

Safe Neighborhood Network Meeting

9/10 9 AM

In Attendance: **Emily Anderson**, PCRG; **Ed Nusser**, PCRG; **Ed Powers**, Brookline Block Watch; **Bob Ostermeyer**, MWCDC-Bertha Block Watch; **Gloria Ostermeyer**, MWCDC-Bertha Block Watch; **Tom Brady**, MWCDC; **Deborah Miller**, East Liberty Concerned Citizens; **Julie Peterson**, Central Northside Neighborhood Council; **Paco Mahone**, Central Northside Neighborhood Council; **Darla D'Anna**, MWCDC; **Tom Corcoran**, California-Kirkbride; **Rob Conroy**, CeaseFirePA; **Barb Kelly**, Lawrenceville United; **Lauren Byrne**, Lawrenceville United; **Jay Gilmer**, City of Pittsburgh (PIRC); **Liz Style**, Mayor's Office; **Nathan Hart**, Oakland Planning and Development Corp.; **Commander Cheryl Doubt**, Division of Narcotics and Vice, Pittsburgh Bureau of Police.

Key Contacts Identified in Today's Meeting:

Narcotics and Vice Division - 412-323-7800

Sgt. Epler, Narcotics and Vice Division - 412-323-7761 (Investigations)

Joy Pekar-Miller, Housing Authority Public Safety Contact - 412-456-5000

Community Safety Website - <http://communitysafety.pittsburghpa.gov/>

Opening Remarks and Introductions: After a brief welcome from Emily, the group went around for individual introductions while also commenting on major concerns in their neighborhood that brought them to the table today.

- Julie Peterson from CNNC stressed that there were numerous problems with shootings, gun violence and drug dealing throughout her neighborhood and that other residents were coming to CNNC to ask what was being done.
- Nathan Hart from OPDC said that in Oakland the largest problem is the existence of illegal speakeasies, while also noting that illegal drugs and large student parties can often go hand in hand.
- Darla D'Anna mentioned the operation of what she thought to be an illegal car rental business on her street in Mt. Washington.
- Ed Powers brought up the problem of drug houses in Brookline, explaining that one currently exists next door.
- Tom Corcoran from California-Kirkbride also brought up the issue of drug houses, as well as the issue of identifying drug dealing both by the police and by residents.

Narcotics and Vice Discussion

Following the introductions, Commander Cheryl Doubt began her talk on the work of the Narcotics & Vice Division.

Commander Doubt began by offering an overview of the Division's different units and operations.

- **Impact Units:** these are the undercover cars that look for street deals

- Investigative Unit: typically not long investigations, investigate possible drug houses, locations – IE, complaints of same person around school, etc.
- Strategic Investigations Unit: this unit is trained on how to use GPS/cameras to track and investigate. May assist other units on doing wiretaps. Title 3= investigation needs wiretap
- Vice Unit – Prostitution, Gambling, Bar Complaints, “Massage Parlors”
- Weed and Seed Unit – Larger Scale investigations. Brought bigger, federal arrests. Bring in most funds in terms of seizures.
- Firearms Tracking – Traces all weapons that come into possession of division and helps to make determinations of who can/cannot get weapons/permits back
- Asset Forfeiture – Audits, keeps track of what is brought under control.

She then quickly summarized of the work of Narcotics and Vice Division in the last year:

- Seized \$1 million in currency
- Traced 587 weapons, (460 not reported stolen; 40 reported stolen in PGH; 87 reported stolen outside city)
- Recently N&V has shut down 7 bars, 2 afterhours clubs, 3 massage parlors. Massage Parlors usually come back

Other Points that Cmdr. Doubt stressed in her discussion were:

- Narcotics fuel violence in our neighborhoods; and stated her belief that this is not just a police problem, but requires efforts from every resident.
- What appears to residents to be no action is usually not. There are not immediate solutions.
- When possible she prefers federal prosecutions on narcotics cases as these put people away longer, but these investigations always take longer. In the cases of street arrests, dealers can be back on street on bond before paperwork is complete.
- If there is an ongoing issue in your neighborhood, call the Narcotics and Vice Office or your Zone Police Station and speak to a supervisor or detective.
- Narcotics and Vice Div. looks at all complaints/311 reports/etc. They cannot get to all of them, but they do prioritize.

Q&A with Commander Doubt

- Julie Peterson asked about the proper contact for residents and what groups should be telling residents to do. Cmdr. Doubt said in the case of witnessing a drug deal to call narcotics and zone detectives as well. They can contact 911 as well, but in the case of seeing a deal, by the time 911 responds there is nothing going on.
- Tom Corcoran brought up the issue of drug houses and asked about the investigation process for them
Cmdr. Doubt said that they need to observe long enough to make an arrest to stand up and usually this means making a buy from a dealer, however some dealers won't deal to anyone

they don't know which prolongs the process. Tom mentioned there was a specific house he had in mind, Cmdr. Doubt told him to contact Sgt. Epler at Narcotics and Vice at 412-323-7761.

