

North Tamiami Trail Community Crime Meeting
November 16, 2010
Minutes of the Meeting

Location: Crossroads Methodist Church, 4726 North Trail
Attending: approximately 250. Agenda attached.

Meeting called to order at 7 p.m. by Cynthia Biggar, president of Indian Beach Sapphire Shores Neighborhood Association. Special welcome to City Commissioners Clapp, Turner and Atwell, County Commissioner Mason, City Manager Bartolotta. Thanks given to Panelists.

Cynthia Biggar: Purpose of Meeting: Discuss ways to end Criminal and Intimidating Activities on NT and in adjoining communities (ie. this meeting is a community initiative to fight crime)
Events leading up to this meeting besides NT's decades-long reputation: (1) Last summer, collaboration between neighborhoods and city was initiated by Julie Morris, Burt & Bernadette Luper, Penny Rosel with Commissioner Clapp, Police Chief Hollaway, Jay Patel, Debbie Muller. (2) IBSSA & Bayou Oaks had joint meeting with Police, State Attorney, Chief Judge.
Neighborhoods supporting this crime initiative: IBSS, Bayou Oaks, Janie Poe, the Gardens, Amaryllis Park, Newtown Front Porch, Central Cocconut, Tahiti Park, The Uplands, the North Trail Redevelopment Partnership and the North Trail Business Alliance.
Community Leaders contacted: Mary Mack, Carol Hickler, Maria Gelinas, Valerie Buchand, Pola Sommers, Jennifer Ahern-Koch, Claudia Cuomo, Kafi Benz, Jay Patel, City officials and reps; Ryan Chapdelain, Shavon Reed-Agard, Lorna Alston, others.

Debbie Muller: Chairperson of Crime Watch in the Indian Beach Sapphire Shores Neighborhood: Highlights importance of communication with your neighbors, police and city officials.

Marjorie Sykes: President Bayou Oaks Neighborhood Association & moderator for evening: Hope to achieve at this meeting is 3-fold:

- (1) formulate ideas for solutions
- (2) ID best ideas
- (3) take ideas & create action plan

Explanation of process from arrest to conviction

Mikel Hollaway, Police Chief, Sarasota Police Dept.: Explains two types of misdemeanor arrests made by an officer – those made when he sees an offense and those made when he is called after the event and sees “probable cause” for arresting. Mentioned 12 exceptions to misdemeanor rule.

Ed Brodsky, Chief Assistant State Attorney: criminal cases require higher standard of proof (“beyond reasonable doubt”) than civil cases; 2 types of cases: (1) misdemeanor (2) felony Prosecutors serve the people, want to hear our problems, how can we be more responsive? (brought “Victims' Rights” pamphlet – available from at State Attorney's office, Ringling Blvd)

Chief Judge Lee Haworth, 12th Judicial Court: outlined steps of prosecution after crime committed (1) police investigate (2) suspect charged/arrested (3) within 24 hrs appears in court (4) Judge given information, decides if can be bonded out (5) arraignment – pleads guilty or not, gets lawyer, case management arranged, judge decides trial or not. Trial/Sentence. 95% come to Judge as plea packages by Public Defender. Pkg includes (ex.) drug treatment, work at Salvation Army, Drug Court, DUI Court. The Program has to come to the Judge not vice versa.

A Neighbor's Personal Story: Tom Stephens/Beth Noble Residents for 17 years on Remington Drive between Mecca & 47th St. behind the 3 motels. Constant traffic: 5 mph, same cars go around 12 times, beep horns, look through fences at motels; used condoms, needles in yard “wears on quality of life”. 2005 worked with Det. Steiner, Nuisance Abatement Program to get fences up, motels on 1-year probation = complicated, frustrating, short-term. Wrote letters, spoke at city commission mtgs. Motels & managers need to be held accountable. Videos of mgrs. seen hanging out with drug dealers & prostitutes. Prostitution Exclusion Zone [PEZ] program, some prostitutes arrested 60 times. If let girls walk, drugs follow. Thanks Det. Steiner for help. Stings help best. [loud applause]

From your point of view or your area of expertise, what is or could be the most effective tool to end Criminal and Intimidating Activity on the North Trail and its neighboring communities?
Individual 5 minute responses.

Mikel Hollaway, Police Chief: Need more folk like Tom & wife involved in community. Arrested abt. 75 prostitutes this year – like revolving door. Jay Patel & I are going to walk Trail. Promote Crime Watch. Hear people afraid of that. “There comes a time when we have to draw a line in the sand and take a stand.” Revitalization of NT – Jay Patel's done great work. Have enrolled most of NT businesses in No Trespass Program. Community involvement. We must count on you.

Jeff Steiner, Nuisance Abatement Detective: Police can fine property owner for owning a nuisance property if 3 felony arrests made within 6 months on property – 2 have to be sale of narcotics. 80 narc search warrants executed this year in city. Re: prostitution: not every P is prohibited from entering PEZ as part of probation. Prevention is at forefront of cost of Nuisance Abatement.

Paul Sutton, Administrative Captain, Public Information Officer: Prostitutes arrested this year total 77: 47 in North District, 27 Central. Most effective tools to reduce crime:

- (1) Citizens. Gillespie Park had same problems, became eyes and ears of their community.
- (2) Trespass Enforcement – for when a business is closed or house abandoned
- (3) Nuisance Abatement – used for motels as well as noise
- (4) Prostitute Exclusion Zone (PEZ)
- (5) Arrests? You don't arrest your way out of a problem.
- (6) Need fewer criminals - address addiction issues (crack, alcohol, prescription drugs)
applauded success rates of Salvation Army, 1st Step, and Drug Corps Program
10% untreated released people maintain sobriety. 60% program grads do = 300
people in community are clean and not doing crimes to support habit

Ed Brodsky, Chief Assistant State Attorney: Prostitution is a misdemeanor w/ low bond. Striving for PEZ to raise bond, stay in jail longer instead of back on street so fast. Can include requirements for medical testing, treatment for addiction, etc.

