

Community Advisory Committee Minutes
June 4, 2024

Committee Attendees: Bill Corey, Evan Smith, Cameron Moody, Ken Niles, Sheila Footer, Al Muller, Ethel Pacheco, Prem Garg, Stephanie Clipper, Joe Bucherer

Regrets: David Churchill, Sandra Schwarzbart, Bill Lewis, Cheryl Tyler

The meeting was held via Zoom and called to order at 6:00 pm.

Topics:

Off Duty Police Patrols:

- Members of the Committee probed the feelings of residents by having conversations and polls within their buildings regarding the interest and knowledge of the off-duty Montgomery County Police Officer presence.
 - Generally, a majority of those spoken with are in favor of having a visible presence in the Village. Among reasons offered were street safety, monitoring of the cross walks, speeding cars, and the sense that the Village has become less safe.
 - There is a contingent of residents who were not aware of the police presence. Some were interested to know that the police were present during daylight hours, when they were at work and away from home, and questioned having increased safety at night in especially dark areas of the Village. Others did not know there was a presence at all.
 - When learning of the presence, several residents asked if the officers could do foot patrols instead of being in their cars at the sub-station on N Park or parked in front of 5550. Residents at the ends of the Village, such as Highland House, The Willoughby, and Willard Towers tended to be less aware of the presence.
 - From the report issued by the Montgomery County Police in the May Council Meeting, it is clear that the police presence is involved in catching speeding incidents,
 - The Committee has expressed the opinion that safety is likely an impression based on a combination of factors such as the real presence of police and fewer incidents. What is clear is that a follow up to the May Council Meeting where comparisons to other areas of the County as a barometer of “safety” is not relevant to a large component of the Village either. Hence, there is an opportunity for the Village to enhance the marketing and PR of the police presence by moving to a combination of drive and foot patrols, reminders in the newsletter, and ensuring that the patrols cover more than the central part of the Village.
 - The Committee was provided a topline of the report provided by the Police for the April Council Meeting. The report covers the Year ending March 2024. Counts were provided outlining the number of incidents recorded by officers, noting that there were no contractor van break-ins during the period. In addition, citations for school bus safety, traffic control, and other incidents were provided. The report also outlines that a shift in hours to provide early evening patrol and foot tours have been added per requests and to increase visibility.
- Conclusion:
 - The Committee was split on the role of the police presence. Without the investment in the off-duty program some members suggest that crime incidents could return to pre-program levels, despite the sub-station use. We also consider that measurement of effectiveness is difficult as there is not a long-time baseline trend for comparison. The report issued by the police clarifies impact.

- Some members of the committee noted that they did not see a benefit. Reasons were that the patrols rarely went beyond the central core of the Village, did not include evening / low light hours when people would be walking back from the Metro, the fact that any fines issued were 100% collected by the County (unlike the sharing agreement on parking enforcement), and that by paying incrementally for off-duty officers, Village residents were actually paying twice for police presence – once via tax dollars and again for this program.
- We do not consider a survey of Village residents to probe further would provide meaningful input given the low historical response rate to such vehicles and the lack of demographic representation.
- We suggest a review of the program, possibly modifying hours lower if budget is a concern, but we also suggest that continued marketing and public relations by the Village, especially in the newsletter be employed, as was done in the June issue. This seems a missed opportunity to promote a program with positive impact, based on the provided report, that could be used to generate higher levels of awareness and input from residents.
- We suggest that while budget is important, that this issue be referred to the Public Safety Committee which holds regular open meetings for discussion and to gather resident information. The budget allocation for this program is a relatively small piece of the overall budget while Council is allocating funds for consultants in other areas. If it is deemed a valuable program, Council does have the facility to raise taxes to cover the cost as it is only collecting the State mandated minimum currently.

The next meeting will be held on July 9, 2024, at 6 pm in the Village Center. Village residents are encouraged to attend.