

Takoma Park Crime/Public Safety Forum

(Sponsored by the North Takoma, Old Town (OTRA), Pinecrest, SS Carroll, Victory Tower, and Westmoreland Area (WACO) associations, Safe Takoma, and the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church.)

December 8, 2009

Takoma Park Presbyterian Church

Meeting notes

Approximately 24 attending plus Takoma Park Police Chief Ronald Ricucci, Public Information Officer Cathy Plevy, and Det. Charlie Holtzel.

Seth Grimes: introduction.

Mary Jacksteit: Took over as facilitator. Asked attendees for their questions and concerns.

- 1) Louise Gard, Holly & Tulip: Lighting switch to dim lighting.
- 2) Marty Ittner, Flower Avenue: Technology and police alerting, e.g., handhelds, texting, use of GPS to figure out where you are.
- 3) Mary Hanisco, Maple near church: Is this an upsurge or is this the usual crime level? A lot of crimes have been people followed from Metro. Is there a particular response strategy.
- 4) Herb Berst, Hillwood Manor: Noting Park police, involvement, What's the situation with inter-jurisdictional issues?
- 5) Jackie Davison, Victory Tower: Update on scams?
- 6) Chuck Thomas, North Takoma: Update on people breaking into cars, recent car-jacking on Boston?
- 7) Louise: Also had car issue.
- 8) Helen Kish, Willow: Concerned about daytime burglaries.
- 9) Seth, relaying: Need for additional street lighting, but is it a deterrent?
- 10) David Pittman, Park: Crimes of other types including drugs.
- 11) April Kissel (?), Lee Avenue: Any news related to rape on the jogging trail.

Chief Ronald Ricucci:

Recognized Public Information Officer Cathy Plevy.

Trying to keep the community informed and up to date. Put out information on arrests except when there are confidentiality concerns.

- 1) Will talk to Daryl Braithwaite, public works, about lighting at Holly and Eastern. There is an issue when PEPCO is involved. Lighting does deter crime. Louise: Have had issues with cars being stolen. Chief: Will talk to Daryl.
- 2) Can track cell-phone location, have tracked criminals when phones are stolen, can use in response to incoming cell-phone calls. People sometimes put PD on speed dial. Sometimes get calls during incidents where the line is open. Can accept text

messages. Emergency number is communications number: 301-270-1100. If you call 911, it will go through Montgomery County communications dispatch which introduces delay.

- 3) Crime is down in the last six weeks. At night, there are four plainclothes officers working, two extra patrol, command staff. Still working high-school students robbed, Roanoke incident. Go-go stabbing on the other side of line in DC a couple of years ago, and one last Saturday night on Holton at Prince George's line. For latter issue, met with PG chief today; he's going to try to ban go-go dances in PG. Also met recently with Park Police chief. Montgomery County had problems with knifings, shootings at go-go dances on at least three occasions.
- 4) Have had details monitoring the Metro situation. Robberies have stopped with the exception of one incident. But it's important that you maintain awareness when walking.
- 5) Park Police jurisdiction: Primary on Sligo Creek Parkway and path, but TP-PD patrols and will be first on scene and handle. Working on changing the MOU to formalize TP-PD responsibility. TP-PD is the primary investigator on the recent sexual assault.

Herb Berst: What's the relationship between TP & Montgomery county police? A: On same radio channel, monitor each other.

In response to Seth: Regarding Holton Avenue incident: Understand that PG police were holding 35 calls in Hyattsville district. There isn't a problem of cooperation or coordination. It's a matter of numbers.

In response to Billy Coulter: Can chase (hot pursuit) across borders. Biggest crime in last six months is theft from autos/larcenies. Can get easily sold GPS, iPod, radar detectors, wallets, cell phones from cars. People leave their cars unlocked, valuable in sight.

