

## **Sycamore Avenue Crime Victims Group Requests Increased Focus by Police on Crime Prevention**

2013 was a bad year for many residents of Sycamore Avenue. There were 17 burglaries in the Sycamore Avenue Area (as defined by the Takoma Park Police Department) during the first nine months of 2013, which was more than three times the number for 2012.<sup>1</sup>

The Takoma Park Police Department responded to each incident and undertook some proactive tactics, such as deployment of undercover officers. However, the crimes on Sycamore Avenue continued, and in January 2014, the burglaries escalated to an armed robbery and carjacking at the corner of Sycamore and Beech. The victim of that crime was a security-conscious woman who was walking the 20 feet from her car to her front door after arriving home from work at 9:00 p.m. In addition, we learned of several other armed robberies that occurred within a short distance of Sycamore Avenue during the month of January.

A group of approximately 15 residents of Sycamore Avenue and nearby streets met on February 2, 2014 to discuss the crime wave and countermeasures that we can take, as well as specific crime prevention ideas that we would like to see the Takoma Park Police Department explore.

This report summarizes our discussions.

Collectively, we have a wide variety of perspectives on issues of crime and policing in Takoma Park. Many of us have lived in Takoma Park for a decade or more. Most of us have been victims of crime in Takoma Park at least once. Some of us have experience or professional knowledge of criminal justice systems.

**We believe that more must be done, by the Police Department and by residents, to prevent crime in Takoma Park.**

And we believe that our ideas, outlined in this document, can be successful. There are many cities and towns with far more difficult crime challenges than Takoma Park that are succeeding in reducing crime. Many neighborhoods in cities like Chicago, Detroit, and Camden, NJ have severe poverty and dysfunctional social conditions that contribute to crime. By contrast, Takoma Park is a prosperous suburb with an extremely active and high-functioning community. There is no reason why Takoma Park cannot get a handle on its crime problem.

### **Takoma Park Is a Great Town with a Bad Crime Problem**

Over many years, many of us have had the experience of mentioning the latest crime in our neighborhood to friends at work or relatives who live in other cities, and hearing them say things like, “What kind of a terrible town do you live in? You’ve had two friends get carjacked where you live? You’ve been burglarized three times? Please move someplace safe, I’m worried about you.”

And we tell them, “No, Takoma Park is a wonderful place. We wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.”

But we realize that our friends who live elsewhere have a point. Takoma Park is a dangerous place to live – or at least it feels dangerous to those of us who have had a gun waved in our face, or who have had to explain to our young children why the window is broken and their bedroom is all messed up and the TV is missing again. Most people who have lived in Takoma Park for any length of time have had such experiences.

Following is a summary of our perspectives about crime and policing in Takoma Park, with several specific suggestions for the Police Department.

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<sup>1</sup> Takoma Park Police Department. Analysis prepared by Andrew Gucciardo, Oct. 2, 2013.

## A Note about Technology, Civil Liberties, Privacy Rights, and Racial Justice

We want to state at the outset that our intention is to address the significant problem of crime in Takoma Park. We are aware that there is strong support for civil liberties among many Takoma Park residents, and we take a back seat to no one in our commitment to privacy and civil rights. To the extent that we will seek consideration of new technologies and strategies by the Takoma Park Police Department, our goal is to test approaches that have helped many other cities and towns to deter crime. We hope to produce an intelligent, reality-based debate about issues of crime, and we hope that Takoma Park residents' concerns about national and international security agencies will not prevent any consideration of crime reduction strategies in our own back yard.

With regard to protecting our privacy, we think it is unlikely that the National Security Agency will have any interest in whether the Takoma Park Police Department installs security cameras or license plate readers that detect Takoma Park residents traveling through the streets of Takoma Park.

However, persons who have committed burglaries or armed robberies in Takoma Park might think twice about committing more of these crimes if they notice cameras and signs stating that their vehicles may be recorded as they travel to and from the scene of a crime.

Furthermore, we wish to state that we are concerned about poverty, over-incarceration of minority youths, and related issues that are connected to crime. In fact, the key element of the approach that we will be suggesting is to bring a new focus on preventing crimes from occurring in the first place. Of course, crimes that are committed must be investigated, and every police department works to identify suspects and make arrests when a crime is committed.

