



MPSN Safety and Security Focus Meeting Minutes, Wednesday July 13, 2016

MPSN Council Members: Kathleen O'Reilly, Sandy Stevens, Greg Quintero, Paul Wilson, Cissy Segall Davis, Susan Young, Julie Farr.

Officials: Eva Thibaudeau, Coalition for the Homeless; Patrick Key, Houston Health Department; Andrew Perez, MFAH; Felix Vara, METRO Transit Police; Antoine Bryant, METRO; Bill Pugh & Brad Jernberg, South Main Baptist Church; Rubi Longoria, Houston Parks Department; Hina Musa, Houston, Southeast; Dwight Boykins, Houston City Council Member, Shavonda Johnson, CM Boykin's office; Jose L. Torres, Houston Parks & Rec Park Ranger; Tim Cantwell & Ralph Cooper, Cloudbreak Houston Vet Campus; JD Walther, Emergency Aid Coalition; Sgt. Shannon Farquhar, Emilio Reyes and Ramon Sambrano, HPD, South Central; Sgt. Odell Haynes of Harris County Precinct 7 Constables; Cynthia Alvarado, Midtown Management District; Cindy Jackson, Midtown; Marc Eichenbaum, Deputy Assistant to the Mayor for Homeless Initiatives.

Guests: Wayne Patin, Thomas Wang, Barbara Key, Marilyn Lewis, Charles Wade, Barbara McGuffey, Cindy Woods, Troy Julian, Michael Lewis, Dan Hasell, Randy Twaddle, Lesley Walker, Barbara Jackson, Abel Gutierrez, Vicki T., Rand Turner, Lula Azorey, Jose Ferrero, Lauren Brownfield, Tania Botello, Naveed Ahmed, Ali Badruddin, Rudolph Colby, Jim Honey, Cynthia Aceves-Lewis.

Meeting called to order: 5:35 p.m.

President Kathleen O'Reilly welcomed everyone and asked for introductions around the table.

Discussion followed:

Cynthia Alvarado: Midtown has been working to mitigate concerns at Peggy Point Park.

- Mayor recently announced 'No charitable permanent feeding' at Peggy's Point Park as well as at other city parks.
- Please report issues around Peggy's Point Park to HPD's non-emergency number, 713-884-3131 or the District 7 Constables Office, 713-643-6602. Constables have added additional patrols to the area. HPD has also been requested to increase patrols.
- Private property owners need to insure that their Trespass Affidavit is up-to-date.

South Main Baptist Church: Each morning, 25-30 people are gathered around the perimeter of the church. Church employees must pick up trash they leave on the church property, daily.

Patrick Key, Heath Department: City has stopped permitted charitable feeding at the parks. All organizations have discontinued, except for one organization that desires to continue feeding at the Main Library. It's challenging to control illegal food distribution by individuals who take it upon themselves to buy food, stop at the parks and hand it out to those who want it. If citizens see illegal food distribution, they should report through the non-emergency HPD number.

Eva Thibaudeau, Homeless Coalition: Clarified that there is a distinction between drug abuse and homelessness, separate but sometimes intermingled issues. All homeless people are not using drugs and not all drug users are homeless. When homeless find a safe place (in the park for example), then the sellers come. When we talk to homeless, they express fear.

Julie Farr, Museum District & South Main Alliance committee: So many prongs to consider when approaching this problem. What if it became a reward system? South Main Alliance discussed the potential for using “No Kush Sold Here” type banners at a community hero at convenience stores where Kush/K2 is typically sold.

Councilmember Dwight Boykins: Kush is difficult substance to control. Those recently released from Texas Department of Corrections come to Houston by bus. They look at available social services and the climate and decide to stay. CM Boykins indicated he is sensitive to the homeless as well as to his constituents who don’t feel safe to walk in the park. Mayor Parker worked toward providing housing for the homeless. Mayor Turner has addressed the issue as well and CM Boykins will continue to focus on this issue.

Mark Eichenbaum: The Mayor’s Office for Homeless Initiative has worked to provide housing for the chronically homeless, and 2 ½ years ago achieved a major reduction in the number of chronically homeless veterans.

