



A man rides a bike down Weld Street, an area that's had its problems over the years. PHOTOS BY ROBERT BELL/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT & CHRONICLE

After big drug arrest, can community fill street's power vacuum with help?

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Police knock on the door of every home on the block between North Union and Scio streets. After the knocking comes an announcement: "It's the police... but it's nothing bad."

Weld Street has seen trouble: Three people were shot and killed along this half-mile strip last summer. Another five were shot and survived their injuries. And a 16-year-old girl went missing from her Weld Street home in August. She would be found dead seven weeks later across the city.

Police ruled her death a homicide and a suspect has been charged.

On a mild Friday at the end of 2023, the presence of police brings a positive turn of events.

Rochester Police Capt. Sam Lucyshyn announces a substantial drug arrest in the area. The arrest creates a power vacuum that could leave the neighborhood even more vulnerable to violence as nefarious actors scramble for control.

Lucyshyn promises to fill the expected void with resources and support. He distributes pamphlets about mental health and family services, and passes out toys for young children.

Rochester police aren't walking away from Weld Street. Not yet.

Just 12% of street segments are responsible for all city's gun crime

Police are careful not to characterize all of Weld Street as a violent place.

People raise their families here. Kids play outside on swing sets atop manicured lawns. Parishioners worship behind a pair of angels painted on the walls of Mt. Carmel Deliverance Center Church. Other residents kick back at the end of a long week with soul food, a drink and live music at S&T Lounge.

In many ways, Weld Street is like any other neighborhood in this city.

Rather than label an entire community as a place where bad things happen, Rochester police are trying a more targeted approach — focusing their intervention efforts on street segments sometimes as compact as 300 yards long.

Last year, just 12% of street segments were responsible for all of Rochester's gun crime, Lucyshyn said.

Looking at Weld Street, 10 of the 16 non-fatal shootings that took place there over the last five years were within one block of the corner where Weld meets North Union Street.

Most of that violence picked up in the last two years. Between 2014 and 2020, there were zero homicides on this street. Police started conducting what they call a "case of place investigation" on Weld Street last summer after five people were injured or killed in three shootings within 10 days.

Violence attracts attention.

"It's unfair to look at it as 'Weld Street is a problem,'" Capt. Greg Bello said. "No, that one corner on Weld Street might be a problem."

During a case of place investigation, police try to identify environmental factors that could be contributing to violence.

A one-way street, for example, could be acting as a sort of unintended drive-thru for drug sales. Heavy greenery or poor lighting creates spaces where people can lurk unseen. If repeated shootings are taking place near a certain home or business, it might raise red flags about an absentee landlord or backyard activities.

Some of this is easily addressed.



Officer James Laruez inside Awan Grocery, a corner store on Weld Street and North Union Street.

Some pedestrians on Weld Street look uneasy and apprehensive at the presence of police in their neighborhood. Others say they are happy to see law enforcement patrolling the area.

Bello said one business owner near the Weld Street neighborhood was getting tired of people loitering outside, so the owner researched and planted a specific type of bush that attracts bees to try and get people to move along.

Working with people takes more time.

RPD canvassed Weld Street after D&C reporting intensified

In an older style of policing, RPD may have responded to an uptick in violence on Weld Street by saturating the neighborhood with patrols and writing tickets for any infraction they saw — hoping something would stick.

Today, Rochester police have started identifying people who they suspect are caught up in drugs or gang activity. Rather than try to shake them down and make an arrest, police are offering resources to help them get on a better path.

These meetings are impossible without community partners, Lucyshyn said, because of a general mistrust in police. Oftentimes, RPD will try to identify what help the person may need — and approach them alongside a credible messenger from the community.

In December, Lucyshyn walks Weld Street with fellow RPD officers James Laruez and Angelo Mercone, local members of the U.S. Marshals

Service and representatives from the city's person-in-crisis team. City Councilmember Michael Patterson and Chaplain George Folwell, a member of a ministry that responds to crime scenes, are also there.

"Like any institution, there are a few bad apples, but that doesn't mean all cops are bad people," Folwell said.

Some pedestrians on Weld Street look uneasy and apprehensive at the presence of police in their neighborhood. Others say they are happy to see law enforcement patrolling the area.

Several residents who open their doors recount instances of violence and drug trafficking they have observed. People did not want to give their names to a reporter.

After dropping off a young child, a bus driver asks the Rev. Dr. Julius C. Clay what was going on. After he tells her about their mission, the woman gives two thumbs up in support and commends the officers for their work.

"That's why I wanted to come," said Clay, who leads the nearby New Beth Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. "So the people would know they have nothing to fear."

By the time they leave that evening, the moon has replaced any daylight. Weld Street is quiet, peaceful and secure.

Capt. Lucyshyn hopes it stays that way. Either way, he'll be back.