But investigating crimes cannot be the only approach. Nationwide, even for the most serious of all crimes – homicide – only 65 percent of crimes result in an arrest or other “clearance,” according to FBI statistics.<sup>2</sup> **Nationwide, only 28 percent of robberies are solved, and only 12 percent of burglaries result in an arrest.**

**Clearly, arresting suspects cannot be the only goal for a police department, if that “enforcement only” strategy fails to achieve results in three out of four robberies, and seven out of eight burglaries.**

**We need a new approach that adds crime prevention strategies to the mix.**

### A New Approach Is Needed: Crime Prevention Is Better than Crime Investigation

We begin by noting that since the 1980s, police departments nationwide have adopted an entirely new approach to crime fighting, in which police try to prevent crime, rather than merely responding to 911 calls and investigating crimes that have already been committed.<sup>3</sup>

A key element of crime prevention is “problem-oriented policing,” a concept that has been standard procedure in most police agencies for decades. Problem-oriented policing means that police, working with the community, seek to identify problems that contribute to crime and then eliminate those problems, rather than responding again and again to the individual criminal incidents as they occur.

(For example, if a city experiences assaults and fights outside a certain nightclub every weekend, it makes more sense to deal with the root cause of the problem – perhaps by revoking the nightclub’s liquor

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<sup>2</sup>FBI. “Percent of Offenses Cleared by Arrest or Exceptional Means.” <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2010/crime-in-the-u.s.-2010/tables/10tbl25.xls>

<sup>3</sup> A summary of this watershed development is provided in “Police and Communities: The Quiet Revolution.” George L. Kelling. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. [www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/109955.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/109955.pdf)

license – rather than having the police department keep spinning its wheels, responding to the same types of crime week after week, year after year.)

Hundreds of reports have been written about how police departments have used this approach to solve a wide variety of crime problems.

**The Center for Problem-Oriented Policing (CPOP) has published a series of 72 guidebooks that detail which strategies have been found effective, and which strategies have been found less effective, for 72 specific crime problems.**

These thoroughly researched and sourced CPOP guidebooks address issues such as robberies at ATMs, thefts from cars, burglaries, drunk driving, domestic violence, robberies of convenience stores, abandoned vehicles, hate crimes, and many others.<sup>4</sup>

Guidebook #18, “Burglary of Single-Family Homes,” addresses the most frequent crime problem on Sycamore Avenue in 2013.<sup>5</sup> This report describes 19 types of responses that police and community members have taken to prevent residential burglaries.

At the top of the list of effective practices are “installing burglar alarms” and “installing closed-circuit television” at individual houses. The Takoma Park police might consider urging residents to take these steps if they can afford them.

Another strategy cited in the guidebook is “reducing traffic access.” This strategy could be applied to Takoma Park, because many of the people who commit burglaries and other crimes in Takoma Park do not live in Takoma Park. Because Takoma Park is such a small jurisdiction on the border of Washington, D.C. and Prince George’s County, it is possible to commit a crime in Takoma Park and flee to an entirely different criminal jurisdiction in a minute or two. We are grateful that neighboring police departments are eager to work with the Takoma Park Police Department in fostering cross-jurisdiction cooperation.

We believe Takoma Park should explore ways of making it more difficult to flee a crime scene quickly, by restricting traffic through Takoma Park. (We will elaborate on the ideas of cross-jurisdiction cooperation and traffic restrictions later in this report.)

## **Technology Is the Future of Policing**

Problem-oriented policing continues to be relevant and to guide police departments nationwide, but in a sense, it is “old news” in the field of policing. There are many other developments that also have been revolutionizing policing in the last decade, including community policing, hot-spots policing, crime mapping, and Compstat programs.

There is a growing consensus in policing that technology will be the most important issue in policing in the next decade. Police departments nationwide are experimenting with a mix of new technologies, such as the following:

- Crime mapping systems and predictive analytics software that help police focus on the locations where crime is most likely to occur,
- Automated license plate readers that scan hundreds of license plates per hour to quickly identify stolen vehicles or vehicles being driven by wanted persons,
- Gunshot detection systems that notify police immediately if guns are fired, and pinpoint the location of the shooting,
- “Body-worn cameras” that are attached to police officers’ clothing, which capture video of police encounters with suspects and members of the public, and
- Police use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to (1) quickly and efficiently share information with the public and receive inquiries and comments by community members, and (2)

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, a clearinghouse of information:

<http://www.popcenter.org/problems/>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.popcenter.org/problems/burglary\\_home/](http://www.popcenter.org/problems/burglary_home/)

obtain intelligence about criminal suspects, such as gang members who “brag” about their criminal activities online.

