

## Vandalism and Graffiti in Longmont

### Statement of the Problem

*“Graffiti locations are often characterized by the absence of anyone with direct responsibility for the area. This includes public areas, schools, vacant buildings, and buildings with absentee landlords. Offenders also target locations with poor lighting and little oversight by police or security personnel.”<sup>1</sup>* This statement can be easily applied to the larger aspect of graffiti, which is vandalism. Disorder (often manifesting as criminal mischief or “vandalism”) has been shown as a direct link to a diminished sense of safety as well as the commission of more serious crimes. Disorder is symptomatic of a number of underlying social issues that result in the breakdown of informal and formal social controls. For that reason, it is difficult to deal with disorder without a “big picture” perspective.

### Vandalism in the Nation

#### National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)

The NCVS provides a representative sample of victimization by household on a yearly basis. Most recent data was recorded for 2000. Unfortunately, the NCVS does not determine rates based on size of city, so numbers represent the entire nation. Since the mid 1990’s, the household victimization rate has consistently declined. In 1994, 9 percent of households were victimized, in 1997, 7.4 percent, and in 2000, 5.7 percent. (See Table 1, Appendix A).

The most common object vandalized is the car (44%), followed by a mailbox (13%) or a residence (13%). Damage usually involves defacement (35%) or smashing or tearing (18% & 17% respectively). (See Table 2, Appendix B).

#### Juvenile Self Reported Perpetration and Victimization (Monitoring the Future Survey)

The Monitoring the Future Survey is administered to a sample high school seniors across the nation. They are asked specific questions about victimization, crime commission, and drug/alcohol usage. Juvenile rates mirror the trends seen in the NCVS; victimization has decreased during in the last decade, from 27.2 percent in 1994 to 22.9 percent in 2002. (See Table 3, Appendix A).

About 12-14 percent of high school seniors admit committing an act of vandalism at school, while 6.5 admit a similar act at work. While the numbers increased during the late 1990’s, they have decreased in 2002. Every year, about 3 percent admit to arson. (See Table 4, Appendix A)

#### FBI Arrest Rates

The FBI tallies arrests for all local jurisdictions around the country. For cities with a population ranging from 50-99,000, the 2001 arrest rate for vandalism was 100.6 per 100,000 inhabitants. Nationally, vandalism comprised 2.4 percent of all arrests tallied (regardless of jurisdiction size).

### Vandalism in Longmont

#### Definition

Criminal Mischief (or vandalism) occurs when one person knowingly damages the property of another. The offense is a felony if the loss to the victim exceeds \$500.00. Damage can involve partial or complete destruction or defacement of any object.

#### Reported Incidents

Graffiti. Official reports of graffiti are not available. Since the inception of Graffiti Eradication and Abatement Response (G.E.A.R), known incidents of graffiti have been handled more informally. Prior to the new ordinance, report takers referred any complaints to the Community Services section of the Police Department. The Police Department noted and photographed any graffiti that appeared gang related and used the information to appraise any rise in gang activity. The Police and Municipal Juvenile

<sup>1</sup> Weisel, D.L. (2000). Graffiti. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services: Problem Oriented Guides for Police Services, Washington, D.C., p.5.

Probation Departments worked collaboratively to remove the graffiti from the reported sites, using community service probationers as labor. Once the new ordinance was passed, all graffiti has been referred to City Code Enforcement. Within the parameters of the new law, probationers may still be asked to remove graffiti around the city, though their participation is far below what it once was.

In 2001, G.E.A.R. recorded 127 cases of graffiti. Most often, a wooden wall or fence were defaced. (See Table 5 in Appendix A). Between September 2002 and early December 2003, Code Enforcement has logged 220 calls regarding graffiti. They record the location by police beat. According to their records, the beats which have been hit hardest are Three, One, Five and Nine. (See Table 6, Appendix A and the Police Beat Map, Appendix B).

Other Acts of Vandalism. Between January 2001 and early December 2003, the Longmont Police Department completed 3,508 vandalism reports.<sup>2</sup> Between 2001 and 2002, reported vandalisms increased by 8 percent. In 2003, the numbers decreased by 18 percent.<sup>3</sup> (See Table 7, Appendix A). The most common target has been the automobile (69 to 72 percent), followed by a residence (14 to 17 percent), and then a business (6 to 7 percent). Typically, the mischief involves a window smash (52 to 56 percent). (See Table 8, Appendix A.)

