

## **Oakwatch: The Oakland Code Enforcement Project**

### **Minutes**

**November 16, 2017**

#### **PRESENT**

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Hannah Green, Lizabeth Gray, Elena Zaitsoff, Matthew Mays, Jamie Ducar, Joseph John, John Kelly, Sid Lingala, David Manthei, Joan Dickerson, Robert Harper, Sophia Koss, Evelyn Stafford, Millie Sass, John Wilds, Steve Cetra, Kenneth Eckenrode, Marjory Lake, Michael Medwed, Blithe Runsford, Erika Strassburger, Maura Kennedy, John Tokarski

#### **INTRODUCTIONS**

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EZaitsoff read the mission statement and reviewed the ground rules for the meeting. She asked to continue the introductions around the room.

#### **COMMANDER HERMANN AND OFFICER DAVID SHIFREN, PITTSBURGH POLICE ZONE 4**

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Police force prepares Thanksgiving dinners for in-need individuals. Donations (monetary and food items) were requested to support their efforts.

DShifren gave crime report:

17 non-traffic citations: 9 disorderly conduct/unreasonable noise, 4 carry of false ID, 1 open container, 1 public drunkenness, 1 public urination, 1 underage purchase/consumption

Weekly snapshot: thefts of delivered packages reported (six total thefts on November 5; five took place in Oakland). Take one of three precautions: sign for your package, ask a neighbor to sign for your package, or pick up the package yourself. Police made an arrest on November 4 thanks to a video camera in someone's front foyer that captured footage of the individual.

There have been a number of bike thefts in Shadyside, Point Breeze, and Oakland. Make sure you lock your bikes, especially if you leave them on your porch.

Elderly woman knocked down, purse stolen, at Beeler and Forbes, in mid-afternoon. Important to be aware of your surroundings at all times.

#### **JOHN TOKARSKI, OUTREACH AND EDUCATION**

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The citywide public safety meeting on October 18 was successful and had a large turnout. Next citywide meeting is in April (date TBD).

The fall semesters of the citizens and students police academy is ending. The spring semester sessions will take place at the Jewish Community Center and the Community Day School, respectively.

Specialized training is available to groups that are interested.

**Q: Will you be fined if your house numbers are not visible?**

A: LGray & JTokarski – yes.

**STEVE CETRA, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH POLICE**

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3 aggravated assault, 5 criminal mischief, 3 defiant trespass - 9 citations issued, (8 affiliated, 7 on campus, 4 off-campus)  
4 DUI (non-affiliated)  
1 open container (non-affiliated)  
4 panhandling (warnings)  
3 public drunkenness (non-affiliated, 2 on-campus, 1 off-campus)  
1 stolen property (off-campus, non-affiliated)  
1 resisting arrest (off-campus, non-affiliated)  
1 robbery (off-campus, non-affiliated)  
1 simple assault (off-campus, non-affiliated)  
23 underage citations (20 non-affiliated)  
3 warrant arrest (all non-affiliated)  
49 conduct referrals (37 affiliated, 12 non-affiliated)  
6 party shut downs, 1 arrest, 12 citations, 5 knock and talks, 29 party warnings.

**Q: Where do parties take place?**

A: There is no designated location – all over Oakland.

**SERGEANT MATTHEW MAYS, POINT PARK UNIVERSITY POLICE**

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Halloween weekend went smoothly. Point Park police prepared by sending out emails to students reminding them to respect their neighbors and leaving door hangers on properties occupied by students. Keith Paylo, Vice President of Student Affairs, participated in a walkthrough in Oakcliffe near Playhouse (many Point Park students occupy that area).

The Playhouse recently hosted a politically conservative speaker. Protests rumored to occur, but the event went off without any problems.

Comments:

LGray – We are beginning to take a more proactive approach to trash. We will leave Oakwatch door hangers at properties in violation of building codes. The door hanger will communicate which code is in violation. The residents/property owner should correct the violation or 311 will be called. We will also door-knock in student heavy areas to talk with them about trash expectations/laws.

**MAURA KENNEDY, DIRECTOR OF DEPARTMENT OF PERMITS, LICENSES, & INSPECTIONS**

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MKennedy provided a summary of PLI updates:

New website. You can edit the settings to customize the notifications that you receive, such as any time a code violation citation is issued. PLI wants to be proactive about communicating with those that care about their neighborhood. Note: website now lists permit review times.