For example, a 2011 survey of law enforcement agencies conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum found that 71 percent of responding agencies were using automated license plate readers (LPRs) to some extent, and 85 percent said they plan to acquire or increase their use of LPRs in the next five years.<sup>6</sup>

Following is a discussion of the particular strategies in policing that we think are most applicable to Takoma Park.

## **Specific Proposals We Would Like the Takoma Park Police Department to Consider**

Note: We are aware that the Takoma Park Police Department is a small department with limited resources. Thus, in choosing among various ideas that we wish to propose, we avoided strategies or technologies that would require large amounts of officer time or which could only be employed for limited periods of time.

Rather, we favored technologies and strategies that function on their own, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by sending a message to everyone who passes through our city that Takoma Park takes public safety seriously.

We want the people who have been committing crimes in Takoma Park to see things – things like security cameras, license plate readers, temporary or permanent street closures – that send a message that committing a crime in Takoma Park is a risky proposition, and that there is a good chance of being caught.

### **SECURITY CAMERAS**

Most major cities and many medium-size and small jurisdictions have deployed fixed surveillance cameras to deter crime and aid in the investigations of crime.

Police say that security cameras have contributed to thousands of arrests, and have become extremely popular in the neighborhoods where they are placed.

Jonathan Lewin, a high-ranking technology official with the Chicago Police Department, said, “Our initial idea was to leave the cameras in place for 90 days in high-crime locations and then move them, but due to community objections, we can’t remove cameras now. When we try to remove a camera from an area, there’s an immediate outcry from the community.”<sup>7</sup>

A detailed study conducted by the Urban Institute for the U.S. Department of Justice, which analyzed the use of security cameras in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Chicago, concluded that security camera programs can be designed to address concerns of organizations such as the ACLU.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the Urban Institute concluded that in most cases, “Analysis results indicate that cameras, when actively monitored, have a cost-beneficial impact on crime with no statistically significant evidence of displacement to neighboring areas.”<sup>9</sup>

**The Sycamore Avenue Group respectfully requests that the Takoma Park Police Department explore the idea of deploying approximately 10 fixed surveillance cameras at strategic locations within Takoma Park, and several additional mobile cameras that could be moved to neighborhoods experiencing spikes in crime.**

Of course, one goal of the cameras would be to provide police with leads following a major crime.

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<sup>6</sup>“How Are Innovations in Technology Transforming Policing?” Police Executive Research Forum, 2012. [http://policeforum.org/library/critical-issues-in-policing-series/Technology\\_web2.pdf](http://policeforum.org/library/critical-issues-in-policing-series/Technology_web2.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Urban Institute Justice Policy Center; and COPS Office, U.S. Department of Justice. “Final Technical Report: Evaluating the Use of Public Surveillance Cameras for Crime Control and Prevention.” September 2011. Page xi.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, page xii.

For example, the victim of the January 2014 robbery/carjacking on Sycamore reported that a light-colored small car, perhaps a Honda, drove past her as she got out of her car, and she suspects the robber was cruising the streets with an accomplice, looking for a victim.

It would be tremendously useful if the Takoma Park police could look at security cam footage at nearby locations in the minutes before the robbery/carjacking, as well as during the minutes after the crime was committed, searching for the light-colored car as well as for the victim's stolen car.

If the images were clear enough, the police might find that the Sycamore Avenue robber/carjacker was in the light-colored car, and if police could get a license plate number from the video, that might solve the crime. Even if the light-colored car was itself stolen, it would be useful to connect the robbery-carjacking on Sycamore with the earlier theft of the light-colored car, perhaps somewhere else in Takoma Park.

These surveillance cameras would be used to investigate violent crimes and other serious criminal acts in Takoma Park. We assume they would not be used to detect speeding or other moving violations by motorists – such use is not part of our proposal.

