SAFETY REPORT 2019

DOWNTOWN WATCH AMBASSAORS

For over 20 years, Downtown Watch Ambassadors have served our community by providing assistance to downtown businesses, residents, and visitors. Ambassadors also work closely with the Winnipeg Police Service, Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Services, the City, and other key organizations to help improve the downtown core. Downtown Watch Ambassadors are also responsible for helping achieve a clean, safe, and welcoming downtown.



Recent surveys continue to rate safety and crime prevention as high priorities for downtown businesses and Winnipeggers (see page 2). To address these concerns, Downtown Watch Ambassadors serve as a visible street presence within the BIZ area and are trained to identify and report safety hazards, suspicious circumstances, criminal activity, and other serious concerns to the proper agencies.

Overall, the Downtown Watch Ambassador program is a successful initiative that has a significant impact on the civility of the downtown area and contributes to making it a more welcoming environment for residents, workers and visitors.

Safety Report - Downtown Watch Ambassadors

Downtown Winnipeg BIZ dedicates a team of uniformed Watch Ambassadors to assist in keeping our downtown safe. They cover a 250-block radius and patrol seven days a week from 0800 to midnight.

Our current compliment for Downtown Watch Ambassadors:

- 15 Full Time
- 10 Part Time (from 0.2 to 0.8)

With the City of Winnipeg contribution received in late 2018 ($180,000) the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ was able to employ 25 Ambassadors through 2019 covering shifts during the day and evenings. In 2019, the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ also managed an increase in calls for service.

Downtown Watch Stats: January 2019-September 2019 (YTD)

- Total Calls for Service: 3708
    - Average of 412 calls/month in 2019
    - **Up from 2018** – Average of 390 calls/month
- SafeWalks provided: 363
- Special Attentions: 1525
- Well Being Checks: 960

The Downtown Winnipeg BIZ believes the Watch Ambassador program is a critical piece to improving safety downtown. The program helps alleviate calls to Winnipeg Police and Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service by sending the right resource to address a problem. The Ambassadors' visible presence on the streets also provides a sense of comfort.

In a survey of nearly 3,000 Winnipeggers this July, over 77% said the Downtown Watch Ambassador program made them feel safer when they visited downtown. In a survey of Downtown Winnipeg BIZ members in January, 91% said they would like to see more foot patrols. In an omnibus survey this fall by Probe Research, 78% of respondents said they felt very safe or somewhat safe downtown during the day, but that number drops to 32% when asked how safe they feel at night.

SAFEWALK PROGRAM

Downtown Watch Ambassadors are available to walk citizens to their car or bus stop if they are in the downtown area and feel the need for assistance?

They will meet citizens at their location within the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ and walk with them either to a bus stop or other location downtown.

Downtown Watch can be contacted between 08:00 am and midnight to request a SafeWalk.

(204) 958-SAFE (7233)

Request:

In 2020, the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ would like to, at minimum, maintain the number of Ambassadors and ideally, add more eyes and ears on the street at night, when Winnipeggers say they feel less safe.

The Downtown Winnipeg BIZ respectfully requests a continuation of funding dedicated to improving safety. Without the $180,000 contribution received from the City of Winnipeg in late 2018, we are at risk of losing several full-time Ambassadors from downtown streets. That would mean between 10,000 and 12,000 less hours of patrol.

A 2020 funding commitment of $180,000 would allow the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ to maintain current staffing levels. An increase to $250,000 would add two additional positions, increasing the number of Ambassadors on the streets at night. The Downtown Winnipeg BIZ will continue to seek additional funding sources to sustain this level and increase the number of Ambassadors over the next three years and beyond.

Recent Watch Ambassador Success Stories

- While on patrol, a suspicious male was observed loitering in a back-lane and acting in a suspicious manner. Watch Ambassadors recognized the male as a suspect wanted by WPS and who was believed responsible for breaking into several vehicles in the downtown area. Police were called and Ambassadors kept the male under surveillance until they arrived. The male was taken into custody and theft from vehicles dropped significantly.

- Watch Ambassadors, while patrolling a parkade experiencing a high number of vehicle break-ins, observed a suspicious female rummaging inside a parked car late at night. Upon seeing the Ambassadors, the female exited the vehicle and claimed it to be hers. Ambassadors were highly suspicious and called police. Upon arrival, police quickly determined that the vehicle was not hers and took her into custody.

- A customer was hit over the head with a liquor bottle when confronting a shoplifting suspect while leaving a downtown liquor store. The suspect fled prior to police arrival however Ambassadors in the area were able to help identify the suspect who was subsequently arrested.

- While on patrol, Watch Ambassadors were approached by a female asking for help. She reported that she had been abducted by a male and was being forced to stay in a hotel room against her will and managed to escape. Ambassadors immediately called 911 and waited with the female until police arrived. It was later learned that the female, who was not from Winnipeg, had been reported to police as a missing person.

- A male, who was believed to have been under the influence of methamphetamines committed several acts of shoplifting in the downtown. When confronted by security, the male produced a large machete and threatened them with it. The male then fled and Watch Ambassadors were alerted. While police and security were searching for the male, Ambassadors observed the suspect run into a nearby parkade to hide. They alerted police who quickly attended and after a brief foot pursuit were able to take the male into custody.

- In addition to having paid Watch Ambassadors, the success of the program also relies on dedicated volunteers. Each month, approximately 60 volunteers dedicate their time and energy to help make our downtown safe. This adds an additional 720 hours a month of visible presence and assistance to help improve safety downtown.

