

# Georgia State University Police Department Operation Clean Sweep

## Crime Reduction Task Force

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**THE PROBLEM:** Located in the heart of downtown Atlanta, Georgia State University is a growing and expanding campus. On August 10, 2007, the University opened a brand new 2,000 bed dormitory in the Sweet Auburn District of the City of Atlanta. This area is a known haven for drug dealers and users and we knew that throwing 2000 18-21 year olds in that high crime area would create a lot of problems.

**ANALYSIS:** When the University first bought the property, patrol officers who were newly assigned to that area were the first to notice the problem. After the Crime Prevention Unit conducted its own assessment using the City of Atlanta Police Department's crime statistic as a base, the Department's Special Operations Unit known as the Directed Patrol Team became involved.

**RESPONSE:** Using a Problem Oriented approach we worked with local and community leaders to close down and fix problem business and parks; and conducted a crackdown on drug activity, making Auburn Avenue a place where drugs could not be sold.

**ASSESSMENT:** After the operation was completed, there was an 18% reduction in the number of crimes reported to the City of Atlanta. The neighborhood looked cleaner and residents felt better about where they lived. From August 2007 to May 15, 2008, we have only one reported robbery in the area that previously had an average of 1 per month and not a single report of burglary inside the Commons.

## Introduction

Located in the heart of downtown Atlanta, the Georgia State University (GSU) Police Department is a full-service, CALEA Accredited police department serving more than 30,000 students, staff and faculty. Just a few blocks from some of Atlanta's biggest attractions including; the CNN Center, Georgia Dome, Turner Field, World of Coke and the world's largest aquarium, Georgia State University is a main thoroughfare for the residents of and visitors to the City of Atlanta. Georgia State University Police Officers deal with the same issues as the Atlanta police, from armed robberies, to drugs, gangs, vehicle break-ins and thefts.

In August 2007, the University opened a 2,000 bed dormitory in the middle of the Sweet Auburn district. The Sweet Auburn district is one of Atlanta's most historic areas. It was the center of the civil rights movement and today the Martin Luther King Jr Memorial is located at its center. However this area has become a haven for drug dealers and users. Crack cocaine was sold in open air markets and the community was run and overrun by the drug dealers. The GSU Police Department knew that if we were not proactive, the drug dealing and using in this area would trickle into our new dormitories.

We knew that the area the dorms were going into was a hot spot of criminal activity. From entering autos to armed robberies to shootings, this area was not a place a student would want to go. When the university broke ground on the site of the Commons, we started to send our patrol officers into that area. It did not take long for them to start telling the command that this area was not very safe. However,

it was not until the department's yearly planning session that the problem was brought to the full attention of the department. The police department wanted to be proactive in nature. We knew that throwing 2,000 18-21 year old students, some of whom had never lived in the city before, would be a formula for disaster. We have had robberies and assaults in the past in other known drug areas and we wanted to prevent these crimes before they happened. After a site survey of the area for possible problem spots, the Crime Prevention Unit determined that Auburn Avenue, which was the main street of the district, was the center of the drug activity in that area. These findings were confirmed by the Department's Special Operations Unit known as the Directed Patrol Team.

## Analysis

In May 2007, both the Crime Prevention Unit and the Directed Patrol Team came together to discuss how the problem could be fixed. Many options were considered; from just leaving it alone, to high patrol of the area, or encouraging students to walk another route. In the end the only way to really fight the problem was to engage it directly.

In order to get a handle on the problem, the first thing we did was to ride around the area in unmarked police cars to see what was going on. We saw open air drug markets, people using drugs on the street and in parks, cars that had been broken into and a lot of loitering. Our next step was to meet with the community that already worked and lived in the area to hear from them what was going on. We met with community leaders at a local church to hear their concerns. They told us where they saw drugs being sold and some even brought pictures they had taken

of drug dealers. The community was extremely concerned about the problem that had been going on for years, but they never had anyone to tell their story to. The last thing we did was to request crime statistics from the local police department, City of Atlanta Police. Georgia State University Police is not the primary jurisdiction in that area and it was only recently that we started patrols of this area. We wanted to use the Atlanta Police reports as a measure of success. We knew that if Part I crimes went down (i.e. thefts, stolen cars, robberies etc..) in that area, we were doing our jobs. After obtaining Atlanta's crime statistics, we saw that there were 58 reported Part I crimes reported to police in a 7 month period from June to December 2006. This included 7 Assaults/Batteries, 35 entering autos and thefts, 5 stolen cars and 5 robberies. All of these crimes were occurring on the same block where the drug dealers were selling there drugs. We believed that a majority of the crime was caused by drug users in need of cash or goods to trade for their drug of choice. . From everything we have seen and heard, Auburn Avenue was the main source of drug dealing and that is where we focused our operation.

