

Guns, gangs still key issue in York Region

BY JOE FANTAUZZI
Staff Writer

Violent crime along with guns and gangs have been identified by you as two of the top public safety priorities in York Region.

Traditionally, traffic and traffic safety has been the number one concern for residents, according to Chief Armand La Barge, but it now sits at number three.

The others are crimes against property and drug control and enforcement.

"What's of concern to the community obviously needs to be of a concern to us, but our priorities will also take into account some of the issues we've identified," Chief La Barge said, noting massage parlours and marijuana grow operations as examples of problems the force has put in its cross hairs.

"When we establish priorities, it doesn't mean to the exclusion of other concerns and issues," he said.

"It's ironic when you look at our crime rate and if you were to ask anybody in the street, 'Are guns and gangs a big problem here in York Region?', they would certainly say 'Not compared to Toronto' but it's obviously of a concern to people."

"They're concerned about it getting a foothold here."

A new area police hadn't seen previously identified as a priority before is property crimes, Chief La Barge said.

"When you look at all of the things together, violent crime, guns and gangs and drugs and then property crime, there's a connection between a lot of these types of crime," he said.

Traffic will be an issue in York Region forever, Chief La Barge said.

"If you were to survey the residents 25 years from now, traffic would be a major concern just because of growth, just because of infrastructure struggling to keep pace, just because of the way people drive," he said.

While the rate of crime in York Region is decreasing and police clearance rates are increasing, Chief La Barge said the force continues to monitor perception of crime as an issue.

"All of those (crime) statistics are technically going down, yet the perception is going up, part of it is a growing region, you have less of a sense of village or community-mindedness and you get that urban think taking over," he said.

Another factor is some media outlets sensationalize crime.

"If the front leading stories are about crime in Toronto or crime in a community, before I know it, I'm starting to think that my community is less safe than it used to be. Nowadays, with the GTA shrinking into one, we're kind of feeling the impact of crime in other parts of the GTA."

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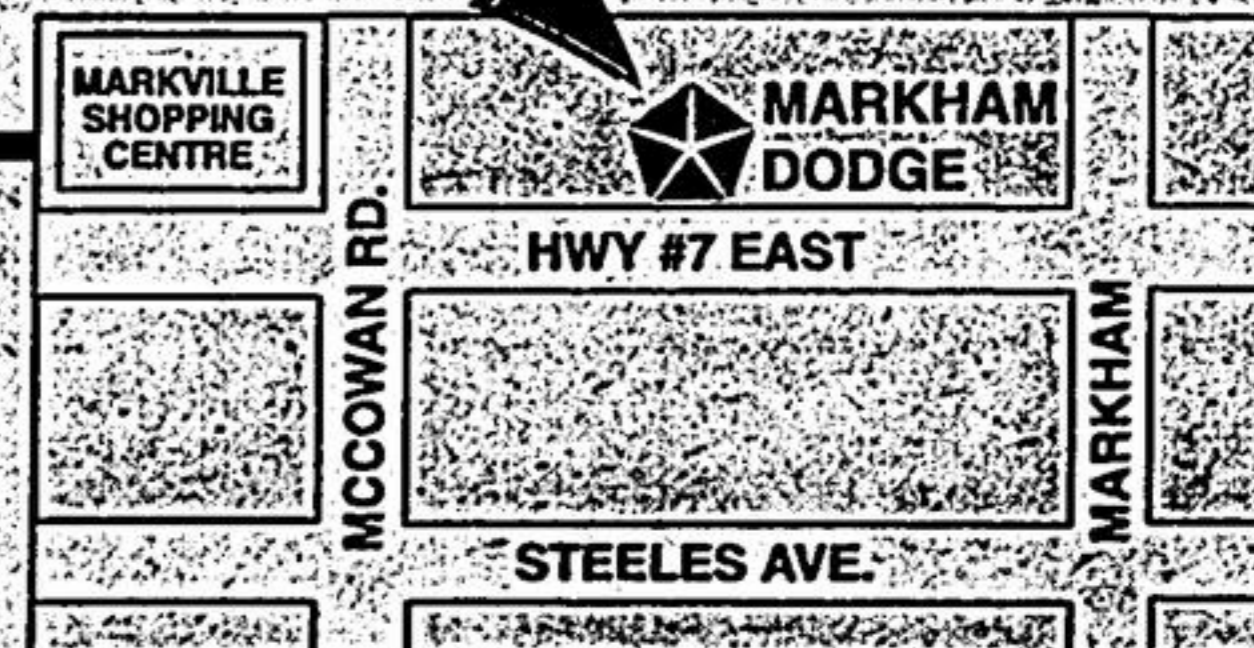
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