

WARD 4 COUNCILMEMBER MURIEL BOWSER



SHEPHERD PARK CRIME BRIEFING MINUTES

January 23, 2012

Councilmember Bowser opened the meeting at 7:35 p.m. at Shepherd Park Elementary School. She was joined by and introduced: Police Chief Cathy Lanier; Fourth District Commander Kimberly Chisley-Missouri; Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice Paul Quander; Director of the Office of Unified Communications Jennifer Greene; Rich Romer from Montgomery County Councilmember Valerie Ervin's Office; Takoma Park Police Chief Ronald Ricucci; Montgomery County Police Lt. Robert Carter; and At-Large Councilmember Vincent Orange.

I. Crime Trends and MPD Response

Chief Lanier made a presentation about overall District trends, Fourth District trends and PSA 401 trends. She began by discussing the three most common types of crimes experienced throughout the District. Carjacking is the least common of the three, though there has been a spike in recent months. The second type is commercial robberies, often of convenience or liquor stores, which are commonly perpetrated by small groups of suspects. The most common types of crime recently has been "snatch" robberies of technology devices such as mp3 players GPS devices, and smart phones from individual residents.

Shepherd Park in particular has been subject to a rash of armed robberies in the past month. They were generally occurring between the hours of 7 and 10 PM at night, though Chief Lanier was reluctant to identify profiles of the suspects until some initial arrests were made. Chief Lanier did say definitively that MPD did not believe any of the crime was gang-related. Up to this point, the MPD had no evidence that these crimes were perpetrated by the same suspects or were otherwise connected in some way. Chief Lanier said it was not uncommon to see temporary "hot spots" for crime in a neighborhood, particularly one like Shepherd Park that is generally considered affluent and safe, causing residents to take fewer precautions against crime and present good opportunities for would-be criminals.

Chief Lanier then discussed MPD's response to this trend. In the short term, they are making more arrests (108 already in January alone District-wide). Because many criminals are repeat offenders, this has the benefit of taking them off the street, often for long periods of time. To facilitate greater arrests in the Fourth District and PSA 401 specifically, Commander Missouri had progressively stepped up resources as the uptick in crime was identified. After the first two crimes in Shepherd Park occurred, three additional officers began patrolling Jonquil Street.

After the third crime, bike patrols were added. Most recently, fourteen tactical plain-clothes officers were then added after the last robbery on January 18th. Police presence had also generally increased because of the additional 26 officers assigned to the Fourth District after its boundaries were expanded.

Chief Lanier also identified several long-term initiatives MPD was conducting to fight the types of crimes Shepherd Park and the District as a whole have recently experienced. To deter thefts of smart phones and other technology, Chief Lanier was working with the Federal Communications Commission, a consortium of cell phone manufacturers (GSMA), and law enforcement from 65 other cities to require mandatory technology that would disable the phones after its owner reports it stolen. This practice is also known as “bricking” a phone. MPD is also considering “web crawling” technology that would automatically search online retailers like eBay and Craigslist for stolen goods before they are “fenced”. Finally, MPD was announcing in a matter of days a new rewards program that would offer \$1,000 to \$10,000 for tips that lead to arrests.

Commander Missouri then provided information of the recent crimes in Shepherd Park and MPD’s responses to them.

Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice, Paul Quander, discussed other anti-crime tactics District government agencies were implementing. For example, fire engines, DPW parking enforcement officers, and other District government employees are often reassigned to communities with spikes in crime. They have to effects. First, they are trained to observe and report suspicious or criminal activity to MPD. Secondly, they have a deterrent effect on potential criminals simply by having an open presence and show of force as government officials.

II. Questions and Comments

- **Camera technology** - The first speaker asked whether strategically placed cameras were being used to catch criminals. Deputy Mayor Quander responded that such cameras were in use throughout the District, but would not provide more detail given the value of not tipping off the location and use of those cameras to criminals.
- **Officer resources** - Several residents expressed the need for increased police presence and resources. Chief Lanier and Commander Missouri said that MPD was quick to add needed forces after each crime occurred and a trend was identified. At least 20 additional officers were reassigned to the area after these crimes, in addition to the 26 officers added as part of the Fourth District boundary change. Further, MPD is in the process of conducting hiring for the first time in almost two years, and as police begin to graduate from the Academy in April, more officers will almost certainly be assigned to the Fourth District. Chief Lanier continued by saying that MPD will assign resources in a fair manner to meet the demands of crime levels in each neighborhood. But, it doesn’t necessarily make sense to overreact because police officers in other neighborhoods

outside the Fourth District often play a role in fighting crimes in the Fourth District. For example, a car stolen in Shepherd Park is often recovered by police in the Seventh District, which is less likely to happen if MPD resources are overly concentrated in one area. That is why MPD's overall strategy is to focus on people or groups of criminals rather than areas where they commit the crime.

- **Crime Reporting and 9-1-1 Problems** – Several residents complained of unresponsive police and/or 9-1-1 call takers. In one case, police told a victim that they could not do anything because although their home was broken into, no property was stolen. In other cases, police were slow to arrive at the scene of a minor crime, suspicious activity or to speak with residents who wanted to serve as witnesses at previous crimes.

Director of the Office of Unified Communications, Jennifer Greene, fielded this question by discussing the 9-1-1 call handling protocol. When a resident dials 9-1-1, a call taker from OUC collects the relevant information from the caller and then transfers the call to either a police dispatcher or a 3-1-1 operator based on the level of the emergency.