**Aside from the issue of solving individual crimes, we believe that the highly-visible presence of even a limited number of cameras in Takoma Park will serve as a deterrent and prevent crimes from being committed in the first place.**

A good deal of research has demonstrated that crime-deterrence strategies do NOT merely displace crime to other locations.<sup>10</sup> Rather, “Some neighborhoods are so attractive to criminals and so full of criminal opportunities that they actually *foster* crime.... Criminals will commit as many crimes as they have the time and energy for, *if* the crimes are easy to commit, low-risk, and profitable. When these conditions change and the rewards of crime decline, or the risks and effort necessary increase, criminals will lower their expectations [and commit fewer crimes].”<sup>11</sup>

**In other words, we believe that the people who have been committing crimes with impunity in Takoma Park will be less likely to continue committing crimes if they notice – every time they pass through Takoma Park – the presence of security cameras, along with signage that draws attention to the cameras and notes that they have been installed for the purpose of deterring and investigating crime.**

**The cameras will serve as a warning that Takoma Park has a Police Department that is serious about deploying technologies to facilitate the prevention and investigation of crimes.**

Takoma Park police officials have told us that the city has discussed security cameras in the past, but that some residents expressed opposition, so nothing has been done.

We would like to see Takoma Park's elected officials and Police Department leaders show leadership and foster public debate on this issue. Armed robberies and carjackings, burglaries, and other crimes are a serious problem in Takoma Park. Police leaders and elected officials should engage the community and tell us their views about potential solutions. Thousands of cities and towns nationwide and in other nations have had success with such cameras. If our police and political leaders have some reason for thinking cameras would not be effective in Takoma Park, they should explain their reasoning.

## **PRIVATE SECURITY CAMERAS INSTALLED BY RESIDENTS**

As noted above, one of the more effective strategies for deterring home burglaries, according to a CPOP report funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, is encouraging residents to install video cameras on their homes.

Such cameras have become quite inexpensive and easy to install. For several hundred dollars, Takoma Park residents can obtain systems with multiple wireless video cameras and a digital recording

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<sup>10</sup> Felson, M. and R. Clarke (1998). “Opportunity Makes the Thief: Practical Theory for Crime Prevention.”

<sup>11</sup> Clarke, R. “Closing Streets and Alleys to Reduce Crime: Should You Go Down This Road?”

[http://www.popcenter.org/responses/closing\\_streets/](http://www.popcenter.org/responses/closing_streets/). Emphasis added.

system. No special skill is required to install such systems, because they are wireless. Some video camera systems can trigger an alert to the homeowner's smart phone if an intruder is detected near the home, and some systems are integrated with security systems such as ADT.

In addition to deterring crime at individual homes, private video cameras could prove useful to the Police Department, particularly if the cameras are aimed toward the sidewalk and street. A burglar or armed robber might be seen on a homeowner's video recording, time-stamped to within a few minutes of when a crime was committed nearby, for example.

In the case of the recent armed robbery and carjacking on Sycamore Avenue, some neighbors reported that in the weeks preceding the crime, strangers knocked on their doors in the evening hours, claiming to be roofers and window installers, but providing no brochures, business cards, or even the name or phone number of the company they purportedly worked for. In retrospect, these neighbors wondered if the purported contractors were in fact "casing" homes in the area. If residents had video footage of everyone who came to their door, the carjacking victim might recognize the perpetrator, providing police with a video image of a suspect.

Police in many cities for years have been working with local businesses that have security cameras in this way.<sup>12</sup> With the costs of such systems becoming increasingly affordable, we believe it is time for the Takoma Park Police Department to encourage residents to obtain this equipment for their homes.

**We ask the Takoma Park Police Department to research such home video systems and advise Takoma Park residents about whether certain types of systems are better than others, in terms of ease of accessibility for use by the Police. Many of us are ready to purchase and install this type of equipment. It is easily available at retail outlets such as BestBuy and Radio Shack. However, this technology may be more useful to police if many residents purchase similar equipment that the Police Department can easily tap into.**

One final note on private action by residents: We are aware that neighborhoods in other parts of the country have employed private security guards to respond to spikes in crime. Private security guards are available to assist residents after dark, i.e., escorting into homes, etc. This has been a topic of conversation in our neighborhood, with fears compelling consideration of this option. Our strong preference is to find a way to respond to crime with our own police force.

## **AUTOMATED LICENSE PLATE READERS**

Much of the discussion of security cameras above applies to another relatively new technology in policing: automated License Plate Readers (LPRs). We have been told that the Takoma Park Police Department has acquired several LPRs, but not all of them are currently functional. We request that the Police Department acquire additional LPRs.

Here is why we believe this technology is important for Takoma Park: Auto thefts have always been a frequent occurrence in Takoma Park. All of us have experienced a car theft or know of a neighbor who has had a car stolen.

