

Van Wagner's Beach Plan

Executive Summary

Scanning

Van Wagner's Beach is a popular recreational area situated along the waterfront of Lake Ontario in the City of Hamilton. *"The Beach Strip"* as it is commonly referred to, is used by the public for various recreational activities and includes restaurants, parklands, a licensed bar, Adventure Village and campground. Over time, the parking lots and roadways situated on the Beach Strip became a stage area for the predominantly younger generation to showcase their automobiles by racing and doing "burn outs". As unruly spectators gathered, liquor was being consumed unlawfully and illicit drugs were being used. This unlawful activity not only posed a threat to public safety but also contravened a number of provincial and criminal statutes. All of these issues combined promoted a general perception of escalating disorder, and created a level of fear amongst area residents and those who used the park lawfully.

Analysis

In 2001 area business owners and citizens voiced their concerns. A swarming of a police officer's cruiser by an unruly mob in July of 2001 brought the seriousness of the situation to light. An analysis of the area's calls for service, a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design review, and an open forum with area business owners, community members and other stakeholders was undertaken. The resulting analysis pinpointed the underlying factors attributing to the situation. In response, with assistance of numerous community stakeholders, the Van Wagner's Beach Plan was implemented.

Response

The solution to the ongoing problem involved a coordinated response utilizing a number of community agencies. The first priority was to take control of the property and regulate the activities that occurred there. Several recommendations were implemented including the re-design of parking lots using the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (to deter dangerous and unlawful activities), the re-design of the walkways, lighting and access routes, and a zero-tolerance enforcement of all criminal and provincial statutes.

Assessment

At the conclusion of the project a quantitative analysis was completed comparing statistics to that of the previous year. The resulting statistics provided measurable evidence of the project's tremendous success. The analysis revealed an overall decrease in calls for service of **26%** to the Van Wagner's Beach area. More importantly, there was positive community feedback. Van Wagner's Beach was once again a family-friendly recreational area.

Scanning

The Hamilton Police Service is responsible for servicing a population of half a million people, spanning an area of over 1100 square kilometers. The City of Hamilton is situated on Lake Ontario and *Van Wagner's Beach* is a popular recreational area, most notably during the summer months. The area of Van Wagner's Beach comprises a stretch of approximately 10 kilometers of lakefront property, and includes a family restaurant (Hutch's), a Bar with patio (Baranga's On the Beach), an Adventure Village with wave pool, and Camping & Tenting park (Confederation Park).

A number of long standing problems involving the use of parking lots, roadways and parkland situated along Van Wagner's Beach were identified over the past several years. The area had traditionally been used for public recreation along the waterfront, with visitors frequenting the restaurants and bars in the area, the wave pool, as well as utilizing trailer and tent camping. More recently, the area had become a haven for abnormal users who began using parking lots adjacent to the aforementioned establishments to show off their vehicles by racing and doing 'burn outs'. The vehicles were being operated in a dangerous manner, attracting large crowds of unruly spectators who would cheer on the excessive smoke and noise created by spinning tires. The activity began to inhibit the use of the area by legitimate visitors and posed a significant threat to public safety, both to those driving the cars in this manner, and to those who stood around cheering on the activity. Furthermore, as crowds gathered, liquor was being consumed unlawfully and illicit drugs were also being used. The reckless racing of vehicles through parking lots and on adjacent roadways became a growing concern. The problems consisted of:

- Driving offences such as speeding, unnecessary noise and dangerous operation of motor vehicles.
- The gathering of large groups of people during evening hours, predominantly young persons, who were noisy and who participated in disturbances.
- Large numbers of people attending Baranga's On the Beach. Management controlled the area within their complex, but people would walk or stand on the highway and the surrounding parking lots, creating hazardous conditions for those pedestrians and persons driving on the roadway.
- Vehicles parked on the shoulder of the road would create an unsafe condition for pedestrians not allowing them to travel safely along the limited shoulder of the road.
- Both citizens and Park Security felt intimidated or were actively intimidated by large groups of youth.
- Gang related problems were becoming evident, predominantly at Baranga's On The Beach.
- People leaving the beach strip in impaired states or driving in a reckless or dangerous manner creating a hazard for residents along the bordering roadway, as well as those travelling the Queen Elizabeth Highway either Toronto-bound or Niagara-bound.
- Incidents of littering of the park, vandalism and assaults were becoming commonplace.

Issues at Van Wagner's Beach were brought to the forefront by area business owners who voiced their concerns to the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority (responsible for managing and controlling the parkland and parking lots), and the Hamilton Police. The Hamilton Police Service became keenly aware of the *extent* of the problem in July of 2001 when an officer was dispatched to Baranga's Bar for a domestic disturbance. As the officer attempted to disperse a large crowd to investigate the matter, he and his vehicle were swarmed and set upon by unruly patrons, forcing the officer to retreat and call for assistance. The mob rocked and pelted the cruiser with objects with the officer inside. Every available officer in the Division sped to the scene, and the area was subsequently closed down in an effort to clear the unruly crowd. In the end, the officer was unhurt, however a crystal clear message had been sent. *Van Wagner's Beach was a problem.*

Following the initial scan of the situation, the Hamilton Police Service Divisional Commander and Community Response Sergeant responsible for the area set about identifying the stakeholders who would play a role in the project. The initial Stakeholders were identified as the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority, City of Hamilton Parking and Enforcement, City of Hamilton Traffic and Engineering, the owner of Baranga's On The Beach, owner of Hutch's Restaurant, the Conservation Authority Advisory Board, the local Councilor (politician) for the area, and the Hamilton Police Service.

