



Report of the ANC6B Public Safety Committee Meeting

March 25, 2024, 6:30 – 8:00p.m.

Commissioners Present:

Frank Avery, Committee Vice Chair (6B01), David Sobelsohn (6B03); Frank D’Andrea (6B04)

Resident Members Present:

Lisa Matsumoto, Chair, Ann Keep; Kelly Waud, Cinnamon Butler, Michelle Strizever, Eric Miller, Frank Boudra, Chuck Schmoyer, Elliot Mamet, John Schwab.

I. Agenda Item #1; Introductions

Introductions of Commissioners and new resident members.

II. Agenda Item #2; Commander Hall and Captain Harding, MPD First District

Commander Hall provided an update. He acknowledged that last year saw an increase in carjackings and robberies in our area. So far this year, MPD has been focused on homicides, robberies and violent crime. Homicides are down 88% from this time last year. Robberies are down 29% percent. Violent crime is down as well, but it is important to keep working to sustain the downward trajectory. Regarding the decrease in robberies, he feels that some strategies they have implemented have worked, and the recent legislation has helped. The goal is obviously to restore that sense of safety.

When asked what prevention strategies has MPD put in place, and what does MPD recommend so people don’t become victims, Commander Hall indicated that they follow data to identify and focus on clusters of activity. Why does one area have more robberies than another? Last year, he said they “threw out a net.” Then every area saw reductions. They also increased their auto theft unit. In general, if they have seen a spike in activity, they moved officers to that area. Additionally, officers are trained to see what makes people vulnerable. For example, officers will look for people with their hazards on, like DoorDash drivers, or individuals walking without being attentive, looking at their phones, because they are potential victims. He urged citizens to call police if they see something suspicious. They want people to reach out. Although they have 200 officers, citizens can add more eyes. He gave the example of persons riding around with masks on.

Kelly Waud thanked Commander Hall for attending the safety meeting at Potomac Gardens and for engagement and coordination with DC Public Housing Police. She asked how they communicate with each other? Commander Hall indicated that they have been working hand in hand with public housing police. They know that they can no longer just patrol around Potomac Gardens, but need to get inside. They talk with each other and have seen improvements in relationships. Captain Harding added that they have been increasing communication, trying to figure out who is covering each area. For instance, they noticed that many vehicles come from SW to SE and there are gunshots, so they share that information to try and identify what is going on.

Kelly Waud also mentioned that they have tried to set up movie nights to engage community with MPD. Community is interested in having community basketball game that could be ongoing. Although Commander Hall had not heard about the basketball game he thought that was a great idea and he said movie nights could definitely happen, with popcorn and a big screen. They really want to engage with the community in these positive ways.

Commander Hall was asked, more specifically, how has recent legislation helped and about MPD staffing levels. Commander Hall said Secure DC is helping and it is a start in that it gives them more tools to use to address problem areas. He said that being able to create drug-free zones, such as in Chinatown, has helped. The next drug-free zone will be around 8th and H NE, to be announced soon. He is hopeful that it will help that area the same way it helped Chinatown. He spent some time explaining the requirements for setting up a drug-free zone and how they ensure constitutional protections. He indicated that officers receive specific training related to operating in them and that command staff must oversee them. To allay concerns about constitutional protections of citizens in a designated zone, he mentioned that police have no additional ability or power to conduct stops and detentions than they have in any other situation.

He also mentioned a positive impact from pretrial detention. He indicated that these tools help police do their jobs. The Commander was asked whether MPD is collecting data to show that pretrial detention is helping, since people have strong feelings about that issue. Would data help address those concerns? He admitted he was not sure about data collection, but that might be occurring now or in the future under requirements of the Act. He knows criminal activity has dropped and his sense is these tools have helped.

Regarding staffing levels he indicated they are very actively recruiting, and looking at people coming out of the military and recruiting on college campuses. They are slowly creeping back to full recruitment

The Commander was asked if there anything else we can be doing to advocate? We're trending in the right direction, but what else can we do? Is pressure needed on AG? What about the crime lab? Commander Hall stated that one thing that has helped is a lot of pressure on the AG and the US Attorney's Office. Attention given to the prosecuting arm of the justice system has helped. More action is needed than just arrests. What happens after the arrest is just as important, meaning charging and follow through. When people are interested in a case and follow up with the prosecutors, it helps to put pressure in the right place.

