub City*

How concerned are you regarding drug crimes (i.e. usage, distribution) in your neighborhood? 1 = least concerned, 5 = most concerned

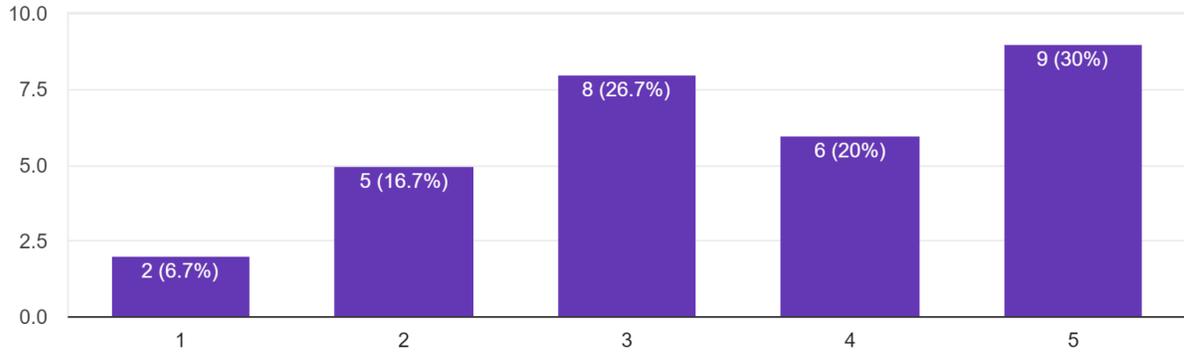
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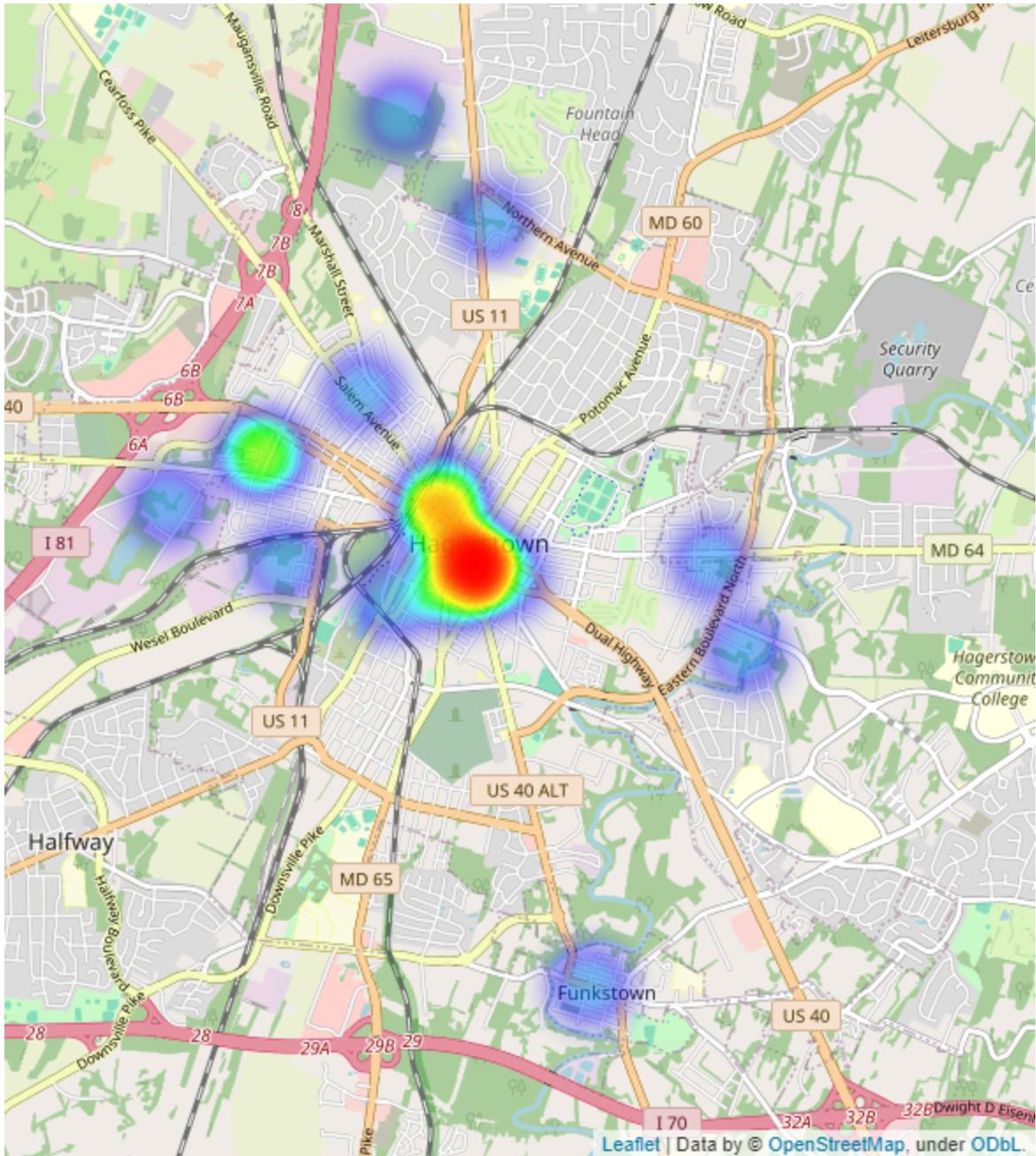
With “5” as the most common response, Hagerstown area residents appear to be very concerned regarding drug crimes. *2024 Hagerstown Area Crime Study, Radio Free Hub City*

