Maplewood Citizens Association

General Membership Meeting

January 31, 2018

DRAFT MINUTES

Attendees: Allen Myers, president; Mary Jo Deering, vice-president and acting secretary; Hugh Barteman, treasurer; and approximately 41 others

President Allen Myers Allen called the meeting to order 7:33 and introduced Captain Paul Liquorie, Bethesda Police 2nd District Commander.

POLICE REPORT FOR DISTRICT 2

Commander Liquorie reviewed police activity in the greater Maplewood area over 2017. Highlights include:

* There have been relatively few incidents: 2 sexual offenses by individuals known to victims; zero robberies; only domestic simple assaults; 1 commercial burglary off Pooks Hill Road; just 2 residential burglaries (one off Old Georgetown).
* Thefts from autos are part of a regional trend. Individuals go through condo parking lots and test door handles and if unlocked and remove anything of value, however small (e.g. designer sun glasses, GPS, cell phones, chargers, laptops); loose change--can cumulatively add to $25 dollars in an evening. There were 17 thefts from autos in Maplewood in past year; 5 were at YMCA. These are totally preventable, by locking car, and by removing items of value.
* Just 8 episodes of vandalism, mostly graffiti.
* There were reports of a gun fired one night on Linden. Officers found an adult female under influence of alcohol and other substances. They also found 2 hand guns. No person or property was targeted.
* Residents are urged to call if they see/hear anything unusual--911 if there seems to be danger; or 301 279 8000 for non-emergency. The police prefer that residents report anything however minor it may seem. This enables them to spot trends, and also, if stolen items are later found, they can be given back to the owners who reported loss. Allen Myers said he would send out a message on the listserve to this effect.

During the Q&A, the following were discussed:

* Question: there seems to be a proliferation of potential prostitution locations around Bethesda (e.g. nail shops, spas). Answer: Sex/human trafficking is practiced in Bethesda. The Vice Unit looks at this and works permitting services office. Every “spa” must have a proper license, and there are inspections. Citizen complaints are helpful. The police also examine online transactions.
* Question: Are petty crimes done by local teenagers or outside? Answer: Such crimes are concentrated near metro stations, so the police suspect that people are coming in from outside.
* Question: What about auto thefts? Answer: People leave spare key to same car or spouse’s car and thief finds it and uses it. Or thief finds garage door opener in car and get into the garage to steal more items. Also they test doors from garage into the house to make quick thefts. So far, arrests in Bethesda have been of outsiders.
* Question: Is there much gang activity? Answer: There’s very little gang activity in Bethesda.

DANBURY HOUSE

Commander Liquorie introduced Chief Maurice Witt, the Assistant Chief for Fire and Rescue Special Operations, and mentioned that the police are also working with the Department of Permitting Services. Highlights of Chief Witt’s presentation include:

* The fire started in basement; 1 man died in the basement. Fire investigation is closed; no specific cause or first point of ignition was determined. They found lots of normal household chemicals; no accelerants or explosives were found. There was lots of stuff in every room. ATF electrical engineers were brought in to look for cause of fire, but it’s still undetermined origin. The insurance company will make its own examination.
* Some tunneling was found in one place in basement; the tunnels hadn’t been dug with any permits. They went in and found no hazards. It wasn’t possible to explore every foot of the tunnels because some are very small, not fully excavated and twisty. The tunnels do not appear to go onto other neighboring properties, but they are not 100% sure. Fire inspectors are now done. The Department of Permitting Services, Department of Housing and Community Affairs, and Environmental Protection office are also involved.
* The tunneling is determined to make house unsafe; hence the order for demolition. The owner is cooperating. There is currently no timetable for the demolition; the overall process for getting there isn’t complete. Once the house is razed, further exploration of the tunnels may be feasible. But inspections to date didn’t show anything that seemed to warrant more inspection.
* Homicide detectives talked with owner. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner hasn't released a cause of death.

