

Minutes:
Safe Neighborhoods Network Meeting
Gun Violence and Firearms Tracking

Saturday, November 12th, 2011
9:00 – 11:00 am
PCRG Conference Room

In attendance:

Emily Anderson, PCRG Staff
Detective Joseph Bielewicz, Firearms Tracking Unit, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police
Rob Conroy, CeaseFire PA
Jay Gilmer, Pittsburgh Initiative to Reduce Crime
Phyllis Bianculli, Carrick Community Council/Hilltop Alliance
Evans Moore, Hilltop Alliance
Tom Wilson, Perry Hilltop Citizens Council
Janet Gunter, Perry Hilltop Citizens Council
Darla D'Anna, Mount Washington Community Development Corporation/PCRG Board
Marlene L. Jackson, Dinwiddie Community Alliance
Jose Diaz, Operation Better Block
Martha Ann Jones, Operation Better Block
Suzanne N. Photos, Mount Oliver City/St. Clair Block Watch
Deborah Miller, East Liberty Concerned Citizens/Larimer Blueprint
Katy Frey, Greater Park Place Neighborhood Association

Welcome and Introductions

Discussion: Gun Violence and Firearms Tracking

Guest Speakers:

Detective Joseph Bielewicz, Firearms Tracking Unit, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police
Jay Gilmer, Pittsburgh Initiative to Reduce Crime
Rob Conroy, CeaseFire PA

Det. Bielewicz gave a presentation on the Firearms Tracking Unit and the sources of guns used in crimes. The powerpoint presentation given by Det. Bielewicz will be distributed to SNN members electronically, but a few points of note are as follows:

- Of the 1000 guns that are recovered by the Firearms Tracking Unit annually, 700-800 have been involved in criminal activity
- Very few of the guns recovered by the unit are in the hands of the individuals who purchased them

- “Outsiders” are typically not bringing in guns to neighborhoods; guns are typically used near where they are registered
- There are not major trafficking operations bringing guns into the city; because PA has more lenient gun laws, it is much easier to purchase a gun within the state and therefore more likely that guns are being trafficked out of the city into states with more restrictive gun laws
- Though over 500,000 gun thefts are reported in the U.S. annually, many more thefts go unreported. The number of gun thefts is likely closer to one million
- Many gun thefts are due to improper storage.
 - 8-10 guns are stolen out of vehicles during every Steeler game
 - In many cases, the gun thief is associated with the gun owner. Often times, the thief is the owner’s child or the child’s friend. Many thefts are conducted by family members who are addicted to heroin or other hard drugs. Addicts can trade the guns directly for drugs or sell them for drug money
- Many straw purchasers are women. These women are often reachable. Many of them are mothers and we can appeal to their maternal instinct, but the community needs to understand the issues involved with straw purchasing and must offer support to women involved with violent men
- The Pittsburgh Police have one of the few firearms units in the state. A lot of departments do not know where their guns are coming from; they just put them in an evidence locker
- Community members can help address the issues of illegal firearms through political pressure and working with anti-violence groups like CeaseFire PA
- The other role for the community is supporting crime victims. Many are afraid of retaliation and don’t want to testify in court. Friends and neighbors can support these individuals by encouraging them to prosecute, and offering emotional support, such as accompanying them to court. When witnesses don’t show up to court, perpetrators walk and are free to commit more violent acts

The group had a conversation about background checks and whether they are effective. Det. Bielevicz mentioned that one of the biggest issues with background checks is that mental health records are not always entered into the system. He also stressed that gun merchants do not have access to a purchaser’s medical records. When an individual goes to purchase a gun, there’s a standard background check that comes back as “approved” or “denied,” but it does not provide the seller with the reason for the denial. If a purchaser is denied, he or she may fill out an appeals form that will then tell the person why he or she has been denied.

Jay Gilmer talked about the PIRC program, which is a crime prevention model designed by Professor David Kennedy of the John J. College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York. It is a communication model built on the premise that violent

crime will drop when law enforcement, social service agencies, and the community are able to reach groups inclined to violent crime.

PIRC identifies works to identify where homicides will come from and actively works to prevent those crimes through street outreach by One Vision One Life. PIRC also works with service providers, such as Goodwill of SWPA, to provide services and an alternative way of life to those who wish to depart from their gang or violent group.

The Pittsburgh Police identified 1500 people who are active in street gangs and groups. There's a cultural issue in that people have been taught that the way to settle disputes is with violence.

Jay shared statistics that there has been a 50% reduction in gun assaults over the past 2 years. He mentioned that these statistics are not perfect because, for example, one shot fired at an automobile carrying 6 individuals is counted as 6 gun assaults. However, the statistics do show a significant decrease in gun assaults. Additionally, there were no homicides in the city over a 2 month period.

Although the decrease in violent crime is good for the city, more effective policing by city police means that gangs and violent groups hang out in smaller boroughs with less police capacity, such as Homestead and Duquesne.

Importantly, almost no homicide goes unwitnessed. If the police cannot solve a homicide, it's because no one has come forward, either because they are worried for their safety or because they intend on taking matters into their own hands.

For more information and statistics on crime by neighborhood, Jose Diaz suggested contacting Deb Gilkey with the Police Intelligence Unit at 412.323.7845 or Deborah.gilkey@city.pittsburgh.pa.us. Deb recently provided OBB with a breakdown of Part I and Part II crimes by neighborhood.

Rob Conroy, Regional Director of CeaseFire PA, ended the discussion with a conversation on what the community can do to prevent gun violence from a grassroots perspective. CeaseFire PA is a statewide gun violence prevention coalition, working through education and advocacy to encourage state and local legislators to support programs and policies that keep our communities safe.

Specifically, CeaseFirePA is concerned with reducing the supply of illegal guns to dramatically reduce gun violence across the state of PA. Currently, CeaseFirePA is working on a few key issues:

- Mandatory Lost or Stolen Handgun Reporting
- Closing the Florida Concealed Carry Loophole
- Fixing the Broken Background Check System

The City of Pittsburgh did pass a Lost or Stolen Handgun Ordinance that would require owners to report lost or stolen handguns within 48 hours of discovery. However, it passed into law without the Mayor's signature and the Pittsburgh Police cannot enforce it. Emily will get the bill number.

The issue with "Lost or Stolen" legislation is that Pennsylvania law is set up to protect gun owners; local municipalities do not have the authority to additionally restrict gun ownership above what the statute allows. The "Lost or Stolen" ordinance doesn't directly conflict with gun ownership laws, but it's perceived as a grey area for some, especially because the NRA gun lobby is so powerful.

Most gun violence occurs in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, so legislators from Central PA don't particularly understand urban issues.

Locally, CeaseFirePA working on "Where Did the Gun Come From?" Campaign. When a violent crime takes place, the community needs to ask that question of the mayor, their councilman, the police, etc. A new database could potentially break down information on recovered guns by police zones and by the methods in which they were recovered.

Rob will work with community groups to help tailor educational needs to neighborhood audiences. He also passed out a coalition form.

The final discussion centered on a quote from Rob, "*Guns don't just kill people; they kill communities.*" A single gunshot can – and has – halt neighborhood development for years.

Emily announced that the next SNN meeting will take place at PCRG on Saturday, **January 14th, 2012 at 9:00 am**. Topic to be determined.