

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JUNE 7, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Michelle Lyons, Co-Chair; Kathryn Bukovsky, Richard Salter, AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia, Council President Thomas McCarthy; Jeanette Herron (6:28 p.m.)

OTHERS: Police Chief A. J. Perez; Officer Straubel, Officer Ortiz

CALL TO ORDER

Council Member Lyons called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m. A quorum was present. She introduced the Committee Members and Chief Perez, along with several Police Officers present.

Chief Perez came forward to speak to those present. He said the Police Department had routed out a number of drug dealers and seized their property. Last June, there were 39 shooting victims. The FBI, AFT, and the DEA all have been working together to share information and eliminate the sources of the drugs.

Chief Perez said that he was aware of the problem on Thorne Street, but cautioned everyone that investigations take a little time. Trumbull Gardens is doing better. He said that there is no way to put a price on someone's life. Once a bullet is fired, it cannot be called back. Chief Perez then spoke about the young man who was killed on December 24th.

Chief Perez said he was aware of the issues regarding Sacred Heart and acknowledged that there was a problem. The Police Department is working with the University. He said that he had 325 police officers, which is well below the 400+ officers he needs. However, there are candidates in training at the Academy and two more potential classes coming in the near future.

*Council Member Jeanette Herron joined the meeting at 6:28 p.m.
Council President McCarthy left the meeting at 6:28 p.m.*

One of the members of the public asked when the force would be up to full strength. Chief Perez said that he did not know.

Another member of the public asked why the police were no longer using the firing range. Chief Perez said that the range was contaminated with lead and that the City had recently identified a new location.

Another resident asked why the police did not put some sub stations in empty storefronts. Chief Perez said he liked the idea.

A Bretton Street resident said he had been hit by paint balls fired from a passing car about four months ago. He went on to describe the number of young adults who hang out in cars and smoking marijuana.

A resident of Keeler Avenue came forward and said that her sister's house was hit by a car because there was no stop sign at Wayne Street and Birmingham. Cars speed on Keeler Avenue and it is dangerous for everyone.

Ms. Evelyn Cousins of Savoy Street said that she has watched her neighborhood go down hill during the last three years. She said she respects the police but there was a murder by the baseball diamond. She said that she hasn't seen police officers in the area. All the time, there are people in the field selling drugs. The basketball court is attracting bullies to the neighborhood.

Ms. Michelle Serrano of Bretton Street came forward to speak. She said that the basketball courts are out of control because people are shooting paint ball guns at people. She said that her husband makes a phone call once a day about these issues. Recently, there was a girl pulled onto the field and almost stabbed. When they call the police, the school police arrive. They need more officers to patrol the area.

Another gentleman came forward to speak about someone who had been killed on Wayne Street because drivers are not stopping at stop signs. If there was a police presence, maybe they would stop or slow down. People are coming down on a dead end street and then after they park, they make drug deals. When the police come, the dealers take off. He said that he lived in Bridgeport for 45 years and his neighborhood now is losing ground. Chief Perez said that he would put a speed trap in that will help.

A resident who said his name was Mr. Ford came forward and said that he would like to lead a round of applaud for Chief Perez. Mr. Ford said that he was a taxpayer and a licensed drug counselor that previously worked for the Bridgeport School District. He said that after he was laid off in 2011 there were no drug counselors in the District. He then asked if people had watched National Geographic about the Mexican border. He said that drugs are flowing north freely and it is a multi-billion dollar industry. There are people who are encouraging kids to join gangs because it is lucrative. He then spoke about solutions such as programs and support. There are no programs or services in the District schools and the parents need to speak to the Board members about this. Kids are being bullied and are afraid to come to school. He said that Superintendent Rabinowitz is responsible for this.

Mr. Craig Gordon came forward and said that one of the reasons that there are drug addictions is due to poor nutrition. The kids make a short hop from junk food to beer and cigarette. He said that the criminals are often malnourished and need good food. Junk food is cheap, easy and tasty, which then ends up with hypoglycemia. He said that this was ending up with everyone and every day.

Mr. Gotell McLeion came forward and said that he was concerned about the speeding cars going up and down Savoy Street. They have five children and are afraid for them.

Mrs. Stacey McLeion came forward and said that her car had been ransacked recently. Now she lives in fear because her drive way is long and they might come into their houses. Recently she found a shoe in her backyard. Her deepest fear is that her kids will be in harms way. Something has to be done. She said that she will often yell at them, but the vehicles don't slow down.