However, most cars built in the last 5 to 10 years have anti-theft technology that makes theft of the vehicle virtually impossible. This is a great advance and has led to nationwide reductions in auto thefts.

The bad news is that some police departments have detected increases in carjackings, which they attribute to the inability of criminal offenders to steal cars unless they have the key.

License plate readers, which can be attached to police vehicles or placed at fixed locations, are capable of scanning the license plates of hundreds of cars per hour, and immediately sounding an alert if a

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, "San Jose police could tap into volunteer residents' private security cameras under new proposal." Mercury News, January 23, 2014. [http://www.mercurynews.com/crime-courts/ci\\_24979753/san-jose-police-would-tap-into-residents-private](http://www.mercurynews.com/crime-courts/ci_24979753/san-jose-police-would-tap-into-residents-private)

passing car has been reported stolen or is on other databases, such as vehicles registered to persons who are wanted by the police.

As with security cameras, LPRs can be very useful in the investigation of crimes that involve motor vehicles. And they also can serve a purpose of deterrence. Criminal offenders driving stolen vehicles or thinking of committing a carjacking will avoid Takoma Park if they see LPRs at fixed locations, with signage warning that license plates are being read in order to prevent crime.

As with security cameras, LPRs would be used to solve and prevent serious crimes, not to detect traffic violations. Traffic cameras are a different technology that Takoma Park is already deploying.

## **TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT STREET CLOSURES**

Street closures and strategic use of one-way streets are a controversial but sometimes extremely effective strategy for preventing crime, according to the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing. In a detailed report published in 2005, CPOP described the rationales behind the concept, and summarized the results of 11 academic studies of street closures in various cities in the United States and England.<sup>13</sup>

Following is a summary of the rationale for street closures, taken from the CPOP report:

**“Offenders find targets in familiar territory. They gain knowledge about vulnerable areas and potential opportunities through their contacts with other offenders and through their daily routines.... This means that frequently traveled streets are more vulnerable to crime. ... Burglars avoid cul-de-sacs and prefer corner sites where neighbors are less likely to see them. Offenders look for heavily traveled streets and locations near major highways, where there are many potential victims and where they can easily escape. Reducing through-traffic by closing streets or alleys means that criminal outsiders are less likely to become familiar with the area; residents learn who does not belong in the neighborhood, which helps them to more effectively keep watch on the streets near their homes; [and] escape routes for robbers are blocked off...”**

The report found that street closures do not *always* work to reduce crime, but cited evidence that they often do work:

- **“Areas with street layouts that permit easy access experience more crime than areas with restricted access and complicated street patterns.”**
- **“A study in Vancouver, British Columbia, found that the more entrances to a street, the more crime on that street. Most research supports the idea that burglars avoid houses in cul-de-sacs, unless these abut wooded areas or wasteland affording access from the rear.”**
- **“A study of 86 Norfolk, Va., neighborhoods found that those with high burglary rates had a larger number of access points from arterial roads.”**
- **“An early study comparing adjacent high- and low-crime neighborhoods found that the low-crime areas did not have major thoroughfares.”**
- **“Reconstruction of a major highway led to the closing of all cross streets in Pompano Beach, Fla., at the highway’s right-of-way. An unexpected side effect was a dramatic reduction in drug dealing, robbery, assault, and other crime in the adjacent neighborhoods during reconstruction. Side streets were reopened after the work was done, but Pompano Beach made traffic modifications and adjusted police patrols to control access to neighborhoods.”**

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<sup>13</sup> Clarke, R. “Closing Streets and Alleys to Reduce Crime: Should You Go Down This Road?”  
[http://www.popcenter.org/responses/closing\\_streets/](http://www.popcenter.org/responses/closing_streets/)

The CPOP report noted that in most cases, the most significant obstacle to street closures has been opposition from motorists who can no longer use residential streets, except to reach local addresses. And we expect that street closures would prompt complaints in Takoma Park.

**However, we encourage the Police Department and our fellow Takoma Park residents to consider the following:**

For approximately a year, residents of Sycamore Avenue have endured repeated burglaries, and recently the crime on Sycamore escalated sharply to armed robbery and carjacking. Police have responded, but as far as we know, not a single one of these crimes on Sycamore has resulted in an arrest.

Now imagine what would have happened if Takoma Park, at the first sign of a major crime wave on Sycamore, had used Jersey barriers to temporarily make Sycamore Avenue a dead-end street ending at Columbia, and with no access at Beech. The only way in or out would be where Sycamore intersects with Elm.