- Through surveys, the Mayor’s Office has determined that 70% of those accessing food/shelter do so 15 days or fewer. Chronically homeless had stopped accessing services at the Beacon, because they were afraid.
- Kush has become a national issue. State passed legislation last September outlawing three main ingredients used in Kush though there is no field test for these substances. The suspect material must be sent to a laboratory for a multi-day/week analysis so enforcement becomes problematic.
- City passed its own Kush ordinance. Also instituted a smoking ban in parks.
- Mayor’s Initiative on the homeless has brought together a number of agencies to try to figure out solutions. We have no solutions.
- Two recent strategies include:
 - Public intoxication transport team (PIT). Drive around to find intoxicated to take them to a sobering center. PIT is a two-person team; they transported 10 people to sobering center yesterday. Data shows that a very small percentage access treatment as a result of going to the sobering center.
 - Additional park rangers. Currently only 4 park rangers for the city of Houston. Recently approved to have radios to communicate directly with HPD. Long-term goal is to have Park Rangers 24-7. Currently reviewing 15 applicants for additional rangers to be added to the park. It will take 60-90 days to see more rangers.

Ralph Cooper: Veterans Service Director of Cloud Break. Five hundred previously homeless veterans are off the streets of Houston. Sgt. Farquahr and his officers are making a difference. Kush is an epidemic. No quick fix, but this program is working.

Shannon Farquahar, HPD: working with the owners of 4510 and 4422 Main. He is pressuring Ms. Adelman, Santa Monica, CA and David Greenburg to fence the properties. Fencing is very effective.

Marc Eichenbaum:

- One hundred twenty five additional police are now on the streets across the city with concentration in the hot spots, 50 of those in downtown area.

- One hundred fifty or fewer regular Kush users are concentrated in highly visible places.
- Zero inpatient treatment facilities in Houston for the indigent and few mental health dollars are available to them. We are looking to develop a program, because currently no system, no services exist for these individuals. Only option available is sobering center for 4 hours.
- Unpermitted feeding. When I go to Hermann Park to talk to the homeless and I ask why this corner? Where do you eat lunch? Their reply is that people stop and bring us food.
- Mayor plans to speak to all the organizations that feed the homeless. If a person gets their needs met outside, they will not take advantage of homeless services.
- Who is manufacturing Kush? Manufactured in China

Felix Vara, Metro Police: Augmented presence of Metro officers in the area.

- More staff riding the line with radios going directly to METRO dispatch.
- If you wish to report a concern, call 713-221-COPS. If it's an emergency, call 911.

Marc Eichenbaum:

- *Can individuals sleep on the streets?* Cannot block ingress/egress to buildings. (In Midtown, cannot sleep on the streets between 7 am-11 p.m., but difficult to police). We need to focus on illegal behavior. Trash and sleeping are less impactful.
- We've done more in the last 4 years than the last 50 years to address homelessness. But these are long-term problems.
- If you call, you give police opportunity to address a current situation.

Private Citizen: *TXDoT property under 59 needs to be cleaned.*

Cindy Jackson:

- Contact information for TXDoT on the TXDoT website: 800-558-9368 (*secretary's note*).
- Around the Wheeler Station or on any METRO facility, call METRO, 713-221-COPS. Or call 911, if it is an emergency situation. Around Sears, call HPD.
- The more the public pressure, the more likely the response.

Private Citizen: *Is there anything Sears can do to help?*

Cynthia Alvarado: Recently asked Sears and surrounding neighbors to make sure trespass affidavits up to date.

- Midtown continues to issue patrol alerts, near the rail and bus stop and has requested that all Midtown area businesses impacted also file Patrol Alerts with Precinct 7.
- This is a community wide effort. Midtown continues to send their Field Services Team with law enforcement protection to clean the area.

Private Citizen: *Why dramatic increase in number of homeless in Wheeler area?*

Eva Thibaudeau: Labor agency has recently opened at San Jacinto/Wheeler.

Private Citizen: Concerns regarding the safety of children. Threatening to children in Hermann Park. Playground is for children and we must find a way to keep it safe.

Private Citizen: *What can city do when private property owners do not maintain their properties?*

Possible Strategies:

- Plant roses and landscape at Richmond/US59 esplanade.
- Raise illumination on at Wheeler.
- Work with Councilmember's office.

MPSN President Kathleen O'Reilly thanked everyone for their input at the meeting and the work they are doing to address safety and security of the neighborhoods.

Meeting Adjourned: 7:06 p.m.

Sandra Stevens, Secretary
Museum Park Super Neighborhood