Parks. The Parks & Open Space Division maintains internal records regarding park damage and cleanup. Graffiti and damage to restrooms remain the two most frequent occurrences in the city parks. Only when extensive damage is experienced or repeat acts in a specific park are the police called to investigate. Recent examples of single incident extremes have been arson to several park buildings with the most expensive costing \$49,000 at Hover Park in West Longmont and >\$20,000 at Affolter Park in South Longmont.

<b>Actual Costs</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
Labor	\$8,809.23	\$7,644.
Materials	\$20,983.60	\$13,804.80
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$29,792.83</b>	<b>\$21,488.80</b>

The chronic nature of the graffiti and vandalism and the sense that clean up efforts are futile has resulted in lower employee morale for periods of time associated with repeat acts. However, beyond the impact vandals have had on Parks' efforts, an overriding cost to the community that can't be measured in dollars or labor is the reluctance of nearby residents to have the Parks & Open Space Division create any further facilities for some youth amenities. Specifically, during the community based park planning sessions that are hosted by staff to design and master plan new parks, some residents often express concern and sometimes fear that creating non traditional park amenities that target teen populations, such as (skateparks, graffiti walls, BMX tracks, etc.) will only net more problems. (Photographs showing damage to the park are attached as Appendix C).

**Police Biennial Survey Results**

Concern. Biennially, the Police Department surveys both Longmont residents and local business owners. The survey was conducted in 1999, 2001, and 2003. Each respondent is asked whether they perceive vandalism as a significant problem in their neighborhood (or at their business) and whether they have been a victim of such a crime. For residents, around 80 percent do not believe that vandalism is a significant problem in their neighborhood and for 85 percent, graffiti is not a concern. For business persons, 72 percent do not consider vandalism a problem and 74 percent do not perceive graffiti as a

<sup>2</sup> The Longmont Police Department actually completed 5,346 Vandalism reports between 2001 and 2003. However, for 34 percent of those cases (n=1838), vandalism was a lesser included offense when a more serious crime was charged (e.g., in cases of burglary, domestic violence, or first degree trespass). Since the Council is interested in a close-up examination of vandalism as a solitary concern, this discussion will focus on the remaining 66 percent (n=3,508).

<sup>3</sup> The number of reported criminal mischief (mischief as a lesser included offense) shows the same trend. Numbers increased by 4 percent in 2002 and decreased by 16 percent in 2003.

problem. The 2003 numbers are fairly consistent with the 1999 results, though in 2001, residents and business persons found both issues even less problematic. (See Table 9, Appendix A).

**Victimization.** In Longmont, residents are asked if they, or another family member, have been victimized by vandalism one or more times, while in Longmont. This has fluctuated over the three surveys. In 1999, one quarter reported some victimization. This dropped to 19 percent in 2001, but it increased to 33 percent in 2003. The youth portion of the survey asked if they, or a sibling in their household under the age of 18, had been a victim of vandalism. In 2001, 22 percent reported they had been a victim of vandalism, but in 2003 it fell to 12 percent. Each survey year, around one-third of Longmont businesses have experienced one or more acts of vandalism. The percentages are slightly less for graffiti. (See Table 9, Appendix A).

### **Arrests by Longmont Police**

In the last three years, Longmont Police have made 513 arrests for vandalism. The numbers have tended to diminish each year. Most offenders are referred to County Court. Males account for 82 percent of all arrests. Nearly 70 percent are under the age of thirty. The average age of arrest is 26 years (median age is 22 years).<sup>4</sup> (See Table 10, Appendix A). Without looking at all 513 arrest reports, it isn't possible to identify the specific nature of the vandalism. The following questions remain unanswered: Was the vandalism a random or directed act; what was damaged; what was the method of destruction; what was the value of the loss; was graffiti part of the crime; was the suspect arrested for multiple incidents; and was this charge the lesser of two or more charges?

### **Comparing Longmont with the Nation**

Vandalism trends in Longmont tend to mirror the nation's. Most frequently, the target of vandals in Longmont and the nation are automobiles and the breaking of glass. However, in terms of arrest rate, Longmont is much higher than the nation. For the nation, the arrest rate for a city the size of Longmont is 100.6 (per 100,000). However, Longmont's rate has been more than double with 249 in 1999, 214 in 2001, and 194 in 2003. One reason our numbers may be higher is because we have a better reporting rate than the national average. The NCVS indicates that for all crimes, the national reporting average is 36% but in Longmont our reporting average is 49%.<sup>5</sup> Obviously, better reporting increases the odds that the case will be cleared. .