The Commander and Captain were asked what is the best way for citizens to submit tips to the police. Do we call 911? Or send a text? There's no followup. Does that take longer than 911 and OUC? What is the guidance or preference? Commander Hall said it depends on the seriousness. It is important to call 911 if something is serious. 50411 is the text tip line. It's for

people who don't feel comfortable calling. When they get a tip, they will act on it, and they get dispatched out. It is also important to give as much description as possible. Exact description with a callback name and number is better. Leave your name. That helps the most. Give very detailed descriptions. Descriptions of guns, drugs being stashed, what people are wearing. These are things that are helpful to build the case. He noted that text tips are anonymous, so there isn't follow up.

The Commander and Captain were asked about how they are using social media in their investigations. Captain Harding responded that they do have a social media aspect, but declined to give details because they don't want to give away their methods.

Commissioner Sobelsohn asked again about staffing and how it is comparing to before the drop. Commander Hall acknowledged it is a significant decrease. He noted that 17 new officers will be coming out of the next class graduating this Friday.

Commissioner Sobelsohn also asked whether the Commander could recommend more legislation? What would be the next step? Are there things for which the ANC can advocate? Commander Hall acknowledged that is a difficult question. He indicated the things they always need more of such as more of a budget. Vehicles and building maintenance, health of officers, recruiting, and equipment all cost money. And, strengthening laws is helpful, but he did not provide more detail.

Commissioner Sobelsohn asked more specifically about what can be done about people stealing packages from people's porches. What can we do about this? What can the people who have cameras do with the images? Captain Harding responded that there is a team working on this problem. He urged that people keep sending the videos to the police since images from different thefts can help them link together the same person committing crime. The same for retail theft. He also noted that even if people don't want to call 911 for a "porch pirate," they should still give the police the footage by text or calling the command center at 202-727-9099. When asked if they monitor NextDoor (neighborhood social media site), Captain Harding indicated they only use the platform to send content out. Commander Hall added that if you see people posting incidents or images on Next Door, to tell them to contact the police. Also if you notice patterns, tell the police. Porch theft and retail theft are things they are focusing on.

Commander Hall also talked about presence and bike officers in the district. He established and reinforced two bike units. One patrols the H street corridor in the evenings. They had them in the ANC 6B area, but they have to look at how many officers are in different places, so they shift them around. Every sector has developed a mountain bike plan. When there is manpower and resources, they will have people out on mountain bikes. In every part of the district, you should see mountain bikes.

Commander Hall was asked about problems with OUC and whether there is anything that can be done from MPD, such as data collection by MPD on missed opportunities or problems with dispatch, to help address problems or make improvements with OUC. Commander Hall is not aware of any data collection like this, but indicated MPD has a liaison. It is another area where the mayor and council have tried to make improvements, but it is a challenging job. He thinks it is getting better.

Commissioner D'Andrea noted that MPD is not at the staffing they need now and asked whether there is any whole government approach that could help such as mental health staffing? Commander Hall talked about community ambassadors who are civilians who are trained to be

on the street, unarmed, without powers of arrest, but they will respond to a theft. They will begin the investigation, thereby freeing up officers. They also have core response teams. These teams work with the Department of Behavioral Health to have mental health officers to ride along with officers in case there is a call with a mental health aspect. They operate out of the 1st District.

Ann Keep praised the Commander and Captain, indicating that the neighborhood walks have been terrific. Lincoln Park listserv people recommended that people come to the walk and get to know the police. She noted that criminal justice is so difficult, but that we need to emphasize that there is government responsibility, but also people's responsibility.

III. Agenda Item #3; Availability of Youth Services with guest speakers Shakitha Leavy, Kimberley Pinkney, and Julia Irving from the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement

Chair Matsumoto introduced the guests from Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, indicating that in the prior meeting, the committee discussed pulling together resources and several residents had asked about youth/family services for the community. Kimberley Pinkney, Community Outreach Program Specialist, first talked about ONSE and what their office does.