How concerned are you regarding violent crimes (i.e. assault, murder) in your neighborhood? 1 = least concerned, 5 = most concerned

30 responses



With “5” as the most common response, Hagerstown area residents appear to be very concerned regarding violent crimes. However, it is important to note that violent crimes do not appear to be as much of a concern for many Hagerstown area residents compared to drug crimes, with the second most common answer as “3”. A total of 15 residents selected “5” for drug crimes, while only 9 residents selected “5” for violent crimes. *2024 Hagerstown Area Crime Study, Radio Free Hub City*



Resident Drug Crime Concern Heat Map - 2024 Hagerstown Area Crime Study, Radio Free Hub City

Hagerstown's challenges, while significant, are not insurmountable. A successful, data-backed model for addressing nearly identical issues already exists, providing a clear blueprint for action.

2.0 A Blueprint for Success: Baltimore's "Outside in '25" Initiative

Baltimore's "Outside in '25" initiative serves as a robust and relevant case study for Hagerstown. Its strategic importance lies not only in its comprehensive, multi-faceted approach but, most critically, in its quantifiable success in reducing youth violence and improving community safety.

2.2.1 Guiding Philosophy: A Youth-Centered, Data-Driven Approach

The core of the Baltimore model is a three-prong strategy of "outreach, engagement, and enforcement." This represents a strategic shift away from relying solely on law enforcement and toward a proactive model that builds trust and provides positive alternatives. The model fundamentally "flips" the traditional approach, moving from a reactive law "enforcement" posture to a proactive law "engagement" model that builds relationships before crises arise. A key element of this philosophy was including young people in the planning process to understand what they truly wanted. When asked what an ideal summer would look like, their response was clear: "We want to make money and have jobs, but we want to have fun!" Furthermore, they stressed that for engagement to be impactful, the message had to come from "someone who's your age and looks like you." This insight guided the development of a program that was both enriching and authentic.

2.2.2 The Strategic Pillars of 'Outside in '25'

The program's success is built on four interconnected pillars that create a comprehensive ecosystem of support and engagement for the city's youth.

- **Proactive Safety Engagement:** Outreach teams from the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE) and credible community partners such as For My Kidz and The PEACE Team were deployed during evenings in high-traffic areas. Their focus was on building trust, de-escalating conflicts, and connecting youth to services, not immediate enforcement. This work resulted in **977 positive interactions** with young people and **113 documented requests for services**, proving that a non-enforcement, relationship-based approach is effective at connecting youth to vital support systems.
- **Diverse and Accessible Programming:** The initiative offered a wide array of activities designed to be both safe and appealing. These included Midnight Basketball, teen pool parties, mobile recreation units, and Rock the Block family events. Critically, the YouthWorks summer employment program facilitated **8,604 job offers**, directly fulfilling the core need expressed by youth and providing a constructive alternative to street activity.
- **Multi-Sector Collaboration:** The program was a city-wide effort, built on critical partnerships. Key collaborators included the Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks (BCRP), Baltimore City Public Schools, community-based organizations like B-360, and a network of funders. The Summer Funding Collaborative contributed **\$2.5**

million, and the Baltimore Children & Youth Fund added another **\$3.5 million**, demonstrating broad-based support.

- **Data-Informed Adaptation:** The strategy was designed to be flexible. Staff used a form to collect data every night, which was reviewed weekly. This allowed program leaders to remain "nimble," identify trends, and make "necessary tweaks throughout the summer." This commitment to using data to inform decisions was crucial to the program's effectiveness and its ability to respond to evolving needs on the ground.

2.2.3 Quantifiable Impact on Youth Safety

The results of this comprehensive strategy are clear and compelling. Data released by the Mayor's office shows a significant year-to-date reduction in nearly every key metric of youth violence.