Ms. Debbie Khawatmi of Amsterdam Avenue came forward and thanked the police for risking their lives to protect Bridgeport residents. She said that sometimes people need a way to anonymously notify the police. She pointed out that everyone needed to work together and know each other. People think non-residents can come to Bridgeport and pollute the City. Non residents need to pay higher penalties for destroying Bridgeport.

Mr. Mark Ferguson came forward and said that his nephews can't walk two blocks to his house because they are afraid of the people who are on the basketball court. In the last eight years, there have been a murder and a robbery. He said that there was drug activity in front of his house. He chased two people away from the front of his house in April. There is constantly trash in front of his house. While it nice that they redid the basketball court, it had just brought more people into the neighborhood that have caused problems.

Council Member Bukovsky left the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Another resident came forward and said that the one thing that he was hearing over and over again was that the police were not showing up. He said that they pay a lot of taxes and that something needs to be done about the various issues, like speeding. With the issues like drugs, the officers want their names, but people are reluctant to give their names.

Officer Straubel said that the department would be rolling out an anonymous tip line. The chronic problems should be handled through that rather than 9-1-1. He said that there were limited resources and the department was doing the best it could.

Mr. Ron Ravit came forward and said that he could not park his car on the street because of the speeding cars. He said that this was deplorable and he had kids on his street after 11 p.m. He thanked the Chief for listening.

A resident of the 131st District came forward and said that he would like to be involved. He spoke about the shooting at Trumbull Gardens and said that he wished his City Council Member were present. Council Member Lyons said that this was a Public Safety Committee meeting and his council representatives were not on this committee. He then asked Council Member Lyons to continue these meetings.

Another resident came forward and said that one of the officers had blocked off a street where the parents were discharging children in the middle of street. It worked out well. With cars parked on both sides, many parents simply stop their cars in the middle of the street and the children get out on the street side of the vehicle. Other people are blocking the driveways. This is about the children's safety. She said that making the street a temporary one way street slowed people down.

Mr. Rod Harrison pointed out that there were a number of unregistered motorcycles.

One of the officers came forward to speak about unregistered motorcycles. He said that there was now an ordinance that does not allow people to drive on the sidewalks. He explained that the officers do not chase motorcycles because they don't want them to be hurt. He added that when there are cameras around, the criminals leave because they don't want to be recorded. If the residents see kids getting on dirt bikes, call the police. The police will cease the bikes.

One resident spoke about out of state vehicles that were parking on his street and some suspicious activity that was taking place there.

Mr. Wayne came forward and suggested that the neighbors tell the local store owners that they don't like it when they have merchandise available that can be used as drug paraphernalia. He had told one store owner this and the owner no longer offers the item.

One neighbor came forward and said that someone had been walking down her street and took photos of the security camera on her house and then took a photo when her dog barked at him.

Another resident came forward and said there was a lack of will on the part of politicians and that everyone needs to raise their kids to become leaders.

Council Member Lyons said that Officer Ortiz would be speaking next. She said that the basketball courts and they should be there for the pleasure of the residents. There is an organization called "Save Our Youth" and that if this was not an effective program, the people may have to shut down the basketball courts. She said that she had spoken to Mayor Ganim about this and that there would be future meetings about this.

One member of Street Save Bridgeport came forward and said that his group was present as a resource. He said that his group goes into the nooks and crannies where the drugs and problems are. Much of this revolves around trust. There is strength in numbers. Kids need to learn about conflict resolution and how to deal with various issues.

Officer Ortiz came forward came forward to share a few points. He said the office has been working in the area for a while. Signs will be installed that forbid playing after dusk soon. There have been training events on Bretton Street with the new recruits. New cameras have been installed at Blackham School. He encouraged people to become involved in the neighborhood Watch program.

Council Member Herron came forward to speak about the concerns. She said that she and her family were victims of a home invasion and while the police did what they could, the prosecutors made a plea deal for five months for the perpetrator. She encouraged everyone to go to their legislators. Council Member Herron said that she would be in Hartford soon, talking to her State Representatives about this. Her home had cameras and recorded the whole thing. Cameras are great, but if the prosecutor does not do their job, it doesn't help.

Mr. Clifford Becker came forward to ask if there was a system to notify the residents when a crime had taken place in the area. He mentioned an incident where a woman had been sexually assaulted and once they heard about it in the paper, that was it.

ADJOURNMENT

Council Member Lyons adjourned the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services