Analysis

The problem with unruly and disorderly activity at Van Wagner's Beach had been resurfacing each season for the past several years. The frequency and severity of the problems began to rise in 2000, and more so in 2001. Van Wagner's Beach is primarily a seasonal recreational area, and thus the summer months were identified as the predominantly problematic times of the year.

For the purposes of analysis, four distinct recreational areas along Van Wagner's Beach were identified. Those areas were; Hutch's Restaurant, Baranga's On The Beach, the beach area itself, and Confederation Park and Adventure Village. All four areas are located on the beach strip, however the restaurant, bar and Adventure Village are situated some distance apart, connected by a dedicated walkway. To better ascertain problem type, frequency, and time when occurrences were most prevalent, the analysis focused on these specific recreational areas within the beach strip area.

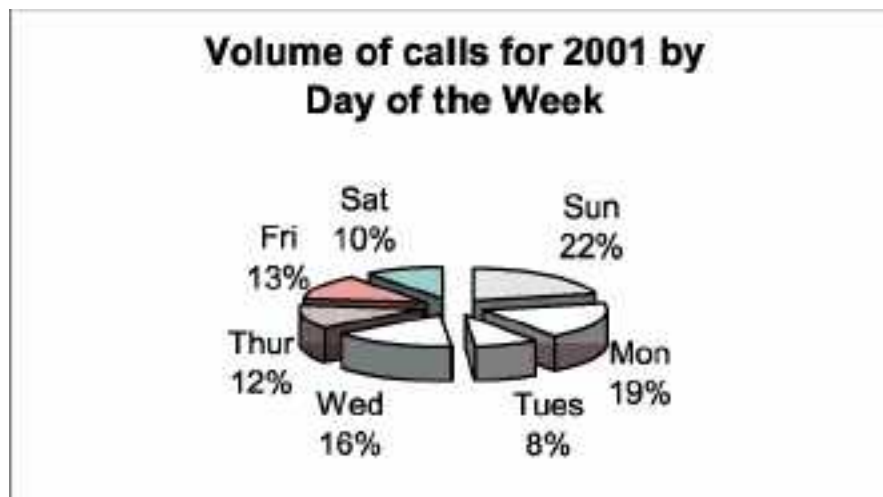
Upon initial analysis of calls for service to the area, it was found that the majority of calls occurred during the months of June through September. Statistics revealed that in 2001, June, July, August and September accounted for **76%** of all calls to the area for the entire year.

The following chart represents the breakdown of volume of calls by day and month for 2001 for Van Wagner's Beach. The shaded areas highlight the **summer month** totals:

Van Wagner's Beach 2001 Calls for Service

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Total P/M	
January	2	2	1	2				7	2.1%
February	1	1	1			1		4	1.2%
March				2		1		3	0.9%
April	8	6	2		2	1	1	20	6.0%
May	6	1	3	4	2	4	5	25	7.5%
June	5	9	4	6	6	7	4	41	12.3%
July	22	16	8	16	12	10	7	91	27.4%
August	15	17	3	20	13	12	12	92	27.7%
September	10	7	2	1	2	6	1	29	8.7%
October	1	2	2	2			1	8	2.4%
November	1		1		1	1	2	6	1.8%
December	1	1		1	2		1	6	1.8%
Total	72	62	27	54	40	43	34	332	
Percent	21.7%	18.7%	8.1%	16.3%	12.0%	13.0%	10.2%		

A further analysis of the volume of calls per **day of the week** revealed that Wednesday evenings and Sunday evenings were the busiest nights for calls for service in 2001:



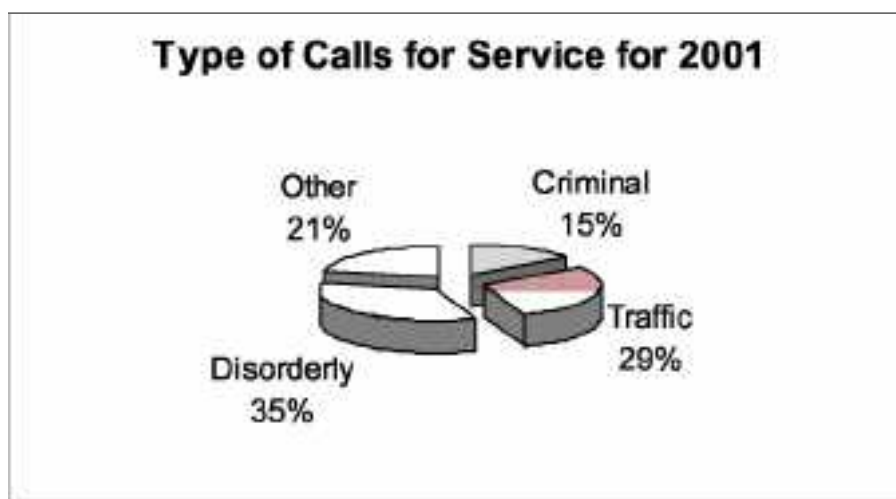
The above chart indicates that Monday received the ^{2nd} highest calls for service, however this statistic is somewhat misleading. A significant percentage of both Monday *and*

Thursday calls were actually early morning calls (just after midnight), a spill over from Wednesday and Sunday evening activities. Taking this into account, statistics indicated that both Wednesday and Sunday evenings were the most problematic times of the week. The Wednesday evening statistics coincided with the fact that the bar, Baranga's On The Beach, hosted an 'All Ages Night' every Wednesday evening, which attracted youth from all over Hamilton, and surrounding area. Sunday evenings had consistently been busy evenings on the beach strip for many years.