During the Q&A, the following issues were raised:

* Question: Was there any crime? Answer: The investigation still open, but currently they don’t see anything that suggests criminal activity.
* Question: What about the hoarding? Answer from Allen Myers: There is no law against hoarding inside a single family home.
* Statement from the father of the victim: There is much more to learn about the location of body and the tunnels and the materials in the house. His son sent numerous emails and texts. Answer (Captain Liquorie): This is someone’s private property. The police have investigated as much as possible. We do have access to the emails. The Department of Permitting Services will explore tunneling. We need to do due process to address extent of situation. We must determine how far tunnels extend; are there materials deeper inside tunnels? We have plan for exploring this in a safe, methodical approach. We’re concerned about structural instability. We will look for evidentiary items and take them into the investigation. We will get more answers. Chief Witt: We put chain link fence around property and secured the tunnels. Now only I have key.
* Question: Please confirm you will excavate the tunnels after house is razed. Answer: The owner has been ordered to have it razed. The process will be supervised.
* Question: Do you have any notion of intent? Answer: no.
* President Allen Myers commented that no neighbors have raised any issues except one person who lives behind the property. No one has reported adverse impact.
* Question: where did dirt from tunnels go and why didn’t neighbors report anything? Answer (Allen): Probably inertia; reluctance to interfere. Neighbor comment: property is very overgrown; one can’t see anything from front.
* Question: Is there any timeline for the demolition and completing the investigation? Answer (Captain Witt): The Department of Permitting Services is working with owner.

President Allen Myers told the audience that he would continue to follow this and inform the community of developments. He also called for volunteers for block captains for Neighborhood Watch. Police will provide training. We need continuous vigilance. Allison Peppleman is coordinator.

TRAFFIC ISSUES

* Beech and Linden traffic controls: Commander Liquorie said that to make any changes, including “calming,” the entire community would have to support the change. Police beat officers respond to complaints and can enforce the signs. Traffic is single biggest complaint in 2nd district. The police need to hear more from citizens associations in order to prioritize their enforcement efforts. Montgomery County now has cameras on most school buses. We found over 20,000 violations in 2017. Those people are fined.
* Alta Vista and Old Georgetown issue: The new bump out creates a hazard; cyclists still don’t stop. Allen Myers has suggested a traffic signal. The state will consider it.

BUSINESS MEETING

Secretary’s Report: The Minutes from the September 27th meeting were distributed and approved per motion of Alan Goldhammer. (There was no meeting in November.)

Treasurer’s Report: The balance as of January 31, 2018 is $13, 761.81. The report was approved per motion of Colonel McGee.

French International School:

* The FIS dropped its proposal to build a new school on Old Georgetown Road and instead is proposing to purchase the property currently owned by the Federation of Societies in Experimental Biology (FASEB) on Rockville Pike south of Pooks Hill Road. FASEB will remain in some current structures on the property, and there is a tenant in another structure.
* The biggest issue will be bus traffic. The main entrance on Rockville Pike is difficult to exit during rush hour. There are gates through Alta Vista Court and the Pooks Hill Square town houses, but these are not suitable for all the FIS traffic.
* FASEB had offer from a developer to build 60 units, as a combination of single-family-detached housing near the neighborhood, and townhouses near the existing townhouses on Pooks Hill Road. The FIS might generate more traffic than the houses. We need to assess FIS impact when we know more.
* FIS is not ready to talk to MCA until later Spring or Fall.

Beech Avenue. The developer proposes 19 homes. The county will probably require opening Nelson, and the end of the street into the property may be changed, so there could be 1-2 fewer houses. The county had originally talked about having 35 town houses to get more green space, but that would cause more traffic. The timetable isn’t firm but perhaps it will take up to a year to start construction.

Cypress Avenue: FAES proposes to build 7 single family homes. Prior proposal to build 15 homes was opposed by MCA. This proposal seems appropriate for the property and the neighborhood.

Maplewood Village: Karen Bedell leads a subcommittee that is exploring an opportunity to partner with Wyngate Village (Wyngate Neighbors Helping Neighbors--WNHN). WNHN provides the type of services a neighbor would do, like transportation, small household help, computers, etc. They already have platform set up and volunteers to provide services. Our two villages are developing a plan for Maplewood residents to be able to ask for services from WNHN and also to seek to be trained as volunteers. The two organizations are still looking at all the issues. The partnership wouldn’t be rolled out until September to be sure it’s clear and successful.

Spring Social: Chip Brenner reported the event would be held April 29th at the Knights of Columbus, rain or shine. Volunteers are needed.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.