Nationally, more individuals over the age of 18 are arrested (54%) than are those under 18 years (46%). In Longmont many more adults than juveniles are arrested for vandalism (71 percent are adult v 29 percent juvenile).

Longmont cannot compare offending rates with the Monitoring The Future study because no on-going self-reported **offending** survey has been conducted in this community. However, Longmont's self-reported **victimization** rate for vandalism appears higher than that reported in the NCVS. Over the last ten years, household victimization rate in the NCVS has ranged from 6-9 percent, while in Longmont it has ranged from 19 to 33 percent. In terms of youth victims, the numbers recorded in the *Monitoring The Future Study* more closely match what we see in Longmont. In that analysis 22-27 percent of the high school seniors have been victims of vandalism, a much closer number to what we see among youth in Longmont and the community at large.

### **Best Practices**

Vandalism is a widespread problem for nearly every community. Since it is often a random crime that takes little time to commit, apprehension can be difficult. Many incidents go unreported. There are varying motives for the crime, but the end result is expensive in terms of repair cost, reduced sense of

---

<sup>4</sup> Arrest data (as opposed to the reported crime data addressed on page 1) may include offenders who have committed no other crime except vandalism as well as those who were arrested for more serious crimes. Without extensive research on a case by case basis, it is not possible to differentiate individuals arrested for vandalism alone, as opposed to others who were arrested for burglary and vandalism, with vandalism constituting a lesser-included secondary charge.

<sup>5</sup> According to our biennial Police-Community Survey, 48% reported their victimization in 1999. In 2001, 54 percent reported, and in 2003, it was 46 percent. The average for all three years is 49%. The last year recorded for the NCVS is 1999.

safety, reduced property values, and the ties it has to more serious incidents of crime and disorder. It is generally agreed that graffiti must be removed immediately to avoid any positive reinforcement the vandal receives by seeing the markings remain. In terms of the “broken windows” philosophy any sign of disorder breeds further problems because it sends a message that the community doesn’t care and isn’t watching.

In terms of graffiti, damages are usually visible to the public and the surfaces that are defaced are often hard to clean. Graffiti has been explained as adolescent rites of passage that is fairly innocent; anger toward society; ideologically based, usually reflecting hate and bias; gang related marking territory and making threats; tagging as self expression and a means to attain notoriety; or a gateway offense to more serious crimes.<sup>6</sup>

Practitioners and researchers have made several recommendations to help communities reduce graffiti. This includes **target hardening** practices such as:

- a. Additional lighting
- b. Monitored surveillance camera, especially closed circuit television (through a security company or police dispatch). Systems were maintained with a quick response in mind.
- c. Audio cameras where the person monitoring can actually speak to the offender
- d. Sprinklers that are motion activated
- e. Vandal proof surfaces that are dark, textured, coated with wax or silicon sealers, graffiti resistant paint, non solid surfaces, or easily cleaned surfaces
- f. Control access (place baffles around poles, fence off areas, plant thorny bushes, close the area at night, etc.)

**In terms of enforcement**, police are urged to engage in zero-tolerance enforcement and to utilize undercover officers. One agency recommends partnering with local teens to co-patrol with a bike officer to find the graffiti and to possibly identify its source in the neighborhood. In Ohio, the police enlisted a 24-7 auxiliary police patrol for the parks. Some jurisdictions have utilized civil injunctions to keep known offenders away from areas. There are laws that hold parents accountable (financially) for their child’s behavior. Some jurisdictions look to increase sanctions for the offense, such as seizing a driver’s license or suspending an offender from school. Some more unique approaches found in Europe involve a type of “city-guard” program where uniformed civilians patrol public areas. Most guards are hired from a list of the long-term unemployed. They receive several weeks of training and are paid minimum wage.

In Florida, the police and school partnered to create an anti-vandalism program that provided incentives and sanctions. The police chief and principal addressed every middle and high school classroom outlining the program and their expectations. Students were asked to sign a pledge, knowing what sanctions would be employed if the pledge was broken. Incentives included raffles, media publicity and permission to attend special school functions. Sanctions included being banned from special school activities and being charged with an offense.

**Controlling access** to materials is another approach. This might involve a ban on the sale of markers and spray paint to youth, and to place those items behind secure counters to eliminate shoplifting. In San Diego, officers found that there were a number of web sites maintained by graffiti “artists” that discussed where the best places were to do their work, where stores could be found that sold materials, as well as providing a venue to showcase their work. If officials peruse these web sites, some proactive intervention might prove productive.