*A further analysis of the **types of calls** for service in 2001, were broken down into four categories:*

- Criminal:** Representing assaults, impaired driving, drug offences, stolen autos. Most of these calls were generated by officers themselves while on patrol in the area.
- Traffic:** Representing RIDE Lanes (**R**educe **I**mpaired **D**riving **E**verywhere), Traffic Stops and Roadside breathalyzer checks. Again, most of these calls were generated by officers themselves.
- Disorderly:** Represents calls for disorderly offences, bar disturbances, and trespassing calls. Most of these calls were generated by the public.
- Other:** Represents ambulance calls, alarms, general assistance type calls. The majority of these calls were generated by the public.

*The graph below represents the **type of call** breakdown for 2001:*



Broken down further, calls for service by *specific location* at Van Wagner's Beach in 2001 revealed the following results:

Baranga's On The Beach

Day	Incidents	Criminal	Disorderly	Traffic	Other
Sunday	21	4	10	2	5
Monday	10		6	2	2
Tuesday	1	1			
Wednesday	19	2	10	5	2
Thursday	12	1	6	4	1
Friday	9	1	1	4	3
Saturday	2		1	1	
	74	9	34	18	13

Hutch's Restaurant

Day	Incidents	Criminal	Disorderly	Traffic	Other
Sunday	33	3	16	11	3
Monday	9	2	2	3	2
Tuesday	10	2	1	3	4
Wednesday	12	2	6	1	3
Thursday	7	1	4	2	
Friday	11	2	1	3	5
Saturday	13	2	1	2	8
	95	14	31	25	25

Van Wagner's Beach

Day	Incidents	Criminal	Disorderly	Traffic	Other
Sunday	13	2	3	5	3
Monday	12			11	1
Tuesday	4			3	1
Wednesday	12	1	2	7	2
Thursday	7			7	
Friday	6		4	2	
Saturday	4			4	
	58	3	9	39	7

Confederation Park and Adventure Village

Day	Incidents	Criminal	Disorderly	Traffic	Other
Sunday	16	6	3	1	6
Monday	14	3	5	1	5
Tuesday	18	3	10	2	3
Wednesday	15	4	6	2	3
Thursday	10	3		5	2
Friday	18	2	9	3	4
Saturday	14	4	6	1	3
	105	25	39	15	26

It was through crime analysis that the significant problem areas at Van Wagner's Beach were identified, along with the problematic months, days of the week, and approximate times of offences. Police Officer observation and analysis of past incidents in the area identified the fact that many of the 'abnormal' users of the area were in fact youth coming from locations other than Hamilton. Person and vehicle license plate checks often revealed visitors were from neighbouring cities. It soon became evident that Van Wagner's Beach, especially on Wednesday and Sunday nights, was becoming the '*place to be*'. The added attraction of an All Ages Night on the beach strip only served to lure even more young teens and young adults to the area. This in turn led to underage consumption of alcohol (in parking lots prior to entering the All Ages event) as well as drug use, further exacerbating the problems in the area. This 'allure' of Van Wagner's Beach being the '*place to be*' served as the primary motivator for those persons who derived pleasure from racing their vehicles in front of an audience. For those spectators who liked to 'cheer on' this disruptive activity, the allure was just as great.

Prior to the implementation of the Problem Oriented Policing plan, Police attempted to quell the problems at Van Wagner's Beach by having officers monitor the area on problematic nights. Unfortunately, it was found that as soon the officers would leave the area on a more urgent matter, the crowds would gather once more, and the reckless activity would resume.

The harm caused by the disruptive and rowdy behaviour was apparent. Hutch's restaurant noticed a drop in family use of their restaurant. Staff at the restaurant did not feel safe and were often intimidated by roving groups of youth. Residents in the area complained of excessive noise, reckless driving and roadway congestion. Escalation in gang activity was evident, especially during the All Ages Night. Legitimate visitors attending the area were intimidated by the large gathering of youth, sometimes upwards of 3000 strong. Of greater concern however, was the potential for tragedy. With so many persons congregating in an area for the sole purpose of watching vehicles race and burn rubber, the recipe for disaster was evident. Combined with the fact that the area was open to the general public, these young persons, many of whom were consuming alcohol and/or drugs, were putting not only themselves at risk, but were also placing the legitimate users of the area in harm's way.

The analysis ultimately revealed that Van Wagner's Beach was in fact a hotbed for disruptive and potentially dangerous activity. The parking lots afforded a makeshift racetrack and the inability of the Conservation Authority to supply adequate security left little deterrent for would-be racers or their spectators. As well, the problem was now affecting the community's sense of safety and security, and was slowly eroding the family oriented appeal of the Hamilton Beach Strip area.

Response

After a thorough examination of the situation and underlying conditions of the problem, a problem solving approach was adopted. The first priority was to take control of the property and regulate the activities that occurred there. This included permitting lawful enjoyment of the property for legitimate recreation, while at the same time inhibiting unlawful behaviour. This required a concerted effort from all stakeholders with a clear understanding of each stakeholder's responsibility in addressing the problem at hand. Simple considerations such as closing down the bar, banning vehicles from the area, or dependence on continual police presence in the area were not viable options.

As a result of the analysis, the following response strategies were implemented:

1. Monthly Meetings with Stakeholders

Monthly meetings were held with all stakeholders until the end of the project to ensure:

- a. A clear understanding of the roles of each stakeholder and their responsibilities
- b. That problems were responded to in a timely fashion, as they developed.
- c. That the progress of the responses to the problem were monitored

2. CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design)

The intent of CPTED was to redesign the area to inhibit unlawful activities and make the area non-conducive to unlawful activities in the first instance.