## Response

After assessing the problem, we decided that we needed to take a problem oriented approach. We used the POP Triangle and tried to attack the problem from all three sides. We became the first handler for the offenders. We focused on both the drug dealers and drug users. We were also the managers of the neighborhood. We would work with the city and business owners to get problems fixed in the neighborhood.

Lastly we would become the guardians of the neighborhood, working with community leaders to help fight the drug problem.

First, as law enforcement, we knew that we needed to conduct a zero tolerance operation on Auburn Avenue, focusing on drug use and sale. However that was not the only source of the problem. The neighborhood itself had to take their streets back and we wanted to get them as involved as possible. To accomplish both of these objectives, Operation Clean Sweep was created with one goal; reduce crime of Auburn Avenue by at least 10%. In order to accomplish this goal we created three objectives: 1. work with community and city leaders to try and fix problem establishments; 2. arrest as many drug users and sellers as possible; and 3. establish ties to the community of which we were now a part.

The first step in our response was to meet with leaders from the Big Bethel Church, developers who were building on Auburn Avenue, City of Atlanta park officials and the owner of the strip shopping on Auburn Avenue. Each of these groups played a key role in our response. One of the main problems was Calhoun Park, located on Auburn Avenue and Piedmont. (*See map 2*) The Park had a lot of trees and seating areas which made it ideal for using drugs and hiding. Working with the City, they decided to close down the park for three months and renovate it, taking out the seating area and opening it up to make it less friendly to drug users. We also worked with the owner of the strip shopping center to close down two problem businesses. We believed that the Auburn Avenue Record Store was selling drugs but could never get enough evidence for a search warrant.

The owner of the property filed an eviction notice and when the Fulton County Marshals served the eviction they found 20 pounds of marijuana, 3 stolen automatic rifles and multiple bullet proof vests. (*See picture 1*) This was a major disruption in the drug dealing activities. We also worked with the property owner who finally shut down the night club that was in his property. The Peacock Club was a major attraction for drug dealers and users along with other disorderly activities like DUIs. Lastly, we worked with the church to set up community meetings to talk with residents about what we were doing and to get feedback from the community. This became one of our most valuable assets for the second part of our operations, zero tolerance.

In order to make Auburn Avenue a place where drugs could not be used or sold, we had to ensure that the laws were enforced. In a three month period, we made over 40 arrests for both misdemeanor and felony charges, including 21 charges for drug possession. On one particular night of the operation, officers stopped three suspects for possession of marijuana and after an inventory search of the vehicle and the suspects, found that these individuals had multiple driver's license and credit cards all with their pictures and different names. After an investigation, we found that these three suspect had be stealing identities and making up false ones. They told us that they worked in Georgia and had other partners in Florida selling these fake ID and getting credit cards. In total, they had stolen almost half a million dollars from banks and credit agencies. This investigation was picked up by more then 6 different local, state and federal agencies including the US Secret Service. This all stemmed from a simple marijuana arrest.

The operation started July 1 and as Graph 2 shows, our arrests went down in the month of August. We realized that the drug dealers learned what hours we were working and stopped selling drugs from 6pm -2 am. So we adapted as well, splitting up the team into two units and varying our hours daily. We were able to catch the dealers off guard and our arrests went back up. We made a large number of our arrests through information given by an informant. We made over 10 arrests based on these tips. We ended the operation on November 1<sup>st</sup>. The reason for stopping was that all the dealers and users who were out on bond were finally getting sentenced. We noticed a drop in arrests and people on the street and our officers could not keep up the daily hours change for ever. It was time to wait and see if we had made a difference.

## Assessment

The results were clear, there were less people on the streets loitering, the locations where drugs were sold were empty, the park was clean, and the neighborhood felt like a place you would want to come to. At the project's end, we arrested 44 people for criminal activity. But more importantly was whether or not crime went down, and it did. There was an 18% reduction in crime from the previous year and this drop continued through December and January. Vehicle thefts went from 4 in a 6 month period in 2006 to 0 in the same 6 months in 2007. Theft during the same period in 2006-2007 went down by 53%. We also talked with City of Atlanta police officers who work

in that area and they thanked us because they have notice a steep decrease in their calls for service.