The office was formed as a result of the NEAR Act to address gun violence, to come up with some strategies to address gun violence from a public health perspective. She presented about several programs. The Pathways program gives men ages 18 to 35 the ability to self-correct. Another program with three phases: workforce development phase where they are introduced to wellness and entrepreneurship, vital records, transportation. Many of the people in this program are reentering society. DOES, DBH support them as well. There is wellness support for mental health. There is also subsidized employment, transitioning to unsubsidized employment. ONSE follows them for 13 months afterward.

Other programs: Family Support Survivor Program which provides support to victims of crime: financial, wellness, relocation. There is also a program, the ONSE Leadership Academy, started at Anacostia HS, looking for young people who have the potential to be high risk and involved in crime. The program is now operating in 6 schools. They are now also looking at feeder middle schools. Since the ages of people committing crimes is getting younger, they have moved to middle schools.

The People of Promise program does case management around people who have been newly released from incarceration to our communities. They have 26 communities of focus. People of Promise helps people who live in these communities and need resources to ensure that they do not become a recidivist. The data says that if you are in school and working, you are less likely to commit a crime. There is an outreach portion of violence intervention. The focus is on indigenous citizens of the city in the communities who know people who commit crime or might have been victims. Using trained credible violence interrupters, the goal is to keep the peace among people who might respond in violent ways.

Our ANC 6B community is a not a community of focus for ONSE programs because the level of violent activity does not meet their threshold (a good thing), but they do support Potomac Gardens through a food distribution program. Food insecurity is a big issue. The next closest community is Trinidad.

Ms. Pinkney and Julia Irving spoke more about the Pathways program, which is a referral program, understanding that people who are living in a community where they hear gunshots 4 times per week, or see homicides 4 times per year. Other entities in the district can help individuals as well if they aren't eligible for these programs.

They were asked about the violence experienced at Digital Pioneers and what we can do as a community to help kids affected by that trauma, so they don't carry it forward. What can we do to support our community?

Ms. Irving indicated that Digital Pioneers is definitely on their radar and that they specifically look at feeder schools for our communities of promise. Digital Pioneers did experience a lot of trauma this year. Teams were deployed there to make sure that the principal, staff, and students were connected to supportive services. Each time there was violence, the crisis response team was deployed. Many of these students live in the communities, so they still get support at home. Things the community can do: advocacy for food, employment. Advocate for people to hire people from the program. In their experience, when there were people who got jobs, then the gunshots stopped.

They were asked to talk more about food services, where it comes from. What's the quality of food that you deliver, and how can we enable that? Ms. Pinkney noted that they partner with DC Central Kitchen and they service Potomac Gardens on Mondays. Mr. Murphy at Potomac Gardens is the contact for food. He is the senior resident counselor. They deliver to the 1229 G St address every Monday in the community room. Food quality has gotten better. The goal is to empower communities by referring them to resources. After that has been done, they step back, but they haven't been able to find anyone in Potomac Gardens who can get the food. The goal is to strengthen the relationship between Potomac Gardens and DC Central Kitchen. Picking the food up might be a way to help and engage the community. She also noted that there are more healthy options now. Knowing the relationship between food insecurity and violence, it would be good if everyone could be involved in the food distribution.

They were also asked how can we stay connected or provide support (e.g. food, pathways program, etc.) for the kids in our neighborhood? Ms. Irving spoke about the Breadcoin program. It is a food token that officers can distribute out into the community. It's done in other districts of the city, but not here. Providing with a bread coin might help. Obviously, advocacy for food, housing, and employment are all important, but also, when there is a hearing before the city council, they want to hear feedback.

Commissioner D'Andrea asked if they have any estimate of how many people they are affecting and could effect? Are they bumping up against constraints? Ms. Irving indicated they are always looking for affected communities and other communities come on the radar while they may wean other communities off. However in communities with the highest rate of ongoing violence, the highest issue is housing. Trying to find housing for people to move them outside of communities with stress and pressure of violence. But the challenge there is identifying long-term employment that will allow them to keep paying rent.

Finally, they spoke about teaching entrepreneurship, their art initiative, Art for Change. There will be some participating in Art All Night. They will also be selling jewelry they have made at Eastern Market.

The Committee was very appreciative of the work of our guests and the programs they presented.

IV. Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:24 PM. The next meeting is April 24, 2024.