- a. The parking lot on the West side of Hutch's was divided. An island was placed in the middle and a separate entrance was constructed to allow access to both parking areas.
- b. A path was built from the parking lot just west of Baranga's parking lot. This encouraged people to stay off the shoulder of the roadway.
- c. The large mound of earth on the East side of Baranga's by the mini-putt range was removed. This encouraged people to use the adjacent parking lot and keep pedestrians off the side of the road.

3. Education

All stakeholders must know their capabilities and resources and their legal authority to act. They must also be aware of the limitations of both. Towards that end the Hamilton Police Service ensured that officers were reminded of all the relevant sections of the Criminal Code and other applicable statutes including:

- Alcohol/Drug Related Driving Offences
- Search & Seizure Authorities
- Assault Offences
- Disorderly Offences
- Common Drug Offences

In addition officers were reminded of all relevant sections of the Provincial Offences and Hamilton City By-law offences that an officer might encounter:

- Liquor License Act
- Trespass to Property Act
- Conservation Act
- Highway Traffic Act
- City Parks By-Law

The Police Service met with the Hamilton Conservation Authority to explain authorities, and with the managers of Baranga's to provide an overview of:

- Relevant sections of the Liquor License Act (re: overcrowding, underage drinking, identifying forged identification)
- Trespass to Property Act and the right to prohibit activities on the premises and the ability for Conservation personnel to trespass unwanted persons.

Police monitored:

1. Names of all persons charged with offences in relation to this initiative
2. Police resources utilized specifically for this initiative

4. Deployment of Police Resources

Hamilton Police Service supplied Beat Officers as well as Community Response Branch officers to monitor and take proactive steps during problematic times on the strip. The initial response involved a high uniformed officer presence, especially on Wednesday and Sunday evenings. A zero tolerance approach for offenders was practiced by officers. As required, plain-clothed officers were deployed in the area. The set up of RIDE Lanes (**R**educe **I**mpaired **D**riving **E**verywhere) was utilized on specific evenings with the assistance of the Ontario Provincial Police. Police resources were continually assessed throughout the initiative to ensure appropriate response and ensure effectiveness.

5. Re-examination of Security provided by Baranga's and Confederation Park

- a. Baranga's examined and deployed security in and around their premise
- b. Hamilton Conservation Authority and Confederation Park examined the use of private security to control access to the parking lot.

6. Other Partners

- a. City By-Law Officers
By-Law officers issued parking tickets and towed vehicles that have been abandoned
- b. Auxiliary Police Officers
Auxiliary officers assisted uniform officers to increase officer presence.
- c. City of Hamilton Traffic and Engineering
Monitored the safe design of the roadway

Although coordinated by the Hamilton Police Service, this problem oriented approach required dedicated commitment from all community stakeholders. This was not simply a Police responsibility, nor did it all fall solely on the Conservation Authority or establishment owners/managers. It affected the community as a whole. Prior to implementing any type of action plan in this circumstance, the Police Service Divisional Commander attended several open community forums to discuss the concerns of area residents, business owners, and the general public. Their concerns were heard. It became evident that the situation affected the community's perception of safety and security. To that end, the situation was eroding away a family-friendly recreational area.

To reflect these findings, evaluation criteria would be based on both the reduction of calls to the area (quantitative assessment), as well as anticipated positive feedback from the legitimate users of the area (qualitative assessment).

Assessment

The Van Wagner's beach initiative was successful for a number of reasons. Foremost was the commitment from all the partners at various levels. Resources were found and committed to the project. The level of satisfaction with the project partners upon the completion of the initiative was assessed during the project debrief. The following efforts were undertaken throughout the 2002 summer initiative:

1. Hamilton Region Conservation Authority

- Group Four Security (Canada) Ltd. was contracted and provided security from May 17th until August 24th. The total cost to the Conservation Authority was \$13,280.
- Hamilton Police Officer Art Quinn conducted a CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) review of the problem area and made recommendations. In prior years lights and speed bumps were incorporated at a cost of \$58,000. In 2002, the parking lot was cut in half to prevent racing and burn outs and new signage was added at a cost of \$24,000.

2. Deployment and Effectiveness of Private Security

- Baranga's On the Beach

The owners of Baranga's contracted a private security firm which were highly successful inside their establishment. The security personnel acted professionally and there were no reported problems. As many as 20 security persons would be on duty on Wednesday evenings, and upwards of 10 on Sunday evenings.

- Hamilton Conservation Authority

The Conservation Authority contracted security from May 17th until August 24th. The security personnel patrolled between 9:00 p.m. and 2 a.m. on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings. No major problems were encountered.

3. Deployment and Effectiveness of Police Resources

The plan of action was to have a large uniform presence at the beginning of the project to gain control of the area and make it understood that the police would take a zero tolerance approach for the summer. This began in April of 2002. The main focus was Wednesday and Sunday evenings. The bulk of the project responsibility fell upon the Community Response Unit so that patrol officers could be free to respond to calls for service. As many as eight officers were available to attend Van Wagner's Beach on Wednesday evenings throughout most of the summer months.

Constable Art Quinn's CTPED review recommended the West parking lot be divided with a boulevard separating the two parking lots. This tactic was incorporated and proved to be highly successful in reducing racing and squealing of tires in the area.

In total, 48 persons were either charged or trespassed from the property during the project by police. Most incidents were for unlawful alcohol consumption and/or drugs (marihuana). Not one of the 48 persons was caught re-offending. With the assistance of the Ontario Provincial Police, four RIDE lanes were conducted in the area of Van

Wagner's Beach over the duration of the project. In excess of 545 vehicles were stopped, and of those, 2 twelve hour suspensions were issued. No one was found to be impaired.