The Georgia State University Police Department has a focused goal, to keep our students, staff and faculty safe. In order to do that we are required to patrol the majority of downtown Atlanta. The purpose of the operation was to create a safe environment for our students to move into and live. We kept Sir Robert Peel's principle in mind that "Whether the police are effective is not measured on the number of arrests, but on the lack of crime." The greatest success of the operation has been the lack of crime in the new University Commons. From August 2006 to May 15, 2008, there has been only 1 reported robbery and not a single burglary in the area of the Commons which historically had an average of 1 armed robbery a month. We have had only one armed robbery in almost a year. Our students tell us they feel safe walking on campus and the citizens of that neighborhood thank our officers for helping them take back their street.

## Agency/Officer Information

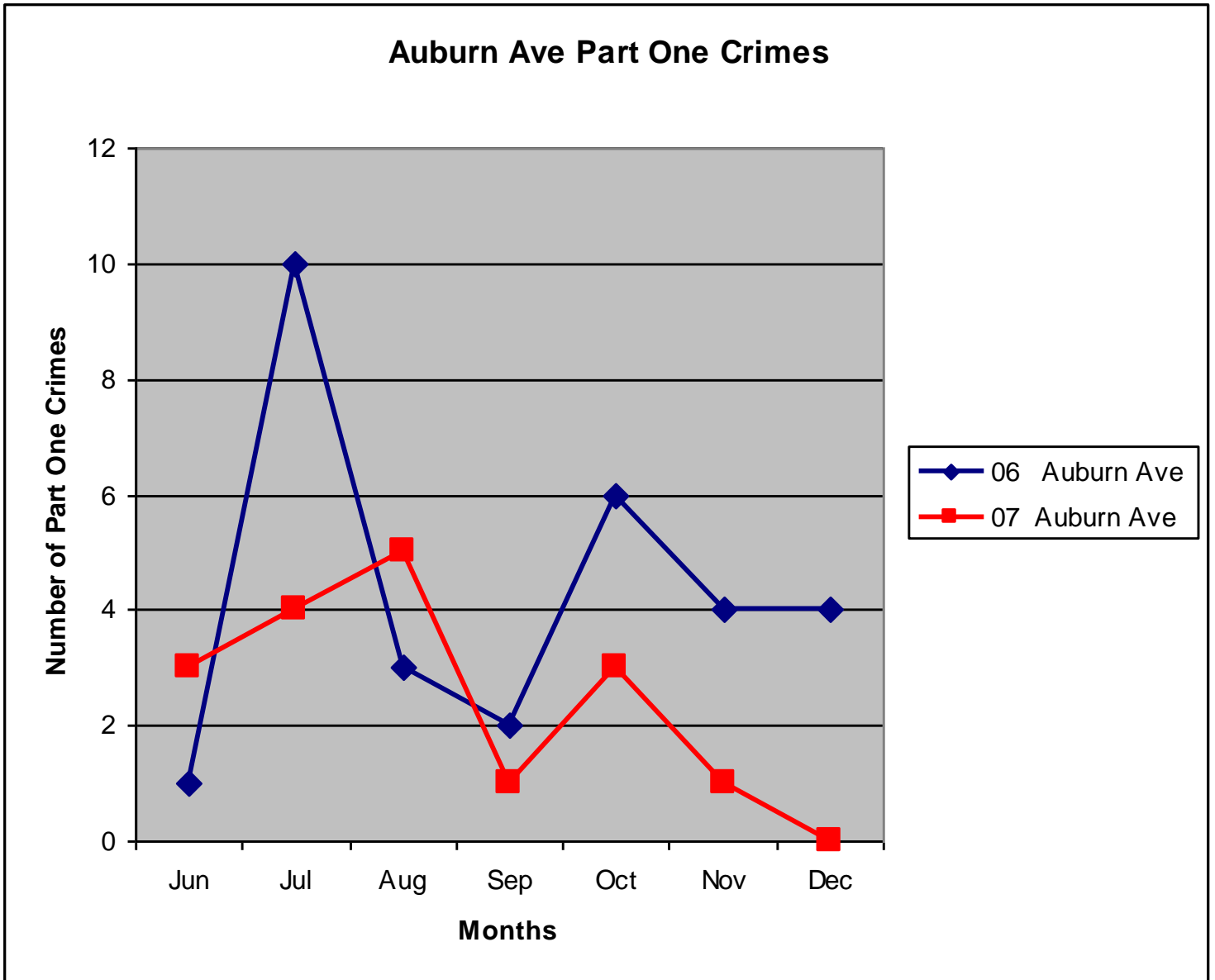
Georgia State University Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit and Directed Patrol Team were the main forces behind this project. Officer Eli Cohen, works in the Department's Crime Prevention Unit and worked along with Sgt Johnson and Sgt Hickey of the Directed Patrol Team to develop this program from the ground up. Officer Cohen has had previous experience in Problem Oriented Policing and was a presenter at the 2007 POP Conference in Madison, WI. Sgt Johnson and Sgt Hickey were new to Problem Oriented Policing and had no previous experience in it. Sgt