Sign up for the PLI newsletter to stay updated on any improvements, policy changes, and inspector ward assignments.

PLI hosts monthly community forums to discuss various topics based on community interest. Friday, November 17<sup>th</sup> focused on navigating the new website. Meetings are the second Friday of each month.

Staffing numbers update: 16 code enforcement inspectors dedicated to quality of life issues, 3 inspectors dedicated to addressing vacant properties, and 3 proactive fire safety inspectors.

Over the last 12 months, PLI has conducted 31,000 code violation inspections, 5,000 fire safety inspections, and 2,000 vacant property inspections.

PLI is restarting their demolition project. They will address vacant properties that are the most dangerous in the eyes of the community first.

New PLI project launched; a single database covering DOMEY, city planning, fire department, finance department, etc.

Active litigations related to rental registration. The city passed rental registration legislation; some organizations promptly sued. MKennedy feels confident that the city will ultimately win and the legislation will be in effect soon. Rental registration is a way for apartment owners to register with the city and make it easier for the city to contact them if there is problem with the property; PLI spends a large amount of time tracking down who owns what properties. Most major cities have rental registration policies.

Upcoming 2018 budget allows PLI to add 5 new positions. The department has proposed to bring on more inspectors on the construction side and an in house attorney. The city council must approve this proposal; they vote and make a decision in December. This new position will allow PLI to have someone dedicated to issues related to permits, licenses, and inspections, rather than reaching out to someone from the city's legal department. MKennedy encourages you to tell your councilman to vote for an in house attorney.

MKennedy reminds us that other neighborhoods throughout Pittsburgh need PLI's attention and she wants to be clear about the level of service that PLI can provide to Oakland specifically. She welcomes individuals to attend PLI's monthly community forums and says they will send a representative to Oakwatch when one is available.

MKennedy denies that the permits counter counsels owners to go for "continues use as two family" when they seek an occupancy permit for two units. She explains that she is unaware of what the zoning counter says and recommends that someone from zoning attend a meeting in the near future to help clarify this.

**Q: What is the process for vacant properties?**

A: First, PLI asks the owner to take the necessary measures to care for their property. If they do not, the city takes action and clears weeds etc. and, in extreme cases, demolishes the property. Demolishing a property is the last resort.

**Q: The increasing amount of development in Oakland seems like an opportunity to turn many properties in Oakland back into single-family homes.**

A: There is no way to prohibited people from renting out single-family homes. Encouraging homeownership in Oakland is beyond PLI's control. The over occupancy code is clear, but it is often difficult to prove over occupancy. You need to push the law department to explore creative ways to prove over occupancy.

**Q: EZaitsoff shares community frustration over PLI's lack of action taken to cite landlords who have been publicly reported to over occupy their residences (one case in particular - a resident interviewed on the news admitted that four people were living in a 3 bedroom apartment, yet PLI said there was no case).**

A: MKennedy says she was unaware. *(EZaitsoff is planning to forward her the information)*

**Q: What can we do (as representatives of community associations) to help you do a better/more efficient job?**

A: Call the PLI office. We now keep computerized records and can see how many calls we receive on a violation. We want to prioritize our resources to address the most important things first. Our main goal of 2018 is to improve our court outcomes.

**Q: How can we require property owners to provide an address and a phone number in order to rent out their property? This might prevent irresponsible people from renting out their properties.**

A: That would require property owners to follow business license guidelines.

#### **ERIKA STRASSBURGER, OFFICE OF COUNCILMAN DAN GILMAN**

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Councilman's office is conducting research to determine a vendor to work with to collect hazardous waste (TVs, paints, etc.) throughout Oakland.

#### **JOHN WILDS, ASSISTANCE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

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Pitt's 10<sup>th</sup> annual Pitt Make a Difference Day occurred on October 20. 41,000 students participated in completing 99 service projects throughout Pittsburgh.

On November 8, two sessions on student rentals in Oakland took place. A panel of city/university officers and community members discussed being a good neighbor and issues related to leasing apartments in Oakland.

Pitt master plan is currently underway. The finalized plan will be presented in 2018; no planned improvements/developments have been decided on yet.

JWilds introduced Jamie Ducar, the new assistant director of community relations at Pitt.

#### **MEETING ADJOURNED**

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EZaitsoff announced next meeting is Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017, 12:00 p.m. at St. Regis Church, 3235 Parkview Avenue. Meeting was adjourned.