The chart below represents the **amount of officer hours** devoted to the project in 2002:

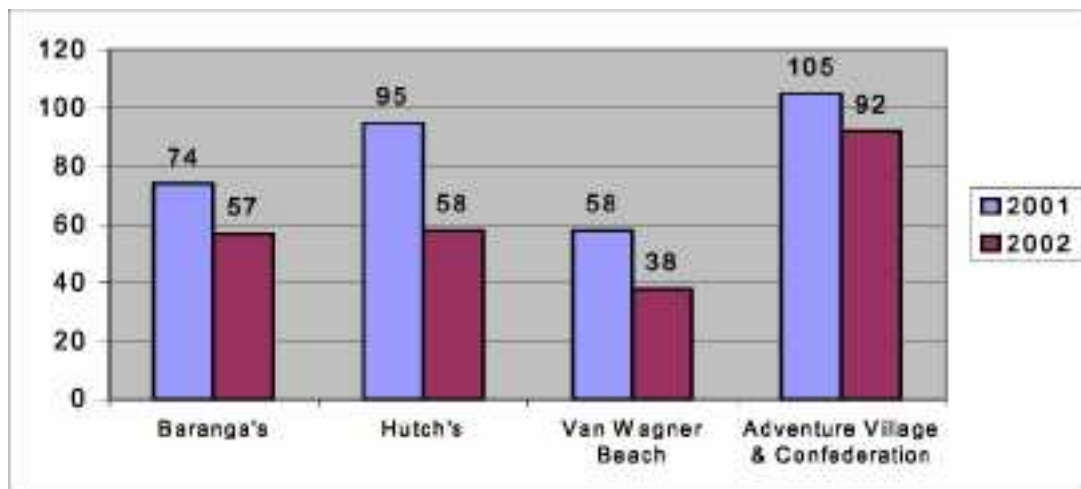
1.	Division 2 (Hamilton Police)	628 Hours
2.	Ontario Provincial Police	30 Hours
3.	Auxiliary Officers	82 Hours

Total Hours	740 Hours
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4. Calls for Service

There were a total of **332** calls for service to the area of Van Wagner's Beach in 2001. This included calls to Hutch's Restaurant, Baranga's On the Beach, Confederation Park, and the beach area itself. Over the course of 2002, the calls for service dropped to **245** calls for the same area, a reduction of **26%**. Consistent with the 2001 statistics, Sunday and Wednesday evenings remained the busiest evenings in 2002.

The Chart below represents the comparison for **Calls for Service** at Van Wagner's Beach in 2001 and 2002:



Highlights of the calls for service by location

- 9 There were 74 calls for service at Baranga's in 2001 and 57 in 2002 - a decrease of **23%**
- 9 There were 95 calls for service at Hutch's in 2001 and 58 in 2002 - a decrease of **39%**.
- 9 There were 58 calls for service at Van Wagner's Beach in 2001 and 38 in 2002 – a decrease of **35%**.
- 9 There were 105 calls for service at Adventure Village & Confederation Park in 2001 and 92 in 2002 – a decrease of **12%**.

The positive quantitative results of the 2002 Van Wagner's Beach project were evident. Calls for Service were reduced significantly in each area of the beach strip. Lawful users began to return to the area. A sense of safety and security returned. The joint venture paid off in positive community feedback from business owners, families and visitors who noticed an immediate impact in the area. It was safe to return to Van Wagner's Beach.

The results of the initiative were successful from both a quantitative, and qualitative perspective. The goals of the project were met in 2002, however it was clear that there would be a need to continue the effort in 2003. Past history suggested that a sudden drop off in police or security presence, might encourage abnormal users to return to the area. As a result, specific recommendations were made to address the 2003 summer season. The challenge for the Hamilton Police Service in 2003 was to continue to coordinate the plan and provide public order while reducing the strain on police resources. Changes were made in 2003 including the hiring of Special Duty officers (off-duty Police personnel) by Baranga's as added security for Wednesday evening All Ages Night. In comparison to 2002, Police resources were almost halved in 2003, however the results were still positive in light of this fact.

The 2003 statistics as compared with the 2002 statistics showed an overall increase in calls for service of **3.6%** for the Van Wagner's Beach area. However, 'Disorderly Calls' (which were the main focus of the project), showed a reduction of **82.4%** over 2002 statistics. This in itself exemplified the continued success of the initiative. The increase in other calls for service in 2003 (Criminal, Traffic, Other) are misleading, in that a large percentage of the calls were initiated by officers on patrol (including investigation follow-ups, traffic stops, and self-initiated arrests). In essence, although the calls for service associated to the Van Wagner's Beach area rose very slightly in 2003, the increase was primarily due to pro-active initiatives in the area. This is also significant given that police resources were almost halved in 2003.

The Van Wagner's Beach project continues to function in 2004. The project has been deemed a success, yet the project will continue to be monitored to ensure problems do not resurface. All stakeholders remain committed to this venture. The community is satisfied and *'peace has been brought back to the beach'*.

Two articles from the Hamilton Spectator dated July 24th 2001 and May 26th 2003 are attached to this submission. The articles serve to exemplify the situation as it was, and acknowledge the results of project implementation. Article transcriptions are also attached.

Submission prepared by,

Constable Treena Ley.

Sergeant Mike Senchyshak

Agency and Officer Information:

This problem solving initiative was adopted at the Divisional Command level. The Hamilton Police Service is divided into 3 distinct patrol divisions, each with a Commander (Superintendent) and Inspector. The Division 2 Acting Superintendent at the time, Eric Girt, and Community Response Unit Sergeant Craig Parmenter adopted and developed this initiative.