Johnson is currently assigned as the commander of the Directed Patrol Team. Sgt Hickey is currently assigned to Evening Watch but before his promotion Inv Hickey and worked as the senior officer on the Directed Patrol Team.

## Project Contact Person.

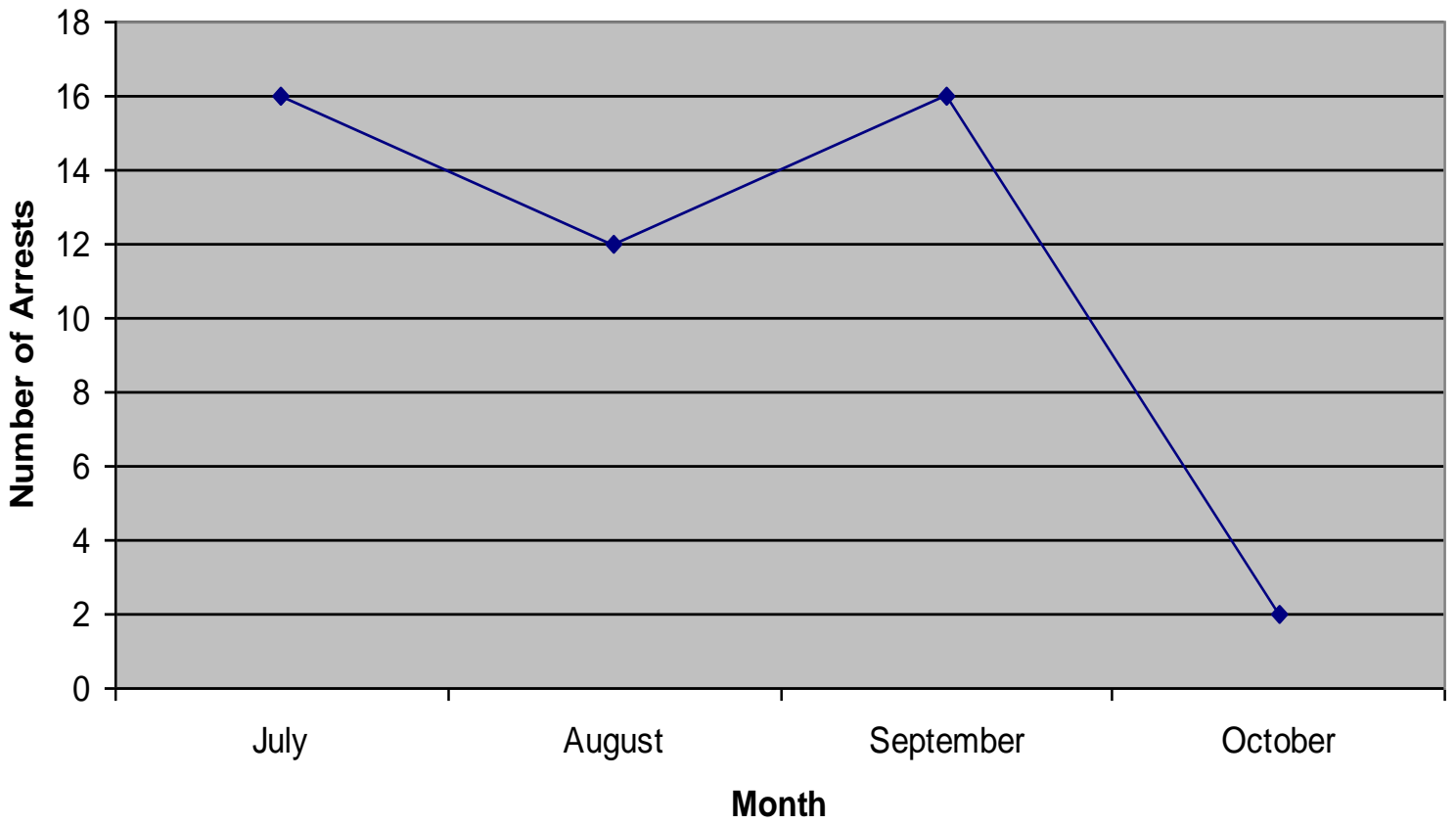
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Graph 1