Police Chief Hollaway: I talked to the US Attorney. Many victims and witnesses refuse to testify so they can't prosecute. You must help the prosecutors so the bad guys get the message and leave.

Judge Haworth: We don't have jail space. State needs room for violent criminals – child molesters, etc. We must attack root causes: lack of education, drug use. Names several programs including Sheriff's Offender Work Program (wear vest and work in public).

Linda Holland, Court Watch: Chair of City Nuisance Abatement Board. Described 1997 beginning of Court Watch by group of frustrated neighbors helped by Lt. Pat Ledwith. Sat in courtrooms in bright yellow shirts. By observation became aware of habitual offenders and monitored disposition of cases, heightening awareness of sentencing. Encourages higher bonds for drug dealers. Wants greater use of PEZ, career criminals off streets. Pamphlet available.

David Beesley, President/CEO - 1st Step of Sarasota: Served 13,000 people last year. Fighting damage done by drug and alcohol abuse costs as much as having Hurricane Katrina every year. 70% in jail have substance abuse disorder. Without help, most will return, must break cycle. Offers mental, family counseling, hope to reunite families, GED. Wants last 90 days of jail sentence spent at community corrections center learning new skills to succeed in society. Provides a safe and sober housing facility on Royal Palm Avenue. (applause) Also addresses economic development: attracting hotel chains to put rundown motels out of business.

Bryan Pope, General Manager – Salvation Army VIP-ER Program: VIP-ER [Volunteer Interim Program – Enhanced Recovery] is 5-year-old collaborative of agencies working together. Recovery training in pods in jail. Achieves 2/3 reduction in recidivism. SA is a church, Center of Hope. Points out societal change in addiction: not older white male alcoholic, now younger group addicted to prescription drugs.

Sarasota can be proud to be ahead of many cities in FL in finding solutions to many problems – financing, finding volunteers, etc. for Disaster Response, Recovery Training....

Judge Haworth: Mentions Galvano Center and Project 180 in Manatee County. On Internet. Two year residential self-help program for reintegration into the community for male prisoners w/ training in marketable skills & academics. Aim: increase public safety, decrease public spending.

Panel Response to audience questions on pre-submitted cards.

If the SPD is understaffed, what prevents you from asking for assistance from the Sheriff's Dept.?

Chief Hollaway: We regularly cooperate with narcotics investigations and emergency response teams, but his resources are just as strapped.

SPD and Manatee County collaboration? Narcotics, otherwise we haven't worked much w/ M. Sheriff
Would calling for stricter legislation against prostitution help?

Jeff Steiner, Nuisance Abatement Detective: Sarasota sent a bill to the state. It was turned down by the Ways & Means Committee. It would cost too much. But we had the distinction of sending it.

Have you considered publishing the johns' names?

Capt. Paul Sutton: Yes. We have sent them to all media sources and they choose not to publish them. SPD has its own website. Need to ask someone to publish the pictures. [great interest and clapping] f

Judge Haworth: People who see a photograph of a subject, then see the subject in a PEZ, can call the police, and the subject can be arrested. [audience reacts positively]

What % are people from outside our area?

Det. Steiner: 100% of the prostitutes live in motels or lodgings on NT, johns rarely live in the area.

What action can we do to make the area unfriendly?

Be Involved Citizens.

What's being done about the derelict restaurants and motels?

Det. Steiner: Search warrants and drug stings. 3 motels put on Nuisance Abatement Program last year. Motel owners do face a problem: they have to rent to whoever shows up or they face a lawsuit.

How about a police substation up here?

Chief Hollaway: Not sure one would work.

Judge Haworth: Put forth concept: criminal system big on the stick but not the carrot. How about a Certificate of Rehabilitation if a person has lived a responsible life for perhaps 7 years.

Why not have a legal zone for prostitutes – legalize, regulate and tax?

Capt. Sutton: Prostitution is illegal in the state so we enforce it. Prostitutes are the biggest victims. "I would not wish it on any person."

Bryan Pope: "It's not part of a civil society." Prostitution is not a victimless crime. A legalized zone would not save money. Prescription drugs are the biggest problem.

At what point is a debt paid after a criminal infraction?

Ed Brodsky, Chief Ass't State Attorney: FL legislature has decided that a one time offender can petition through Dept. of Law Enforcement to have record sealed or expunged.

Would it help if citizens took pictures? Misdemeanor - 1 pic may not be enough to be effective; need witnesses who will follow through, willing to come to deposition, to testify. Businesses rely on video.

Linda Holland, Court Watch: If criminals THINK you're taking pix, scares them away, also don't like their tag # written down. Also, can "just fake them out". We need to have a liaison from each neighborhood represented on Court Watch.

What do you suggest to a family to keep their children from criminal activity?

Judge Haworth: (1) keep them busy after school with meaningful activities (2) try to control their peer group (3) set a good example

Chief Hollaway: love, communication, don't fear the consequences of disciplining your child; also alluded to the church sanctuary as an example of part of a lifestyle to keep children on right road.

Capt. Sutton: "Cops & Kids" program mentors 30 children who don't have fathers; other programs out in community for volunteers to help single and struggling parents.

Conclusion and Action Summary

Marjorie Sykes: It's time for action. They are doing their job. Now it's time for us to help them. Talk. Are we going to do something at the end? We are tentatively planning another meeting in January. Go to the Indian Beach Sapphire Shores Association website to check on it at < www.ibssa.ws>

Meeting adjourned at 9 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Newton
Acting secretary