As a more **holistic approach**, youth educational programs are encouraged. Most youth don’t comprehend the cost a victim incurs when property is damaged or defaced. In Norway, they found that their anti-bullying program also reduced their vandalism problem. In essence, disruptive behaviors often go together, so targeting one may have an unanticipated consequence on another. Providing additional job

---

<sup>6</sup> Weisel, op.cit. 0

opportunities engages youth in pro-social activities. In Los Angeles, school staff provided a program in partnership with local consultants that, on an on-going and fluid basis, implemented school-wide programs that taught students activities away from crime and disruption, while also engaging the community in prevention efforts. Overall, crime is seen as the result of little adult interaction and appropriate discipline which leaves youth rebellious and angry. These programs were designed to turn this energy in to something more productive.

As a general trend, a number of communities recommend a GEAR-like program (usually spearheaded by the police department) that involves partnering with businesses for supplies and citizen volunteers for labor.

For the most part, graffiti walls remain intact. They are seen as legitimate art by other “graffiti artists,” so they are left alone. Graffiti walls have the most favorable impact to the community if they are done in an area that is chronically defaced. Overall, it appears that eliminating the chronic graffiti spot does not displace it to other areas of the city.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Is the City Council interested in the City enhancing their effort to combat vandalism, and if so, what should be the focus?
2. Should prevention approaches include organized, sanctioned graffiti walls and additional job opportunities for youth?
3. Should public facilities be hardened or closed to the public at earlier hours?

# **Appendix**

## **A**

### **(TABLES)**

Table 1  
National Crime Victimization Survey  
Percent Of Households Victimized By Vandalism

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Percent of Households Victimized	9.0%	8.2%	7.9%	7.4%	6.5%	6.2%	5.7%

Table 2  
National Crime Victimization Survey  
Characteristics of the Household & The Act Of Vandalism, By Percent in 2002

Type of Damage	Race of Household	Geographic Area	Size of Jurisdiction	Household Size	Loss	Target of Damage
Deface/Graffiti=35.2%	No differences	Northeast=5%	Urban=6.6%	1=4.2%	\$1.7B	Auto=44.4%
Broken glass=17.6%		Midwest=6.5%	Suburban=5.6%	2-3=5.6%		Mailbox=13.2%
Other break/tear=16.7%		South=4.4%	Rural=4.4%	4-5=7.4%		House=12.8%
Damaged with a car=5.1%		West=7.4%		6+=8.4%		Yard=8.8%
Burned=1.1%						Furniture=1%
Cruelty to Animals=0.4%						Animals=0.5%
Other=23.9%						Bicycle=0.4%
						Clothing=0/1%
				Other=18.9%		

Table 3  
Percent Of High School Seniors Who Have Been Victimized One Or More Times By  
An Act Of Vandalism: *Monitoring the Future Study*

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
High School Seniors Who Are Victimized	27.2%	27.3%	25.9%	24.7%	25.3%	25.6%	25.2%	23.8%	22.9%

Table 4  
Percent of High School Seniors Who Admit To Committing An Act Of Vandalism One Or More Times:  
*Monitoring the Future Study*

Percent of High School Seniors Who Are Perpetrators	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Committed at School	13.8%	14.0%	14.3%	15.2%	14.3%	13.4%	13.5%	14.0%	11.5%
Committed at Work	5.6%	6.2%	6.3%	6.7%	7.3%	7.1%	7.2%	7.3%	6.5%
Arson	3.2%	2.5%	3.0%	3.1%	2.9%	2.5%	2.8%	3.1%	3.1%

Table 5  
Graffiti Reports Referred To The G.E.A.R. Program In 2001

Category	Specifics	Number	Percent
Initiated by Whom	Citizen	72	55%
	City Employee	55	45%
Location Type	House	63	48%
	Business	40	31%
	Alley Specifically Mentioned	15	12%
	Park/Golf Course	4	3%
	Vacant Area	1	1%
	Other	7	5%
Structure Type	Wall or Building	60	43%
	Fence	26	19%
	Garage or Out-Building	19	14%
	Sign	8	6%
	Dumpster	8	6%
	Electric Poles or Boxes	5	4%
	Outdoor Restrooms	2	1%
	Other	12	9%
Surface	Wood	46	39%
	Brick	23	19%
	Block	22	18%
	Metal	16	13%
	Concrete	5	4%
	Plastic	3	3%
	Other	4	3%

Table 6  
Graffiti Reports From Code Enforcement  
September 1, 2002 Through Early December 2003