- Tom Brady asked what is done to address the problem of dealers identifying undercover cars. Cmdr. Doubt explained that cars are switched out on a regular basis but no matter what car you're in, dealers will eventually spot them. She also explained that seized cars can't be used for undercover work as they are not designed for police work. The division loses cars to wrecks as well as dealer identification.
- Darla asked how effective cameras can be as MWDC is thinking of installing cameras. Cmdr. Doubt said cameras have been invaluable in several instances as long as they record and data is recoverable. The key is to have the cameras tied into the City network. She said that she is able to watch certain intersections from her office.
- Julie Peterson said that many residents don't want to call 911; they want to talk to someone. These issues happen now and need attention now, but she has had some trouble with responsiveness from her zone
Cmdr. Doubt said the best strategy is to ask to speak to a supervisor until you get satisfaction. Also advised stating w/smaller group and bring commander in for discussion with them.
- Julie Peterson also brought up problems of created by the private constables employed at Mistick Properties. Constables deal with issues that happen before police get there, result is there are no police reports to file. Tom Corcoran added that it seems almost like Constables are tipping off troublemakers/ sweeping others under the rug
Cmdr. Doubt suggested talking to the Zone about this, as well as saying that neighborhood groups need to know who belongs who doesn't so that they can work w/police.
- Nathan Hart brought up the problem in Oakland of loud student parties where drugs are present. Some people are afraid of retribution (IE vandalism) if they call.
Cmdr. Doubt said residents have to do whatever it takes. Loud, reoccurring parties could fall under disruptive properties. But this need documentation, 911 calls create a paper trail. She suggested trying to get a high volume of these calls from other neighbors.
- Bob Ostermeyer has witnessed drug deals outside his house and has turned in license plates, descriptions of people. He said that deals tend to occur on vacant lots.
Cmdr. Doubt – Dealers are counting on fact that people won't call. They look for spots that are quieter, but now transactions are coming out into the open, (IE fast food parking lots). People are coming in to the city to buy and taking it home. When street deals are busted it can help provide info on suppliers/coordinators. Cmdr. Doubt asked Bob if he could pinpoint a time to give detectives best time to be there to observe the deal?
Bob Ostermeyer – No real time pattern. But this is an ongoing trouble.
Cmdr. Doubt stressed that detectives do care and do want to do the right thing. She offered to take info from Bob after the meeting concluded.
Tom Brady followed up with a success story, saying that he provided car info and descriptions, police came and arrested some people, many of whom had warrants.
- Jay Gilmer – can you speak to the police recruiting process?
Cmdr. Doubt – Always recruiting, the entire process tends to lose people. Really looking for

minorities and females. October 14th is deadline for applying for next round of recruitment. Police force is a rewarding job.

- Darla asked about coordination with borough police forces?
Cmdr. Doubt – Work closely with them but highlighted the need to point out suburban problems aren't the city's fault. Her division has been involved in several investigations that have taken them outside city. Typically work very well with suburban police forces.
- Gloria Ostermeyer brought up the problems of short police staff as Southside Flats are taking resources away from Mt. Washington/Duquesne Heights. Dealers know Thursday - Saturday, cops are busy on Carson St.
Cmdr. Doubt said that frustration over lack of police staff is universal. She also pointed out that when staffing decisions are made, they do look at stats on number of calls, call response time, etc. so if there are more calls there could be an increase in staff for that area.

Emily stressed to the group that there is no substitute for direct contact with officers. Residents can call 311/911 to create paper trails, but there is nothing better than being in direct contact with zones or divisions. Darla added that residents have to keep plugging away. Eventually a call will make a difference.

- Liz pointed out that the Pittsburgh PD is well respected in law enforcement and often gets tapped to train others. They also have good partnerships w/several federal agencies. Ed Powers seconded this thought as he has attended and recommends the Civilian Police Academy.
- There was then a quick mention of the Civilian Leadership Academy, anyone interested should contact Jennifer Beidle-Ford at 412-665-3600,

What's going on in your neighborhood? Roundtable discussion.

Darla commented that a prevailing theme in the meeting today was existence of gun violence; she would like to hear more about gun violence in future sessions.

Jay Gilmer informed the group that Chief Harper has a new intern working on tracking gun violence. Darla pointed out that 34 communities have more power than 1 community and that PCRG can take issues to a larger scale.

Lauren Byrne highlighted the work of block watches in Lawrenceville. LU has created a priority list of trouble properties and has gone over the list w/ police. Over summer, there has been significant action on this list. Lauren also said there has been an issue with getting info from PD to Housing Authority. Any effort to bring these two parties together will benefit the neighborhood.

Julie again pointed out the problem of gun violence in the Northside and suggested that the concentration of Section 8 housing along with non-approved tenants living w/voucher holders creates issues. Lauren suggested organizing a neighborhood walk through. Councilman Lavell went on a walkthrough in the Northside recently and was harassed by dealers, told to get out. Lauren said that Joy

Pekar-Miller at Housing Authority has been an invaluable resource for public safety enforcement in Section 8 housing.

Bob Ostermeyer asked if there is any way to know how guns are getting into Pittsburgh
Cmdr. Doubt said that straw purchases are a big issue for guns. But it is not illegal to purchase automatic weapons.

Darla suggested that the next meeting focus on gun violence in Pittsburgh; Emily agreed to bring in a speaker

Jay Gilmer briefed the group on the work that PIRC is currently doing.

- Working on message to mothers. 15 year old kids shouldn't be supporting mothers. Parents need to know what's going on in their own house. Trying to get this message out to public. PIRC is going around to schools/churches/etc to get this message out.
- Relayed story of Northside shooting, kids won't talk to police, but are willing to plan retaliation shooting. Parents are shocked at this but kids are getting this attitude from somewhere.
- Law enforcement can't stop attitudes. PIRC and others, citizens, neighbors have to work on this. Retaliation is leading cause of homicide in City. People have checked out of the real system, are operating in a side system, no police, street justice. People aren't born with this attitude, they learn it somewhere.

After discussion of PIRC, Emily wrapped up the meeting and noted that Community Safety Website lists when each zone's public safety council meets and suggested that all attend their zone's meetings.

The next meeting for Safe Neighborhood Network will be Saturday, Nov. 12 and will focus on Gun Violence.