

Minutes from the meeting of February 12, 2020 of Super Neighborhood 17 – Eldridge/West Oaks

- I. Call to order at 7:00 p.m. President Baker opened the meeting. He established quorum with 8 delegates or alternates.
- II. Acknowledge and Welcome to Guests and Visitors
Nathan Beedle – Harris County Assistant District Attorney, Chief, Misdemeanor Division
Torrence Atkinson – Office of Councilwoman Tiffany Thomas – District F
James Rains – Office of Councilman Greg Travis – District G
Rene Ruiz – Mayor’s Citizens Assistance Office, Department of Neighborhoods
Margarita Dunlap – Houston METRO
Ofc. Timothy Whitaker – Representative of HPD
Sgt. Tavis Parkerson – Representative of HPD
- III. A quorum of 8 was established.
- IV. For Community Safety **Ofc. Whitaker from HPD** started with a significant increase in burglaries, primarily at apartments along and near Eldridge. Some comments and keeping yourself safe and helping HPD: use a deadbolt lock with 3-inch screws and a solid door. Apartments are required by the city to provide a solid exterior door. Sliding doors need a secondary lock. Make sure exterior lighting is working. Set house alarms when away. An alarm not set may as well not be there. Make sure the contact information is updated with the city. Close curtains. Keep an up to date inventory with video or photos *and with serial numbers*. A serial number makes much better evidence. Burglary of Motor Vehicles is also up. In a lot of cases the car doors were left unlocked.

Ofc. Whitaker was asked to comment on NRA stickers as a mark. His response was that guns were one of the top items taken in burglaries.

He was also asked about cars with wheels stolen. While it was prevalent years ago, wheel theft is starting to make a comeback. He commented that the basic car alarm is too inadequate, that additional sensors are needed. While wheel locks dampened that opportunity significantly, the use of common locks make it less effective. In some cases, criminals are just break the studs leaving significantly more damage.

When asked about gang activity, he commented that a group operating along Meadowglen Lane has been less active recently, though the main issue remains south of Alief-Clodine.

Ofc. Whitaker also provided a map to discuss the cities yard parking ordinance. If 80% of a community can agree, an application can be submitted to be added as a prohibited yard parking area. This makes yard parking a misdemeanor as opposed to just a civil complaint

brought by HOA's. He commented that the map can be found online [at <https://www.houstontx.gov/planning/Off-Street-Parking-Ordinance.html>]

V. Community Leaders

- a. **Torrence Atkinson, Office of Councilwoman Tiffany Thomas - City of Houston, District F** – opened with a discussion of the Westpark Dr. lane closures. He is working with other departments to have more active monitoring of traffic, with added cameras and added signage to suggest an alternate route. He then announced a community meeting to be hosted by Councilwoman Tiffany Thomas at Budewig Intermediate School, March 12, at 6:30pm to discuss CIPs in the area. He also announced a Census town hall to be hosted Feb 20, at 6pm, at First Methodist Houston. While he is getting a new business card, his old contact information is still valid. He invited people to send him an email to be added to Councilwoman Thomas's e-newsletter list.
- b. **James Rains, Office Councilman Greg Travis - City of Houston, District G** – introduced himself as a new member of Councilman Travis's staff James.Rains@houstontx.gov. While he did not have any prepared remarks, he did take questions. He was asked to look into complaints in the human signal timing at Eldridge and Memorial. He was also asked about the monument sign at Eldridge and Enclave. Rene Ruiz commented that it was on the schedule to be fixed. When asked about Kendall Library it will be at least late 2021 before they start, so it is still a ways away.
- c. **Rene Ruiz - Department of Neighborhoods, City of Houston** – noted the upcoming District G CIP meeting Mar 12 at St Martins Episcopal Church (near Woodway and Sage).
- d. **Margaret Dunlap - METRO** – noted that MetroNext is beginning to reach out to community businesses, and would be hosting an interest meeting Feb 20 downtown. She also reminded everyone that Metro will be operating Park & Ride service for the Houston Rodeo.
- e. **Juan Sorto – Chair, Super Neighborhood Alliance** – introduced himself and his background. He discussed his plan to increase public accessibility to the SNA meetings through public access television
- f. **Michael Huffmeister – former chair SNA and SN18** – Spoke on the Trash Bash and is seeking volunteers to help organize food, materials, and registrations.
<https://www.facebook.com/TrashBash>

VI. **Nathan Beedle – Harris County Assistant District Attorney, Chief of Misdemeanor Division**

Addressed SN17's comments on bail noting that was due in large part to the elected judges. He discussed how the county processes 60000 charges a year and that Harris County is the third most populous county, first being L.A., then Cook – Chicago, and in forth Maricopa – Phoenix. With 48 people working 30000 cases a year. Where Cook County has 700 prosecutors, Harris County has only 330 and that manpower is at the discretion of the commissioner's court.

