



**MAYOR'S NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY TASK FORCE
MINUTES
FEBRUARY 16, 2006**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Theresa Michaelson
Diane Marlin
Jerry Moreland
Al Johnston
Barry Weiner
Mike Bily
Esther Patt
Betsy Cronan
Sam Johnson
John Ruska
Dave Barr
Laurel Prussing, Mayor

STAFF PRESENT: Libby Tyler

Call to Order

Mayor Prussing called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Discussion: Problems and Possible Solutions from Each Task Force Member

Theresa Michaelson indicated that there are issues with neighborhood safety in southeast Urbana. Many problems are concentrated in apartment buildings and most seem to be landlord issues. There are many apartments that are in terrible shape with junk lying all around. There are elderly residents who will no longer leave their house after dark.

Diane Marlin reported that when SUNA held a neighborhood meeting, Chief Adair was present and reported that in 2004 there were 7,614 police calls in beat 64 and over 400 of those were to Sunnycrest II Apartments. The Chief at that time had indicated that most of the calls were property crimes, vandalism, and domestic disputes.

The Mayor reported that the purpose of this task force will be to see if new ordinances need to be created or if it is simply a matter of enforcing existing ordinances. She reported that there has been some significant improvement in dealing with a business on East Washington Street by enforcing the liquor code.

Acting Chief Mike Bily reported that there will be a series of meetings with the Police Department, Home Run and neighbors as part of a stipulated agreement.

Jerry Moreland reported that in his neighborhood there is a lot of violence between King Park youth and Douglas Park youth which consists of loitering at King Park after hours. He indicated that during the school year some of the U of I parties seem to spill over into the King Park neighborhood after hours. He suggested that some solutions would be organized programs for youth, collaboration with the Park District, sufficient advertisement. He also suggested contacting other organizations such as Urban League for city wide support.

Samuel Johnson reported that he would like to get to know the landlords in his neighborhood. He believes that if the neighbors knew who the landlords were, when they see problems they could contact the landlords directly. He also reported that there are abandoned houses in his neighborhood which can cause drug and gang activity. He indicated that at 1208 Dublin trees are growing up through the house and in the summer it makes it easier to hide from the police. He reported that there are a couple of other houses on that street that are abandoned with junk lying around at 1302 and 1304 Dublin.

Libby Tyler reported that if she has an address she can look up the owner and find out what the status is, especially for vacant properties.

It was also suggested that the Supervisor of Assessment's office can give information about who the tax bill is being sent to, which is typically the owner.

John Roska indicated that he has not received many complaints about security from the tenants that he serves. He finds that the number one complaint about security and crime is the lack of adequate locks and slow response from the landlords in getting them fixed. However, he really doesn't know how many of these incidents occur in Champaign or Urbana.

Officer Johnston reported that most of the neighborhood watch groups are in zone 64, which is southeast Urbana. He indicated that there are currently approximately 15 neighborhood watches. He stated that there are some watch groups that he wasn't aware of until they started taking down the faded signs, then people were calling to say they were still active.

Mayor Prussing asked to get a list of all of the neighborhood watches. Officer Johnston indicated that he would follow up.

Barry Weiner reported that his company currently manages a number of properties in Urbana. He has expressed some concern to Libby Tyler about southeast Urbana. They had seen some situations developing that raised some concern, some of which have been addressed. Mr. Wiener stressed that it's important to understand that when talking about "landlords" that there are lots of different classifications – there are people that own their property or owner/operators, there are licensed property management companies, then there are people who are managing property for others, who are not licensed and do not know the rules and regulations.

Dave Barr indicated that his company also manages a number of properties. He stated that his company has encountered perceptions by people in the community (home owners) that people

who live in apartments are somehow second rate or in some fashion not as economically strong. The vast majority of tenants are very good people. If you look at this community the University, the hospitals, etc. attract good people. There are problems but they are not tenant specific. In his opinion a lot of the problems are social economic. Mr. Barr made reference to a law that was designed to keep landlords from supporting drug dealers in their apartments, he does not know of any landlord that would support this type of behavior. He commented that sometimes the landlord gets in a situation with their tenants, where a neighbor will call the landlord when they really should be calling the police. It gets tough when there is a problem tenant because even problem tenants have rights.

Mr. Barr indicated that his primary reason for agreeing to sit on this task force is the registration of apartments and implementation of uniform building safety across the board. He indicated that he supports registration 100 percent and supports building safety 100 percent. As the registration process moves forward there needs to be input from the landlord side because while supporting safe housing, there are significant costs incurred. He would want to make sure that the codes would be enforced.

Esther Patt reported that she is representing the Tenant Union. She indicated that there are some landlords that may be perceived as absentee landlords. She stated that some of the rentals that run smoothly are actually owned by people from out of town and they have good local management staff. There are other places where ownership has changed several times. It is mainly about responsibility. One thing that is important to remember is that things are not going to get better by trying to have the landlord do the job of the police. If a landlord wants to evict someone and they don't have any police calls to back them up, it makes it difficult to evict. The same thing applies to tenants calling their landlord to evict someone who is a drug dealer, without the police being notified.

Ms. Patt stated that from the perspective of tenants, there are a couple of safety problems that are seen most often one problem is with broken or missing window or door locks, another is with lighting in hallways, stairwells and parking lots. It has been her experience that if a landlord does not fix these kinds of things, they generally don't fix other things. It is her understanding the Building Safety Division has changed the time period for compliance with code violations that relate to safety. She stated that if the compliance doesn't work after making the changes then there should be a system for fining. It's not that we need more laws; we need better enforcement of the current laws.