- Director Greene then stated that OUC was aware of and working on the problem of 9-1-1 calls from cell phones being automatically misrouted to Montgomery County dispatchers because of cell phone tower technology. Specifically, she said call takers from both jurisdictions were trained to transfer calls if the caller was located in the other jurisdiction and under no circumstances are they told to hang-up on callers or tell them to try again. Director Greene was also working with cell phone companies on technological fixes to this problem. Councilmember Mendelson, who chairs the DC Council's Judiciary Committee, was also working towards a fix on this problem.
 - Commander Missouri apologized for any poor response residents received from officers under her command and asked them to personally report any problems to her in the future by emailing her at kimberly.missouri@dc.gov or Chief Lanier at cathy.lanier@dc.gov.
- **Parking tickets on stolen cars** – At least one resident as well as previous reports confirmed by Councilmember Bowser recognized a problem with ticketing of illegally parked cars after they have been stolen. It unfortunately places the burden of proof on the victim of a car theft to prove they should not be liable for the tickets. Chief Lanier said that DPW parking enforcement officers should already check with "teletype" services before ticketing a car to confirm that it is not stolen. When this doesn't happen, it's simply a case of human error. She also said they are just about complete with an update to DPW's computer system so that it automatically communicates with the FBI's stolen vehicle database. This would get around any human error problems, and was scheduled to be complete within the year.
 - **Self-Defense** - When asked by one resident what residents could do to protect themselves, Deputy Mayor Quander and Chief Lanier strongly discouraged any attempts

at self-defense. There is strong statistical evidence that self-defense doesn't work, puts the person at further risk of harm, and makes the job of MPD that much tougher. Stolen goods can be replaced, but lives cannot.

- **Returning to the Scene of a Crime** – One of the victims of a recent crime in Shepherd Park complained that criminal suspects returned within hours and just blocks away from where the first crime took place to commit a second. He felt additional MPD resources were needed to prevent this. Chief Lanier responded that police officers did chase the stolen car after the second crime was committed but were unfortunately unsuccessful in capturing the suspect. She also said that the MPD's helicopter ("falcon") is a good tool for such purposes and is almost always accessible within minutes, though it is forced to refuel once an hour.
- **Jurisdictional Coordination** – Given the close proximity of this neighborhood with the Maryland border, residents asked for detail of MPD's coordination with law enforcement from other jurisdictions. Chief Lanier responded that they are in constant and substantive communication with Takoma Park and Montgomery County police. Police officials from those jurisdictions also confirmed this coordination, citing frequent examples where the chiefs from the jurisdictions email or meet with each other, including night hours and weekends. They stressed that criminals ignore jurisdictional boundaries and that crime fighting tactics must do so as well.
- **Neighborhood Watch and Civic Participation** – On several occasions, speakers emphasized the value of public participation to prevent crime. The first thing all residents can do is report all suspicious activity to police regardless of whether it is obviously criminal activity. It allows the community to be the eyes and ears of the police, who can then investigate the reports further. Secondly, neighborhood watches, block captains, and orange hat patrols are extremely effective in deterring criminals from committing repeat offenses in a specific neighborhood. A representative from the local community association was available at the meeting to take volunteers for their neighborhood watch program.

III. Next Steps – Action Plan

Councilmember Bowser concluded the meeting by summarizing the previously expressed community concerns and outlining measures that MPD, and other government agencies/residents would take to address the current problems.

- a. **District Budget and MPD Resources** – Councilmember Bowser described past efforts to appropriate an additional \$10 million to MPD in the current year's budget. She strongly encouraged residents to voice their support for increased police funding to the Council as they consider the new budget in the next few months.

- b. **MPD Resources/Staffing Adjustments** – Councilmember Bowser asked MPD to continue adjusting staff and resource levels as needed to meet the crime levels of Shepherd Park, including assignment of newly trained officers in April and use of DPW and other government staff.
- c. **Crime Cameras** – MPD should deploy more strategically-placed cameras to detect and prevent crimes. There are obvious budget limitations to this effort, though MPD should review current deployment levels and adjust as needed and as resources allow.
- d. **Jurisdiction Coordination** – MPD will continue strong cooperation with Takoma Park, Montgomery County and other police forces in fighting crime.
- e. **MPD Crime Prevention Training** – Councilmember Bowser recommended MPD conduct more training of residents, where police officers go door-to-door providing tips on what individual residents can do to make themselves and others safer.
- f. **Neighborhood Watch/Participation** – Residents, strongly encourage joining the neighborhood watch program. To do so, please contact Alex McCants of the neighborhood association at (202) 558-5336 or mccantsac@gmail.com.
 - i. For information on neighborhood watch training, see <http://mpdc.dc.gov/mpdc/cwp/view,a,1238,q,560689.asp> or contact Yvonne Smith at Yvonne.Smith@dc.gov or (202) 727-8809
 - ii. Join the Fourth District email listserv at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MPD-4D/>.
- g. **Compliance Safety Checks** – These are traffic stops in high traffic areas. All vehicles are stopped, residents are reminded to use seatbelts and carry necessary identification when these compliance safety checks occur. These safety checks also serve to increase police presence and helps with traffic issues as well. Given the strong results they have had in the Petworth neighborhood, Councilmember Bowser asked MPD to consider doing them in Shepherd Park and surrounding neighborhoods as well.
- h. **Second Community Meeting** – Councilmember Bowser suggested holding a second community meeting at a later date (TBD) to follow-up on this action plan and to confirm that the necessary steps are being taken to solve these problems.