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From: Chandler Scarborough [chandler@nowlisted.com]
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Editorial - How safe do you feel today?

Friday, March 28, 2008
2:13 AM

Most people consider safety and quality of schools to be among their top reasons for selecting a home in Virginia Beach over another. Virginia Beach has long been known for its high test scores, and it has often been said that "Virginia Beach is still better than the best school in most other cities." Virginia Beach has also promoted itself as the best city of its size in the country.

How long will that be the case? Increased focus is being given to the growth of youth "gangs" and violence coming recession, and economic downturns historically lead to increased crime. Plus, over the past ten years Virginia Beach's police force has not kept pace with its population growth.

The first precinct, for example, stretches from Lynnhaven Parkway near Green Run all the way to the North Neck. That is a lot of ground to cover! I often hear from people throughout the city that they would like to see more police presence in their neighborhoods. Is it time to reexamine the number of police officers needed and to look for ways to increase their visibility?

The fact that many neighborhoods now have hired, or are considering hiring, off-duty police officers to provide extra security seems to indicate that residents consider increased police presence a high priority and are willing to pay for it. But is it appropriate that neighborhoods should have to pay for police protection which most of us consider a "core" city service?

Are there REALLY no areas of the proposed budget from which additional funding could be moved to support the police? If not, perhaps we should consider raising the tax rate to pay for additional police protection. While no one wants to pay more taxes, at least property taxes are deductible. Payments for off-duty police officers and private security are not.

Rather than encouraging an ever-increasing number of neighborhoods to hire their own police forces, it would make more sense to set the real estate tax rate at a realistic level so that the city can provide a sufficient level of security for its residents to feel safe?

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