Year	Number Incidents	Beat 1	Beat 2	Beat 3	Beat 4	Beat 5	Beat 6	Beat 7	Beat 8	Beat 9	Beat 10	Beat 11	Beat 12
2002	38	2	0	7	0	5	0	1	8	11	0	0	4
2003	182	30	20	38	14	25	3	15	4	17	3	6	7

Table 7  
Reported Vandalism v Vandalism Targeted by Crime Analysis  
Differences in Focus

Year	Targeted by Crime Analysis	Percent Change	Total Reports	Percent Change
2001	1179		1831	
2002	1281	+8.65%	1912	+4.42%
2003*	(est.) 1048	(est.) -18.19%	(est.) 1603	(est.) -16.16%
Total	(est.) 3508		5346	

Numbers for 2003 have been collected through early December (n=961 for targeted and 1469 for total reported). Yearly number is an extrapolated estimate.

Table 8  
Reported Vandalism in Longmont By Target & Method  
2001 through December 7, 2003

METHOD	YEAR	TARGET						
		AUTO	RESIDENCE	BUSINESS	SCHOOL/ CHURCH	PARK	OTHER	TOTAL
SMASH	2001	41%	7%	4%	1%	-	3%	56%
	2002	43%	6%	2%	1%	-	2%	54%
	2003	37%	8%	4%	2%	-	1%	52%
MISSILE	2001	6%	1%	-	-	-	-	8%
	2002	7%	2%	1%	-	-	-	9%
	2003	4%	2%	-	-	-	-	7%
SLASH	2001	9%	-	-	-	-	-	10%
	2002	7%	-	-	-	-	-	8%
	2003	5%	-	-	-	-	-	6%
KEYED	2001	4%	-	-	-	-	-	4%
	2002	5%	-	-	-	-	-	5%
	2003	4%	-	-	-	-	-	4%
PAINT	2001	-	1%	-	-	-	-	2%
	2002	2%	1%	-	-	-	-	3%
	2003	7%	1%	-	-	-	-	9%
PRY	2001	-	1%	-	-	-	-	1%
	2002	2%	1%	1%	-	-	-	4%
	2003	1%	2%	1%	-	-	-	4%
EGGED	2001	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2002	1%	-	-	-	-	-	1%
	2003	1%	1%	-	-	-	-	2%
OTHER	2001	10%	4%	1%	-	-	3%	19%
	2002	8%	4%	1%	-	-	2%	16%
	2003	9%	4%	1%	2%	1%	-	16%
TOTAL	2001	72%	14%	6%	2%	-	6%	100%
	2002	74%	14%	6%	2%	1%	4%	100%
	2003	69%	17%	7%	3%	1%	3%	100%

Table 9  
Biennial Survey Results Regarding Perceived Problems with  
Vandalism and Graffiti in Longmont, 1999-2001-2003

Source	Issue	1999	2001	2003
Resident	Vandalism is no problem (or a minor problem)	81%	78%	78%
	Graffiti is no problem (or a minor problem)	85%	90%	84%
	Victim of Vandalism, one or more times	25%	19%	33%
Business*	Vandalism is no problem (or a minor problem)	71%	74%	72%
	Graffiti is no problem (or a minor problem)	75%	79%	74%
	Victim of Vandalism, one or more times	37%	32%	31%
	Victim of Graffiti, one or more times	33%	28%	28%
Youth*	Youth (or sibling)a victim of vandalism	29%	22%	12%

\*The Business survey allowed respondents to check the answer "not applicable." This option was not provided in the Resident Survey. For consistency, those answering "not applicable" have been eliminated from the tally.

\*\*In 1999, the question for youth was more broadly worded, asking if they knew anyone under the age of 18 who had been a victim of vandalism in Longmont. In 2001 and 2003, the question was limited to youth in the same household.

Table 10  
Arrests By The Longmont Police Department For Criminal Mischief  
January 2001 Through Early December 2003

Category	Specifics	Number	Percent
Year	2001	194	38%
	2002	167	33%
	2003	152	30%
Court	County	362	71%
	Municipal	151	29%
Gender	Male	419	82%
	Female	94	18%
Age (Aggregated) Juvenile=147 (29%) Adult=365 (71%)	10-19 years	217	42%
	20-29 years	140	27%
	30-39 years	72	14%
	40-49 years	65	13%
	50-59 years	15	3%
	60+ years	3	1%
Age	Mean	26	
	Median	22	
	Mode	18	

# **APPENDIX**

## **B**

### **(Beat Map)**

# **APPENDIX**

## **C**

### **(PHOTOGRAPHS)**