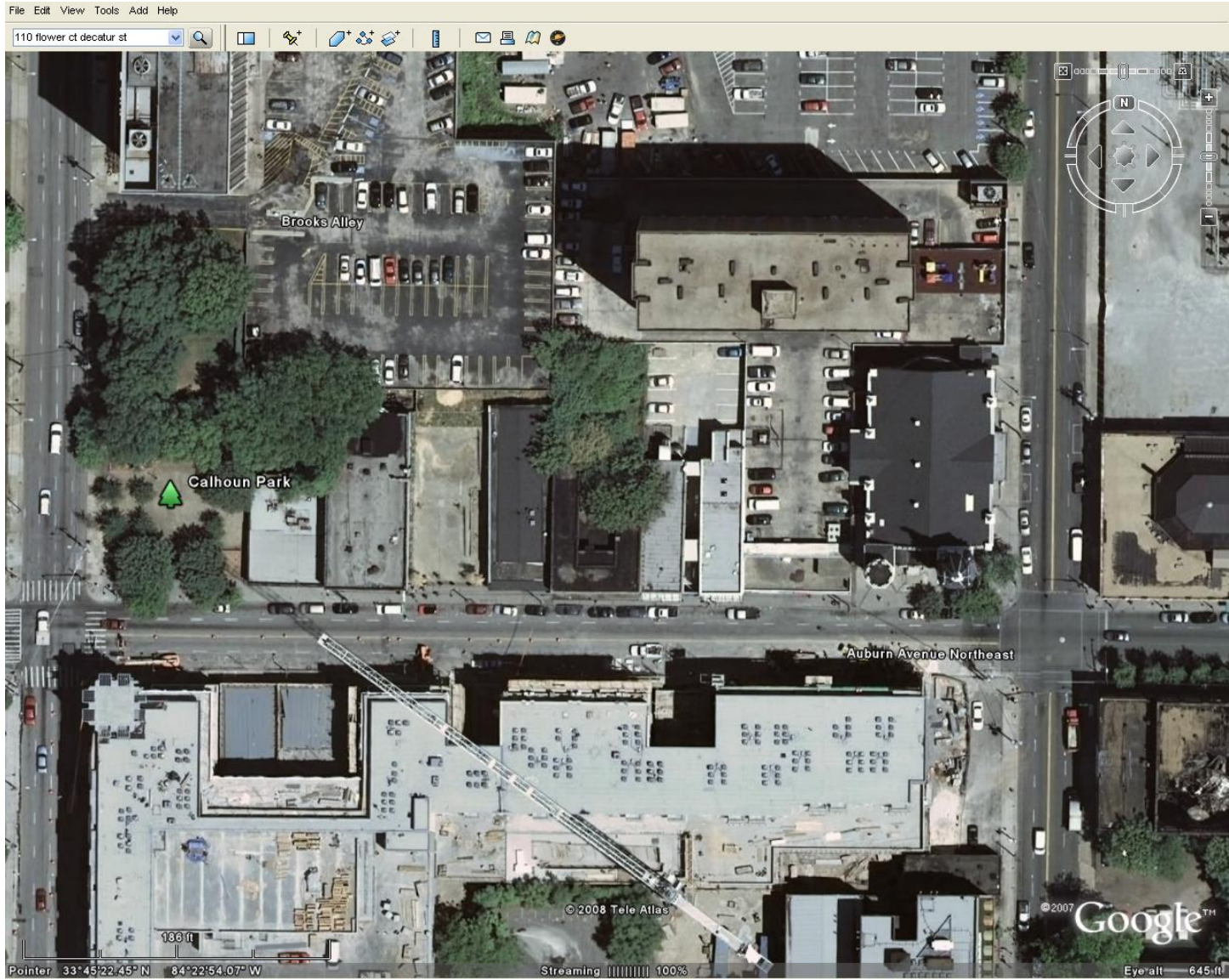


Graph 2

### Number of Arrest per Month



# Map 1





# Map 2





Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3