The Hamilton Police Service adopted Problem Oriented Policing prior to 2001. Internal training in this discipline began in 2001. Sergeant Craig Parmenter was trained in POP, and the Commander's were aware of this discipline. As part of a Hamilton Police Officer's Performance and Appraisal review, the knowledge and use of the Problem Oriented Policing approach is now factored into their competencies.

The Hamilton Police Service has also accessed the Police Executive Research Forum POPNET database for the past several years. Hamilton has submitted examples to this database in the past.

Police resources dedicated to this project concentrated primarily on staffing issues. Each Division has a Community Response Branch which is comprised of Youth Officers, School Liaison Officers, High Enforcement Action Team officers and others. Over the summer months this Unit is available to address community and quality of life concerns. To accommodate this particular project, a shift schedule was drawn up to ensure adequate police staffing was on hand to support this endeavor.

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Beach hot-rodders fuel anger

'It's getting dangerous to drive here.'

By LISA HEPNER
The Hamilton Spectator

Speeding, drinking and car burnouts have made an east-end Hamilton parking lot infamous all the way from Brantford to Mississauga. Now the property managers want the city to help pay for safety measures.

The Hamilton Region Conservation Authority, which manages Confederation Park for the city, is asking for more than \$9 million for improvements that include moving Van Wagner's Beach Road closer to the Queen Elizabeth Way and turning the straight stretch into a labyrinth of curves.

The plan was precipitated by the dangers, including street racing, associated with crowds of young people at the lot west of Hatch's Dingley Dell.

No plan to raise the money has been offered, although a meeting between the authority, city councillors and a member of the transportation department is scheduled for tomorrow.

Police try to monitor the parking lots near late night food and beverage spots Hatch's and Baranga's On The Beach, but are often called away for more pressing emergencies.

As soon as a cruiser pulls over, especially on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday nights, the parking lot surges with souped-up cars and thousands of spectators.

The revellers throw water, vinegar and oil or sometimes bleach behind a speed bump while young people gather around and squint through the crowd to get a better view.

One by one the cars pull up and spin their tires to see how much smoke they can generate. The onlookers cheer. Sometimes, if the smoke isn't thick enough, the bystanders pick up one end of the car so only two wheels remain on the ground.

Sunday night, one east-end officer got an eyeful of this pastime when he went to quell a domestic argument at Baranga's. More than 1000 people — most of whom were between the ages of 17 and 23 — were in the lot.

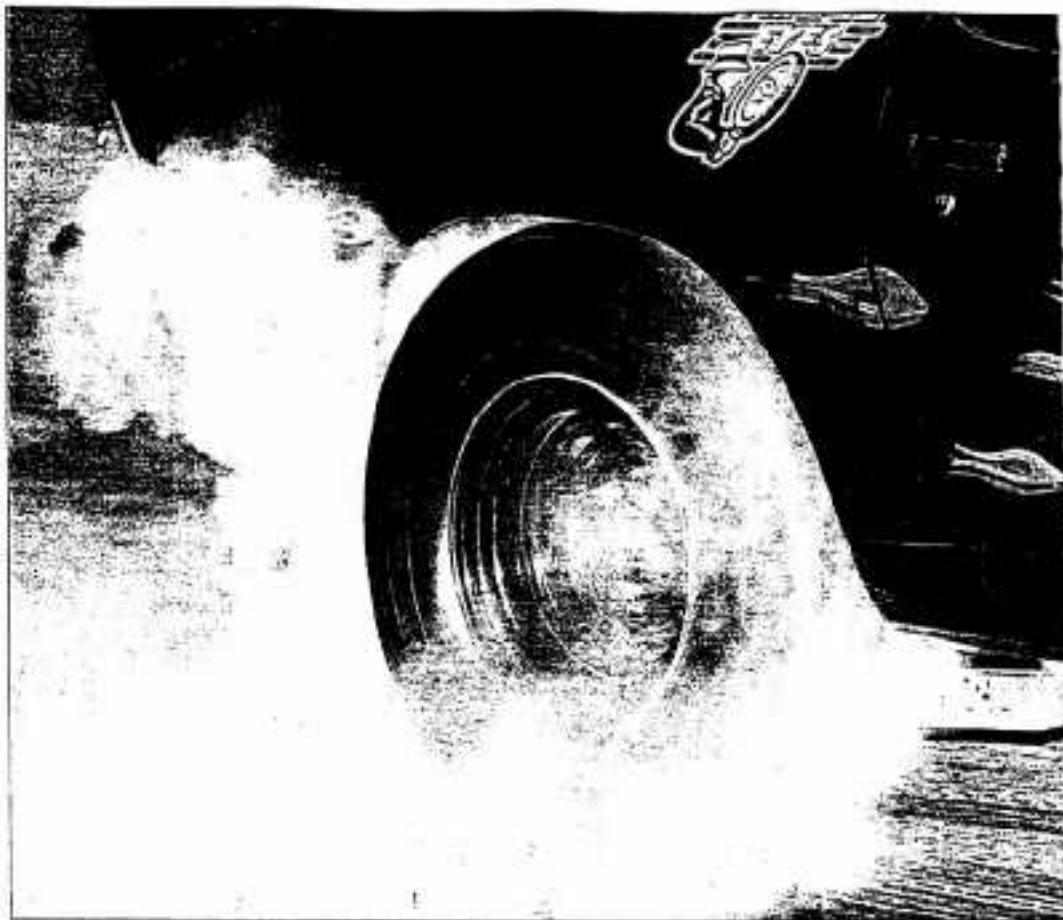
The officer drove up and asked the crowd to disperse.