And imagine if Takoma Park installed a temporary security camera at the corner of Sycamore and Elm, clearly marked as a Police Department camera.

**If these 2 simple steps had been taken, does anyone doubt that the crime wave on Sycamore would have ended immediately?**

**What criminal would drive past a security camera onto a 2-block street and commit a burglary or robbery, knowing that he would have to turn back and be recorded again by the time-stamping security camera, immediately after committing the crime?**

As residents of Takoma Park who have been victims of crime, some of us have discussed the potential of street closures in the past, only to hear our neighbors ask, "Do you want Takoma Park to be a gated community?"

However, we believe this is an exaggeration of what we are proposing. No one is proposing that Takoma Park become a gated community.

In fact, there are many precedents for what we are proposing. Anyone who has ever been stuck in traffic on 16<sup>th</sup> Street, Connecticut Avenue, Wisconsin Avenue, or other major arteries and who has tried to "cut through" on side streets knows that often it is impossible to do. Many neighborhoods in Chevy Chase, Bethesda, and parts of Washington, D.C. have made it impossible to use residential streets, except to reach local addresses. A quick glance at Google maps reveals dozens of neighborhoods near Takoma Park with dead-end streets and one-way streets that have the effect of preventing neighborhood streets from being used for through-traffic.

Presumably, these decisions to use one-way streets and dead-end streets to limit traffic in Bethesda, Silver Spring, Chevy Chase and Washington have been motivated more by a desire to reduce traffic in residential areas than to reduce crime. But as the CPOP report cited above noted, often the two purposes of reducing through traffic and reducing crime go hand in hand.

We see no reason why Takoma Park residential side streets must be available for use as arterial roads for non-residents of Takoma Park.

Finally, we are not proposing drastic changes in Takoma Park traffic patterns that would be imposed overnight. We propose that the Police Department begin to use traffic restrictions on a temporary basis at selected locations near crime "hot spots." In this way, we can gain some experience in testing whether traffic restrictions prevent crime.

If a few Jersey barriers prove successful in stopping a crime wave, support for temporary or even permanent street closures among Takoma Park residents likely will increase.

**As with the issue of security cameras, we urge Takoma Park elected officials and Police Department leaders to exercise leadership on this matter. Other city and county departments, such as Public Works, Fire Department, and the Montgomery County Public Schools, would need to be consulted to ensure that temporary or permanent street closures and/or one-way streets would be feasible.**

**But other neighborhoods in the Silver Spring, Bethesda, and northern DC area have used these strategies to reduce traffic, so it is no answer to simply say that this strategy cannot work in Takoma Park**



**without providing specific reasons – especially because we are proposing street closures and one-way streets as a strategy for reducing violent crime, which is a more important goal than merely reducing traffic in our neighborhoods.**

## **CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL COOPERATION AMONG POLICE DEPARTMENTS**

As we have prepared for the February 25 public hearing and contacted local officials in Takoma Park and neighboring jurisdictions, we have been pleased to find that there is strong interest by neighboring police departments in discussing issues of cross-jurisdictional cooperation among the police departments in the region.

We are gratified at the extremely strong response from these police departments, and look forward to hearing what they can tell us about multi-agency responses to crime.

We understand that cross-jurisdiction is extremely important for Takoma Park, given that our City is a relatively small jurisdiction and that much of the crime committed in Takoma Park is not committed by Takoma Park residents.

We are especially interested in ideas and suggestions that neighboring police officials can offer for developing partnerships designed to prevent and deter crime, as well as task forces and other initiatives for investigating crimes that have been committed.

For example, if Takoma Park deploys security cameras and additional automated license plate readers, the effectiveness of these technologies could be magnified if the metropolitan Police Departments for Montgomery County, Prince George’s County, Washington, D.C., and other jurisdictions can tap into our cameras, and the Takoma Park Police Department can obtain information from other jurisdictions’ cameras and LPRs.

## **ADDITIONAL PROPOSALS**

In addition to the proposals outlined above, members of the Sycamore Avenue Group would like to have a discussion with Police Department officials, elected leaders, and the Takoma Park community about several other ideas that could contribute to crime prevention and foster closer partnerships between our Police Department and community members:

**Independent Review:** Some members of the group believe that an independent review of policing in Takoma Park would be instructive. Such a study could be conducted by an organization with expertise in crime prevention and policing.