He then spoke on the strategy of his part of DA's office, that being misdemeanors, crimes punishable to a maximum of 1-year confinement. His objective is not a conviction. It is rather (1) to hold individuals responsible, (2) place them in a program to learn, and (3) never see them again. As part of that, his objective is to try and prevent a permanent criminal

record. If they can show a convicted felon is no longer a danger, having that person remain employable prevents recidivism.

He then discussed several programs as examples of how the DA's office works to those goals. As an example, he discussed the retail theft program for first time offenses over \$100. It is a 100-day cognitive reasoning course with over a 95% success rate. He also discussed veterans' services. Houston does not have a large federal presence. But with special programs for veterans, they are rehabilitated with a network of support from other veterans where their record can eventually be purged. In addition to the veteran's program are community service programs. One is a program of 6 hours of bayou work, which can be quite demanding in Houston weather. It is designed to provide value to the community and not be easy work. Some offenders in these programs wind up taking permanent employment continuing in the same line of work once out of the program.

Next he discussed the Marijuana diversion program. He explained that the county does not currently have the equipment to measure if the THC content is out of legally allowed limits. Until that is funded by either Kim Ogg or the county commissioners that diversion program, not to mention prosecutions in general for Marijuana are on hold. A concern with that at the moment is an increase in tainted product, though this does not affect synthetics such as Kush that were not impacted by new laws.

Another line of approach he mentioned was DWI prevention. Even with the advent of ride-sharing apps Harris County still has around 11000 DWIs per year. They are working to improve access to low or no cost alternatives, even light rail and busses. Many of these individuals are trying to escape their own depression. An example he offered was an individual who drank too much on the anniversary of a child's murder. Another case involved a spouse left with four kids. In many cases these are professionals, engineers, nurses and doctors. His objective is to reduce the public safety threat. If the county can divert these individuals and correct the cognitive deficit, not only is that individual still productive, but the knock-on effect of fostering children and housing inmates is reduced. Again, how do we reduce the public safety threat.

He then spoke specifically to the bail bond issue. He reminded everyone that the county courts handle misdemeanor offenses, while the district court handles felonies. He recalled how all 16 courts changed following the Nov 2018 election, and with that came a change in philosophy. One issue discussed was how with individuals who did pose a continuing public safety threat bonds were not being revoked, nor defendants properly monitored. In addition, the county has seen an increase in active cases from 17000 to 32000. But also, that highlights the need for additional qualified prosecutors.

The first question following his presentation was to the point of needing more prosecutors, and who is denying the DA's office the needed resources. He discussed the commissioner's recent increase in the public defender's budget. When asked about mental health diversion, he noted that in practice those individuals, though frequent, produce only light trouble.

They get better treatment at specialized facilities compared to housing in the jail. When asked about standards for bonds, he noted that there are not state guidelines, that bonds are at the discretion of the judge. He was then asked about local police being short officers, especially who finds offenders who miss a court date. While he did not speak to police staffing, he discussed the Gulf Coast Task Force to locate wanted individuals, prioritized by offense. He also commented that there is an increasing mistrust among jurors. While subjective, trust/mistrust has recently dropped from 70/30 to 50/50, which makes convictions harder.

When asked about bonds again, he discussed the roles. The judge sets the bond and has control during the case. The DA, the prosecutors are there to resolve the case.

VII. Committee Reports

- a. **Jeff Baker, as Chair for Communications**, discussed the website, Facebook site, and changes in how he is using the email program.
- b. **Jeff Baker, as Chair for Public Safety and Crime**, discussed the \$100k announced for extra policing and overtime with the gang unit.
- c. **Nick Kornuta, Chair for Flooding**, mentioned a flooding town hall scheduled the following week.
- d. As an additional discussion to the census, it was pointed out that the county loses thousands of dollars per resident when undercounted. It was also brought up that ICE does not get census information.

VIII. Old Business

- a. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved

IX. New Business

- a. None

X. There being no more business, the meeting adjourned.

NEXT MEETING: Mar 11, 7:00 PM, AT EAGLES TRACE