- 6) Haven't had any senior scams reported recently at Victory Tower. Biggest recent scam is guy who goes door-to-door with sob story. Caught one, at least two others out there. Q: Are the K9s ever successful? A: Three weeks ago had a robbery. K9 tracked into DC; same people did robberies in MC & DC so closed several robberies.
- 7) Lighting: Can spend funds on lighting, including speed camera funds. Council members can advise, but Chief will consult with Public Works director on particular locations.
- 8) Still investigating car-jacking on Boston, 85-year-old victim, target of opportunity. Car was recovered within 30 minutes of the crime, about 2 miles into DC.
- 9) Car break-ins are down, have stopped several people who have been arrested before for the same crime. Some are juveniles.
- 10) Pro-active patrols are preventing crimes. Are watching certain individuals. Some crime is probably shifting into Montgomery County. Don't let the borders get in the way of operations.
- 11) Crime analyst left about 30 days ago; interviewing and hope to have someone on board by the end of January. CompSat program produces charts, etc., has been very useful. Residents can see it in operation.

- 12) Robert Lanza: What happens as a result of arrests? Are there convictions? A: Are getting convictions of adults; juveniles are a “secret” process.
- 13) ??: No information about convictions is ever shared. Is there a better/another way to get information out? A: Putting out all but major-case information would be too much. Will look at getting more out about convictions.
- 14) Chief presented stats on recent crimes. As of end of October, crime in the city was up 7% over last year; burglaries and robberies were down.
- 15) Do have a lot of drug-related crimes, especially in Langley Park, most arrest there. Special problem at two hotels. Not looking for marijuana offenders, but majority of people caught for marijuana from outside county, extensive records.
- 16) Herb Berst: Gangs? Det. Charlie Holtzel: Still a major issue, as everywhere. Currently have 3 confirmed gangs within the city limits, Piney Branch-Flower, Langley Park. People can report issues directly to Charlie or through usual channels. Funding for gang work is normal PD funding although there is the possibility of special funding that the department is pursuing.
- 17) Two officers paid for with speed camera funds are targeting traffic violations, which do lead to further arrests. Enforcement has probably prevented more crimes than there have been arrests.
- 18) Faith Wheeler: Any patterns? A: Have had enough incidents to indicate patterns.
- 19) Sex assault: Haven’t had similar crimes in three years chief has been here. Have good information from victim. Lab is four months behind on DNA analysis; have requested expediting. Also delays because of volume in fingerprint analysis. Have scanner for individuals stopped without ID; will have license-plate scanner. Cameras are very expensive; city would have to get a grant. Many constitutional issues; need for monitoring. Cameras do have a deterrent effect.
- 20) Faith: Bike Patrols? A: Bikes are out during summer much more than winter. Working on getting bikes in shapes, getting more officers involved. You will see them if there’s a lot of crime that concentrates on one area, but are doing a lot of walking right now, including in business area.
- 21) Daytime burglaries have not been an issue recently.
- 22) Carolyn Tilley: Are citizens patrols effective? A: It’s a deterrent, how much, not sure. Helps raise citizen awareness. Rita: Regarding patrol, have been losing people since started on Cedar Ave in ‘92 also seeing different types of crimes.
- 23) Jackie Davison: How do you coordinate with DC? A: An automatic notification protocol. They have it too but are sometimes slower because they’re very busy. Metro is short-handed, but work with them and they do respond.

Key to making community safer is involvement, knowing neighbors, getting involved in neighborhood groups, call police.

Have started new initiative, Citizens Advisory Board: 10 residents, one business, principal of Takoma Park Middle School. Will bring issues from neighbors – although residents have direct access – another way of getting PD’s message out to the community. Now have stability in the department; officers are not leaving. Department takes incidents personally.

Gang issue has gotten worse. Couldn't be any closer to Montgomery County: Chief Tom Manger, staff, Commander Don Johnson in Silver Spring. Send recruits to Montgomery County academy, pay routine costs, not \$5,000 formerly paid to Prince George's.

Herb Berst: is there spill over from Prince George's? Yes. Not undocumented immigrants because crime stays generally in their community. Do have day-laborer drinking; causing problems.

Marty Ittner: Personal safety? A: Whistles. Mace causes problems.

Dave Borden: Day laborers? A: Center in PG Plaza run by CASA, most won't use. Not allowed to loiter in shopping centers; can stop at certain locations.

Chief: Will see if PD can get more information out on high-profile crimes. Sometimes don't even know disposition, for instance, if there was a plea bargain.