Instead, they overturned the cruiser, setting the car and throwing debris. The officer was not hurt, but he called every available car for backup.

Police closed the road for about an hour while they asked people to leave, and the cars moved out peacefully.

This sort of incident has Jim Howlett in a rage. He sits on the Conservation Authority board and is chair of the authority's advisory committee.

But he also lives near the beach strip and has seen enough to make him go to the lot late at night with a video recorder. He hopes the evidence he gathers will help him win financial support from the city.



Through the lens of his camera, he watched the wheel-spinning burnouts and the street racing — two souped-up cars speeding side-by-side down the two-lane street, one of them in the opposing traffic lane.

"It's getting dangerous to drive here, let alone walk," Howlett said, adding that the aggressive driving has gotten worse in the past few months.

"The problem is that too many of that vehicle 1 or 2 per cent of the population is ending up down here.

"Two guys see each other in the parking lot, the racemaster gets a little high, maybe they need to prove some mental point, and they line up at a traffic light," Howlett says the worst area is from Lansdale Road to Adventure Village.

The guards along the road have to be replaced constantly when cars lose control and career off the road. Howlett says almost every second support pole is a new one.

His mission is to move Van Wagner's

Above, burning rubber from a car's tire. At left, Jim Howlett, chairman of the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority advisory committee, videotapes racers.

Beach Road and make it curve. Baranga's patrons won't have to cross a perilous road to get to the bar.

"If ever there was a place where someone is going to get killed, it's here," Howlett said.

The owners of Hatch's and Baranga's agree, although Alan Tsangakos of Baranga's said at least one so-called improvement backfired. Lighting erected in the parking lot only served to reduce more party-goers.

Hatch's owner Rick Creecham says every year when it starts to get hot, the parking lot fills with young people who leave behind a waste and of liquor bottles, used syringes and condoms.

"This year is probably the worst. You're getting cars from as far away as Mississauga and Oakville and I don't know how the word got out that you can come to Hamilton and do whatever you want, but it has."

Last year, Creecham had the city close off his parking lot with a grass median to separate his young ice-cream-loving patrons from the cars and motorcycles performing dangerous tricks.

It was complaints like his that prompted the conservation authority to draft a plan to dampen the weekly

chase. The \$9.5 million in improvements include a new community centre and pool, a walkway, lighting, landscaping and the new road.

Howlett said Confederation Park staff don't have the capacity for adequate 24-hour surveillance of the site, and police budgets don't allow officers to linger forever at the beach.

Ward 1 Councillor Chad Collins, however, thinks the authority should contribute to park security and suggested an arrangement like the one Hess Village bar owners have, with special duty officers hired every weekend. He thinks the bar, which attracts crowds, should also have to contribute to a solution.

Police crackdowns are two warts reverberating on everyone's lips. Collins, the conservation authority and the bar owners would all like to see tickets handed out and charges laid for speeding, dangerous driving, open alcohol, smoke and noise pollution.

"In my mind, it's a ticking time bomb," Collins said.

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Monday, May 26, 2003

LOCAL NEWS

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Bringing peace to the beach

After racing and rumbles, residents, business and police took back control

By BILL DUNPHY
The Hamilton Spectator

What a difference a year makes.

Last year Hamilton beach residents and businesses, police, and the conservation authority were bracing for another long hot summer of unruly mobs, drag racing, drinking, and drug taking.

They'd spent months putting together a co-operative, community-based security plan, but nobody really knew how well it might work.

It worked.

The crowds still showed up for the all ages nights at Baranga's, a beachfront restaurant and tavern, and crowded into Hutch's restaurant parking lot on warm summer nights to see and be seen.

But there were very few of the incidents that had security officers biting their nails and hoping no one got hurt. Staff at the bars reported feeling safer, and all sides agree that families have returned to enjoy the sand, the lake, and the evening stars.

Hamilton's beach area runs in the west from the High Level bridge east to the conservation authority's Confederation Park in Stoney Creek near Gray's Road. The area of concern concentrated mostly in the area of Van

Wagner's Beach Road in the area of Hutch's and Baranga's.

It took a heavy, but carefully targeted police presence, the hiring of security guards, and some physical re-designing to get a handle on the problems.

This year, the same groups know they have a plan that has succeeded in quelling most of the rowdiness and the only real challenge they face is making sure it's affordable.

It's quite a change from the summer of 2001 when a noisy, out-of-control mob pelted a police car with garbage, rocked it on its shocks and came as close to a full blown riot as has been seen in these parts for some time. City Councillor Chad Collins called the beach strip at night a "ticking time bomb." An editorial in this paper demanded to know "Who's in charge here?"

The answer, it turns out, is the community is in charge. And once people accepted responsibility and stopped blaming each other for the problem, they were able to find solutions. At least that's the way beach resident Jim Howlett sees it.

Howlett, a citizen member of the conservation authority and a member of the task force looking at the security issues along the beach, says there have been "massive improvements. I

almost can't overstate it, it's been a really good improvement."

Howlett spent many nights on the strip in the summer of 2001, video taping the crowds gathering in the parking lot or racing along Van Wagner's Beach Road.

"It was a dangerous situation and at first everyone was saying there was nothing they could do. But once we got through that, we got to the point where everyone was willing to do everything they could to help and it worked."

Hamilton police Inspector Eric Girt instituted regular meetings with business owners and park officials. The police community response branch put together a special team that provided heavy police presence on the key trouble nights — Wednesday and Sunday.

