

NOTES FROM THE FOLLOWUP MEETING ON NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAMS.

We held a follow-up meeting on the topic of Neighborhood Watch Programs [NWP] on May 23, 2023, to discuss what, if anything, we might want to do, in addition to what we are already doing, to address our sense of an increase in criminal activities in Parkwood. The [recording of that meeting is here](#). The passcode, which it is easiest to cut and paste, is ?3+X44G4. A link to some of the questions raised and to references to additional information about NWPs is [here](#).

Discussion. Although 15 residents registered for the meeting, only six were able to attend. In addition to hearing about the lack of responsiveness by District 2 police to a recent break-in at the home of a Parkwood resident, participants discussed several options, including 1) establishing a nighttime surveillance program staffed by residents and 2) paying a private company to provide such surveillance. It was stated that given the current staffing shortages in the police department, it was unlikely that the county could assign officers to this task. Some participants did report that there had been timely police response to calls made when crimes were being observed as they occurred.

One resident submitted the following proposal via email for discussion at the meeting:
I'd like to propose - with some reservation - a way to deter crime in our neighborhood, as an alternative to Neighborhood Watch. It would be ideal to have the police do this, but they have neither the staffing nor the cars. We could hire a private security firm to drive through the neighborhood at night, at random times and on a random path, in a clearly marked car. The idea would be to change our reputation as a quiet, dark neighborhood where you are likely to get away with a break-in.

We would have to look into the cost and raise the money through voluntary contributions. Perhaps neighboring communities would join us in contracting for the service. This is meant to be a deterrent. I would want the people to be unarmed and to be instructed to call the police emergency number if they see anything suspicious. (A friend's neighborhood organization in Gaithersburg hired a private firm to provide conspicuous presence about a decade ago, and the crime problem permanently disappeared after a couple of months.)

My reservation concerns the possibility for a tragic event if the people we hire have guns, given how our older kids seem to enjoy pranking and other strange activities after dark. I'd rather suffer the thefts than have something bad happen if it comes to that choice.

Another resident raised the following questions about this proposal, again via email, in advance of the meeting:

- 1) *How effective for deterring crime is a security guard - Brief review of literature on this question found studies to be done by security firms so findings are questionable.*
- 2) *How can we determine the effectiveness - Someone would have to keep statistics on before and after hiring the security guard. However, numerous variables would have to be controlled for (time of year, state of the economy, jobless rate, etc.)*

- 3) *What is the role of the Security Guard if he or she sees a crime in progress? Do they call the police or intervene on their own?*
- 4) *Are they armed?*
- 5) *How many hours do they patrol and how many times around the neighborhood?*
- 6) *Cost – do we access a fee or use PRA funds – if PRA funds are proposed we need a vote.*

During the discussion, it was suggested that it was unlikely that there would be enough volunteer residents to sustain a nighttime watch program in Parkwood. It was suggested that we survey residents to determine whether they favored paying a private company to provide such a service, and how much residents would be willing to pay for the cost of that service. It was further suggested that we ask Chevy Chase View and the Town of Kensington if they have such services.

Action Items. We will survey residents regarding their views on 1) having a volunteer nighttime watch program and whether they would be willing to participate 2) paying a private company to provide such a service and whether and how much they would be willing to pay for such a service. Because we are about to enter the summer vacation season, we will conduct this survey in the fall. By that time, we will know more about what, if anything, Chevy Chase View and the Town of Kensington do about these issues.

Jeff Griffith
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