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CIDs look to lower crime rate

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NORCROSS — The most important thing — whether it's for businesses, shoppers or residents — is that an area be clean and safe.

That's why Brett Harrell, the director of a three-year-old Community Improvement District on U.S. Highway 78, is proud that his area has one of the lowest crime rates in Gwinnett County.

Off-duty police officers patrol the area for a cost of \$2,500 a year, and Harrell said they've stopped armed robberies in progress, caught a purse snatcher and generally made the area even safer for everyone who sets foot in it.

"The bulk of our crime is property crime. We're so fortunate that comparatively speaking, so little of our crime is life-threatening," he said. "We're keeping up a strong police presence to make sure we don't experience that type of crime."

The other CIDs in the county, Gwinnett Place and Gwinnett Village, are taking note. Gwinnett Village CID Director Chuck Warbington said it makes sense for the Norcross-area district to amp up its security and pay off-duty officers to wear their uniforms in the Village, as well.

More officers will increase the sense of security for the district, which formed in March. The group is now gathering data and crime statistics, but Warbington said he already knows his area is one of the largest in the county, with among the fewest officers patrolling it.

This week, the CID's board approved a security master plan that calls for the off-duty officers and a study of whether more patrols, more lighting or better landscaping is the answer to stopping some of the area crime.

"We need to know how to protect ourselves," he said. "Everywhere we go, that's what we hear, that security is the No. 1 issue. A lot of it is perception of crime. And perception's reality when you're trying to lease somebody property."

Violent crime isn't the only kind that can keep people from living or shopping in an area. Gwinnett Place CID Director Joe Allen said vagrants who loiter in front of stores may discourage people from entering a shop.

Officers addressing a meeting of that group said store owners or shoppers

should not be afraid to call 911 if someone is panhandling or trespassing. That CID is also conducting a study to determine the type of crime that takes place in the area.

Warbington said the private patrols requested by the CIDs aren't meant to take the place of officers who already work in the area, but to enhance them.

"We're not here basically to supplant anything," he said. "There's a partnership there."

Village to hold corridor meeting

The Gwinnett Village CID will hold a meeting Wednesday to discuss a corridor study for Jimmy Carter Boulevard. The design meeting will take place at 6:30 p.m. at the Global Mall, 5675 Jimmy Carter Blvd., and participants will discuss transportation and land-use issues.

A second meeting, to discuss the results, will be held Aug. 30 at the same time and location.

For more information on the study, see www.gwinnettville.com or call 770-449-6515.