Ms. Patt stated that another issue that she runs into is "key control", most landlords do not change locks in between tenants and tenants don't like that. When a tenant is a victim of a burglary and there is no sign of forced entry, you have to wonder if it is someone who works for the landlord. What kind of control is there over keys? Year after year there are complaints about burglaries with no sign of forced entry. A lot more could be done in requiring landlords to change locks when possession turns over. Requiring access to keys to be restricted (to bonded employees) and there is the problem with landlords who just give out the keys to contractors.

Ms. Patt reported that a third issue is leaving doors of apartment units unlocked. This occurs when landlords are painting or doing other work and they leave the units unlocked. This is currently illegal.

There was a discussion about resident managers vs. non-resident managers.

There was further discussion about locks. Libby Tyler reported that when doing systematic inspections, locks are checked.

Esther Patt indicated that systematic inspections do not help the problems because they are done after something breaks. She doesn't feel there is a need for more inspectors, there should be more lawyers to prosecute the landlords that do not comply.

Dave Barr reported that he has found that the apartment market is getting more competitive. In the supply and demand of things the people that don't do a good job managing apartments are going to get hurt by the market. Things have gotten better over time because landlords are looking at what is going on in the market. If there are reasonable codes and reasonable enforcement, it will improve things.

There was a discussion that when the market gets saturated that is when the problems occur because the people who will rent from the bad landlords are the undesirable tenants.

Betsy Cronan reported that she is representing WUNA. One problem that exists in her neighborhood is single family house that have been allowed to degrade, which changes the attractiveness of the neighborhood to responsible renters. Another problem is with party houses. This does not refer to an owner or tenant having their friends over, this would be large after hours parties often times parties that have potty houses, fences around the yard and cars parked on the lawns.

Acting Chief Mike Bily stated that he finds that parking enforcement has been issuing tickets for parking on lawns and can tell that they are enforcing due to the large number of calls he gets from angry citizens who have received tickets. The city's parking enforcement department consists of two full-time people and two part-time. Chief Bily indicated that if people find cars parked in yards or have been parked on the street for more than 72 hours, they should contact the police department.

There was a discussion that the zoning ordinance would apply from the sidewalk to the house and parking enforcement would apply from the sidewalk to the curb.

Esther Patt suggested that there be a neighborhood watch at Sunnycrest II if anything is to be done. She stated that most people's biggest concern with notifying the police department about drug activity is that the drug dealers are listening on scanners and will know who called the police.

Acting Chief Bily reported that he has collected a list of ordinances from the police department that his department feels should be modified to be more helpful.

He reported that landlords can be extremely helpful in drug dealing houses, party houses. He stated that the landlord can sometimes act like a parent to solve the problem rather quickly. Some land accountability is extremely helpful to the police. He commented that landlords should not be dealing with drug dealers. He indicated that there is perception that the police

don't do anything about drug dealers, which comes from the fact that the police can not just arrest someone that they think is a drug dealers; they have to put a case together, which takes time.

Acting Chief Bily stated that it is not uncommon to have 4, 5 or 6 police officers covering the entire city at night. He reported that this is getting better because the council has increased the number of police officers. However, there is a lag time of about 8 months to get a new officer on the street. He reported that last spring, summer and fall the department had officers deployed to Iraq, injuries, officers resigning and discipline problems, which takes officers off of the streets. He stated that beginning this spring and summer there will be the highest police officer count that they have ever had. He commented that this will allow for the Street Crimes Unit to be reactivated.

Acting Chief Bily reported that some of the ordinances that they are looking at changing are with animal control, there have been a lot of dog issues on the north side of town. He also noted that false alarms require a lot of police time in both the business and residential areas.

Acting Chief Bily reported that he has learned that the University of Illinois Police are able to enforce Champaign City Ordinance however, are not able to enforce Urbana City Ordinance. He did indicate that U of I officers often assist Urbana officers. Mayor Prussing indicated that the Legal Department could review this.

Research Needed

Mayor Prussing reported that Acting Chief Bily will be pulling together some ordinances for review. She also indicated that Libby Tyler has pulled together some ordinances from other college towns on rental registration. The Mayor suggested doing some education for landlords and tenants.

Dave Barr suggested setting some subcommittees and he volunteered to work with implementation of codes.

Theresa Michaelson indicated that she would like to see Nuisance Abatement Ordinance looked at. She has some information about what Champaign is looking into, as well as other cities.

Diane Marlin reported that SUNA held two meetings last fall at Yankee Ridge School, the first one was attended by 145 people and second by 90 or so. Most people there were well over the age of 50, much of the discussion is focused on younger tenants and occupants but we need to remember that there are a number of homeowner's who are over the age of 50 and most do not have internet access, they depend on phone, newspaper and mail. There is some basic civic education that needs to be done and to start would be to tell people how to contact their city council representative.

Libby Tyler reported that there are some brochures that city has done with city contact information.

Assignments for Next Meeting

Several people have already volunteered to do some research before the next meeting.

Next Meeting Date

It was agreed that the next meeting will be held on Thursday, March 30 at 5:30 p.m.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jolinda Ross
Recording Secretary