Baranga's, Hutch's and the conservation authority hired private security to keep a lid on problems, identify and evict troublemakers and pass along to police the names of those warned about trespassing. "I think we really regained control," said Howlett.

Police Sergeant Craig Parmenter agrees.

Back in 2001, Parmenter said, "people were complaining about noise, excessive behaviour, drunken behav-

our. People were telling us they didn't feel safe. It got to the point that they were even getting aggressive with uniformed officers."

Parmenter said the increased police and security, combined with better lighting and some innovative re-design, appears to have turned the tide. The design work grew out of something called "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. It is a discipline that officer Art Quinn has trained in for years. Quinn worked with the task force to identify a series of improvements to the physical layout. One key thing he did was cut the parking lot at the Hutch's end of the beach in two, robbing the racers of their natural "oval."

A report Parmenter authored notes a 26 per cent drop in calls to police from the strip.

Brian Hall, Parks Superintendent for the Hamilton Conservation Authority, said they spent nearly \$100,000 on the problems last year but still credit police with much of the solution.

"We had good support from the police, lots of patrols ... Now I just wish (youths would) pick up their (coffee) cups and not break beer bottles."

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Media Articles on Van Wagner's Beach

The Hamilton Spectator
News, Tuesday, July 24, 2001

Beach hot-rodders fuel anger; 'It's getting dangerous to drive here.'

Lisa Hepfner
The Hamilton Spectator

Speeding, drinking and car burnouts have made an east-end Hamilton parking lot infamous all the way from Brantford to Mississauga. Now the property managers want the city to help pay for safety measures.

The Hamilton Region Conservation Authority, which manages Confederation Park for the city, is asking for more than \$9 million for improvements that include moving Van Wagner's Beach Road closer to the Queen Elizabeth Way and turning the straight stretch into a labyrinth of curves.

The plan was precipitated by the dangers, including street racing, associated with crowds of young people at the lot west of Hutch's Dingley Dell.

No plan to raise the money has been offered, although a meeting between the authority, city councillors and a member of the transportation department is scheduled for tomorrow.

Police try to monitor the parking lots near late night food and beverage spots Hutch's and Baranga's On The Beach, but are often called away for more pressing emergencies.

As soon as a cruiser pulls away, especially on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday nights, the parking lot surges with souped-up cars and thousands of spectators.

The revellers throw water, vinegar and oil or sometimes bleach behind a speed bump while young people gather around and squirm through the crowd to get a better view.

One by one the cars pull up and spin their tires to see how much smoke they can generate. The onlookers cheer. Sometimes if the smoke isn't thick enough, the bystanders pick up one end of the car so only two wheels remain on the ground.

Sunday night, one east-end officer got an eyeful of this pastime when he went to quell a domestic argument at Baranga's. More than 3,000 people – most of whom were between the ages of 19 and 23 – were in the lot.

The officer drove up and asked the crowd to disperse.

Instead, they swarmed the cruiser, jostling the car and throwing debris. The officer was not hurt, but he called every available car for backup.

Police closed the road for about an hour while they asked people to leave, and the cars moved out peacefully.

This sort of incident has Jim Howlett in a rage. He sits on the Conservation Authority board and is chair of the authority's advisory committee.

But he also lives near the beach strip and has seen enough to make him go to the lot late at night with a video recorder. He hopes the evidence he gathers will help him win financial support from the city.

Through the lens of his camera, he watched the wheel-spinning burnouts and the street racing – two souped-up cars speeding side-by-side down the two-lane stretch, one of them in the opposing traffic lane.

"It's getting dangerous to drive here, let alone walk," Howlett said, adding that the aggressive driving has gotten worse in the past few months.

"The problem is that too many of that volatile 1 or 2 per cent of the population is ending up down here.

"Two guys see each other in the parking lot, the testosterone gets a little high, maybe they need to prove some mental point, and they line up at a traffic light." Howlett says the worst area is from Lakeland Pool to Adventure Village.

The guardrails along the road have to be replaced constantly when cars lose control and careen off the road. Howlett says almost every second support pole is a new one.

His mission is to move Van Wagner's Beach Road and make it curve. Baranga's patrons won't have to cross a perilous road to get to the bar.

"If ever there was a place where someone is going to get killed, it's here," Howlett said.

The owners of Hutch's and Baranga's agree, although Alex Tsangarakis of Baranga's said at least one so-called improvement backfired. Lighting erected in the parking lot only served to seduce more party-goers.

Hutch's owner Rick Creechan says every year when it starts to get hot, the parking lot fills with young people who leave behind a wasteland of liquor bottles, used syringes and condoms.

“This year is probably the worst. You’re getting cars from as far away as Mississauga and Oakville and I don’t know how the word got out that you can come to Hamilton and do whatever you want, but it has.”

Last year, Creechan had the city close off his parking lot with a grass median to separate his ice-cream-loving patrons from the cars and motorcycles performing dangerous tricks.

It was complaints like his that prompted the conservation authority to draft a plan to dampen the weekly chaos. The \$9.5 million in improvements include a new community centre and pool, a walkway, lighting, landscaping and the new road.

Howlett said Confederation Park staff don’t have the capacity for adequate 24-hour surveillance of the site, and police budgets don’t allow officers to linger forever at the beach.

Ward 5 Councillor Chad Collins, however, thinks the authority should contribute to park security and suggested an arrangement like the one Hess Village bar owners have, with special duty officers hired every weekend. He thinks the bars, which attract crowds, should also have to contribute to a solution.

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The Hamilton Spectator
May 26, 2003

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Bill Dunphy
Hamilton Spectator

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