**“Customer service”:** A number of Takoma Park residents would like to discuss the nature of the responses they have received from the Police Department over the last year. One question, for example, is whether the victim of a serious violent crime that occurs on a Friday evening should be able to talk to an officer on the following Saturday and Sunday, even if the officer who responded is not on duty. A number of people believe that the Police Department often gives the impression that they do not take residents’ questions and comments seriously.

**Segways/Bicycles:** The use of Segways/bicycles could increase police visibility and help deter crime. It would also increase communication between residents and police, enabling greater information exchange and strengthening community confidence in the police department.

## Summary: What We Are Requesting

We respectfully request that the Takoma Park Police Department, along with Takoma Park elected officials, begin to test the following technologies and strategies.

Our goal is to deter crime and prevent crimes from being committed. Some of our proposals would also be helpful for investigating crimes that have been committed.

As a practical matter, clearance rates for most crimes in most jurisdictions across the United States are far too low to have much of a deterrent effect, particularly for so-called “nonviolent” crimes such as burglary that nevertheless have a devastating effect on families’ sense of security in their own homes. Nationwide, only one burglary in eight results in an arrest or other “clearance” by the police.

We believe that it makes more sense to try to deter crime in Takoma Park with devices that are visible at all times to potential criminal offenders, and which send a message that any attempt to commit a crime in Takoma Park will very likely be recorded as the offender approaches or flees the crime scene.

And from a philosophical standpoint, we would prefer not to have Takoma Park contribute to the overuse of incarceration in our country. The United States has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, and Takoma Park should do its part to address this issue by focusing our approach to policing on crime prevention. Investigation and criminal prosecution will always be a core mission of the police, but most police departments long ago adopted a philosophy that crime prevention is equally important.

We do not believe that our suggestions are controversial. But to the extent that any of our ideas may seem debatable to our fellow Takoma Park residents, we request that our Police Department leaders and elected officials engage a public debate and demonstrate leadership by explaining their views about best strategies.

For decades, crime has been a serious issue in Takoma Park. This report focuses on the Sycamore Avenue area because that is where we live, but we know that all areas of Takoma Park have serious crime problems. We have been reaching out to community leaders in other neighborhoods to share our experiences and include them in the discussion and development of new strategies that we are proposing.

We will no longer accept the response that nothing can be done because every idea provokes opposition from a few people, or that we should be grateful because crime is even worse in other places.

We would like to see movement on the following issues:

- **Fixed and mobile security cameras**, placed at strategic locations in Takoma Park, capable of capturing images of vehicles or persons as they travel to or from crime scenes. Video recordings from the cameras might be stored for a short time, perhaps 24 hours or a few days, in order to allow police to review the video when a crime is committed. More importantly, the goal would be to deter crime by making the presence and the purpose of the cameras obvious to all who pass by.
- **Private security cameras**: Many residents of Takoma Park might be willing to spend a few hundred dollars to install video cameras on their homes. Such cameras could supplement the security cameras installed by the City of Takoma Park. The Police Department could maintain a list of residents who would be willing to share video footage. And the Police Department could strengthen these efforts by offering residents advice if certain types of video equipment or systems with certain features would be especially useful to the police.
- **Automated License Plate Readers**: LPRs are already in use by many police departments, including the Takoma Park Police Department. In addition to having LPRs on patrol cars, it might serve the purpose of crime prevention to have LPRs at fixed locations, clearly marked as crime prevention tools.

- **Street closures/changing street patterns:** We request that the Police Department test the concept of street closures and changing street patterns as a strategy for deterring crime. Sycamore Avenue might serve as an experiment, testing whether burglars and armed robbers will continue to target a street if it is temporarily turned into a dead-end street, with a security camera at the only entrance.
- **Cross –jurisdictional cooperation:** We are grateful to neighboring police departments for their efforts to work with the Takoma Park Police Department on joint investigations, and would also like to hear about joint efforts to prevent crimes from being committed.
- **Independent Review:** Takoma Park should explore the possibility of having an independent expert review the city’s crime prevention strategies.
- **Customer service and police-community partnerships:** We would like to discuss ways to improve our relationship with our Police Department.
- **Segways/Bicycles:** Use by Takoma Park police of Segways/bicycles to increase police visibility and improve communication between residents and police.

**For more information about the Sycamore Avenue Crime Victims Group, please contact Emily Van Loon:  
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