Crime Metric	Year-to-Date Reduction (2025 vs. 2024)
Youth Homicide Victimization	83.3%
Aggravated Assault Victimization	20.3%
Robbery Victimization	30.9%

This remarkable 83.3% reduction in youth homicides represents a drop from twelve victims in 2024 to just two in 2025, a tangible measure of the program's life-saving impact. Furthermore, while youth shooting victimizations saw a slight increase compared to the previous year, the 2025 figure still represents a **63.5% reduction** from 2023, demonstrating a powerful overall downward trend in this critical area of violence.

These proven strategies and impressive results form the foundation for the proposed Hagerstown Forward initiative.

3.0 Hagerstown Forward: Adapting the Model for Local Impact

The goal of Hagerstown Forward is not to simply replicate the Baltimore program, but to thoughtfully adapt its core principles to address the specific challenges and community dynamics of Hagerstown identified in Section 1.0. By leveraging a proven framework, we can build a localized initiative that is efficient, effective, and responsive to our community's needs.

3.1 Mission and Objectives

The Hagerstown Forward initiative will be guided by the following primary objectives:

1. To significantly reduce youth involvement in violent and drug-related crime within Hagerstown's city core.
2. To provide safe, structured, and enriching activities that serve as positive alternatives for at-risk youth.
3. To build trust and foster positive, non-enforcement relationships between youth, community leaders, and local authorities.
4. To establish clear pathways connecting youth to employment, educational reconnection, and other vital support services.

3.2 Proposed Core Strategies

To achieve these objectives, Hagerstown Forward will implement core strategies that mirror the successful pillars of the Baltimore model, tailored for our local context.

- **Establish Proactive Engagement Teams:** Creation of dedicated outreach teams composed of credible community messengers. These teams will engage with youth during evening hours in identified "hot spots" within Hagerstown's city core, as mapped by the resident concern data in the "Hagerstown Area Crime Study," focusing on building rapport, de-escalating potential conflicts, and connecting youth with needed resources.
- **Develop Youth-Centric Programming:** Coordinate a diverse slate of programs that appeal directly to local youth. This will include recreational opportunities like sports leagues, community-building events such as block parties in targeted neighborhoods, and partnerships with local businesses to create meaningful summer employment opportunities.
- **Build a Collaborative Local Network:** Establish a formal coalition of key Hagerstown stakeholders, including the Hagerstown Police Department, Washington County Public Schools, local businesses, non-profits, and faith-based community organizations. This network will ensure broad community support, facilitate resource sharing, and prevent duplication of efforts.

The success of these strategies will not be left to chance; it should be measured by a clear set of expected outcomes that demonstrate a tangible return on investment for the community.

4.0 Measuring Success: Expected Outcomes and Community Impact

By implementing a program based on a proven, data-driven model, Hagerstown can anticipate tangible and measurable improvements in public safety and positive youth development. The Hagerstown Forward initiative will rigorously track its progress against a defined set of metrics to ensure accountability and guide future investment.

The expected outcomes include:

- **A Measurable Reduction in Youth-Involved Crime:** Based on the precedent set in Baltimore, we anticipate a significant reduction in youth-involved violent crime. Baltimore's success in reducing youth homicides by 83.3% and aggravated assaults by 20.3% serves as a powerful benchmark for what is achievable through a focused, comprehensive engagement strategy.
- **Increased Positive Youth Engagement:** The initiative will lead to a marked increase in youth participation in structured, pro-social activities and employment programs. This will not only reduce idle time but also build valuable skills, foster stronger community connections, and provide pathways to long-term success.
- **Enhanced Community Trust and Safety:** This program directly addresses the concerns voiced by residents in the Hagerstown crime study. By building positive, non-enforcement relationships and improving the environment in the city core, the initiative will foster a "broader sense for what it takes to build a sense of safety" and improve trust between youth and community institutions.
- **A Replicable and Scalable Model for Future Investment:** By diligently collecting and analyzing participation and safety data, the initiative will create a replicable and scalable model for Hagerstown. This ensures that future public safety investments are evidence-based, efficient, and yield the highest possible return for the community.

These outcomes represent a significant and sustainable return on investment, creating a safer, more vibrant community for all residents.

5.0 Conclusion: A Strategic Investment in Hagerstown's Future

Hagerstown faces serious public safety challenges, a fact confirmed by both statistical data and the direct feedback of concerned residents. The "Outside in '25" initiative from Baltimore offers a proven, data-driven, and adaptable blueprint for successfully addressing these issues. It demonstrates that a strategic focus on proactive outreach, meaningful youth engagement, and multi-sector collaboration can dramatically reduce violence and build a stronger community.

By adapting this successful model, the **Hagerstown Forward** initiative will provide our youth with positive alternatives, address the root causes of crime, and answer the community's call for new and effective solutions..

It is our hope that the City of Hagerstown will engage local partners publicly, instead of behind closed doors, and use this document as a framework for a successful future.

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