

**Public Safety Committee Meeting  
March 5, 2014**

**Committee Members**

Present:

Luis Tejada, Chair  
Dr. Michael Mowaat-Wynn, Public Representative  
Liliana Saneaux  
Dr. Chris O'Sullivan

Excused:

Dr. Pamela Palanque-North

Absent:

Rud Morales

**Public Officials:**

Deputy Inspector Pichardo, 33<sup>rd</sup> Precinct  
Officer Sharon Robinson-Hewitt, Community Affairs, 33<sup>rd</sup> Precinct  
(Absent: 34<sup>th</sup> Precinct; DA's Office representative)

**Public/Press**

Mike Feeney, *Daily News*  
Nancy Preston, Inwood Resident/Moving Forward Unidos  
Candice Delevante, Inwood resident  
Paul Kittas re: Highbridge opening

Meeting called to order 7:14 pm

Mr. Tejada, as a new chair, wants to incorporate everyone's opinion and work toward a common goal. Asks for suggestions for the agenda and ways to bring more people to the table.

- Chris suggests:
  - 1) looking at sign-in sheets and inviting members of the public who attend a meeting, especially looking back to a fall meeting that was well-attended, and sending all of them meeting announcements/agendas (credit to Mitch Glenn, Chair of Parks & Cultural Affairs, for this idea).
  - 2) putting out the full and accurate agenda to attract people interested in a particular issue, instead of just listing the precinct and DA's reports.

**Report from 33<sup>rd</sup> Precinct**

- Numbers don't tell the whole story: 5 cars stolen this year and 5 last year, but this year, in 4/5 cases the driver left keys in ignition, car running and ran into a store. Avoidable.
- With warm weather coming, there will be dirt bikes and quads (ATV's) on the streets. It is difficult and dangerous to stop them when they are out riding. Asking everyone with information on where they are stored – in basements and rear yards of residential buildings, garages – to let him know. Safer to bust them there than on the street.
  - A resident of a building gave an anonymous tip to check out the roof of a five-story building. They confiscated an unregistered dirt bike that a 16 year old had been riding on the roof.
- As it gets warmer, burglaries increase because people leave windows open when they are out, or sleeping. Decline in home burglaries attributed to Pichardo's relentless reminders.
- Luis raises issue of things left out at school and snatched. D.I. Pichardo says Operation ID, going through PTA, Principal, Ass'st. Principal and Dean, to have a "soft presence," informing kids that

“We’re registering every phone in there.” Don’t want to criminalize the kids, but thwart temptation to pick up a phone that is left out.

- Luis comments that his school was plagued with violence, theft, fights and gangs, but is now peaceful and computers are not being stolen, attributing the change to trust given and received.
- Daily News reporter asks if 33<sup>rd</sup> will crack down on double parking. Pichardo explains that the 34<sup>th</sup> was selected to participate; 33<sup>rd</sup> not part of campaign at this time.
- New scam – calls claiming to be from IRS demanding check to be sent immediately; Green dot card; pretending to be from utility company.
- 33<sup>rd</sup> now has a monthly newsletter.

Discussion of school crime:

- Accessibility of data: PD tracks school crime but one has to file a Freedom of Information (FOIL) request to get the data.
- Lack of school crime: Pichardo states that school crime has been “really non-existent” for the last 18 months. Occasionally a cell phone gets misplaced, but “schools are not a dangerous place.”
- Bullying: The PD has an anti-bullying campaign; did a presentation at school on 176<sup>th</sup> with parents and kids. Sometimes parents or kids come in but it is more teasing than an assault, affecting the kids at home and at school, so they try to bring in parents and children and mediate. Tejada says that parents believe the police can mediate and counsel kids, but that is not a police function. Mowaat-Wynn said that parents have to take responsibility; they sometimes egg on their children in rejecting other children who are different. Comments on Latin culture accepting a girl or women having masculine traits but not men or boys who show feminine traits and common use of the N word, which has a different connotation when used between African Americans from when it is used by a white person. Saneaux states that her 3 year old relative brought up bullying with her 3 year old sister. Luis says that his school is emphasizing positive relationships.

## **New Business**

Transfer of responsibility for investigating animal cruelty from ASPCA to NYPD/Poisoning of cats in 33<sup>rd</sup> (Sheila Massey)

- NYPD took over investigation of crimes against animals from ASPCA Humane Law Enforcement. Slow start, police had no training on what constitutes abuse and neglect; most of it happens inside, out of sight. Now there is a procedure in the 33<sup>rd</sup>.
- There were two incidents of a large number of cats in managed feral colonies found dead. Ms. Massey explains why one can conclude that these mass deaths were human killings, not natural.
- She stated that ASPCA gave erroneous guidance to police, but the 33<sup>rd</sup> really stepped up; took a complaint, conducted an investigation – sent two officers to the crime scene and learned about feral cat colonies under the Mayor’s initiative: cats in a colony are spayed/neutered, fed and cared for, and have shelters; they keep down vermin and do not proliferate the way strays and ferals that are not cared for do. The way the cat poisonings was approached is a model of cooperation: Sheila put out flyers, the police logged a report and opened a case, assigned a detective, in contact with ASPCA.
- Dr. Mowaat-Wynn reports that the transfer of animal cruelty investigations to NYPD on Jan. 1 was addressed at a meeting of all the precincts. It is a hot potato to the police; no guidelines; Pichardo was proactive.

- There are now NYPD policies and procedures for animal cruelty but Pichardo cannot share them. A FOIA request might work.
- 34<sup>th</sup> Precinct not present. Issue in 34<sup>th</sup> may be fighting of pit bulls. Decision to ask 34<sup>th</sup> about issues in Inwood and their approach.
- Discussion of how the 33<sup>rd</sup> Precinct's learning curve and response can be shared to help other precincts, "This is how we did it," and "Don't trivialize animal abuse: it's a felony." Chris suggests a resolution that describes the transition from the ASPCA to NYPD, commends the 33<sup>rd</sup>, and specifies their approach, in order to raise awareness of the new procedure among the board and community members.
- There is or will be an Animal Abuse Liaison in each borough or district, and there may a specialist in each precinct.

#### **Attendance of DA's Representative at PSC**

- Lack of attendance of representative of DA's Office for many meetings, also absent from 33<sup>rd</sup> Precinct Council meetings (someone attended the 34<sup>th</sup> Precinct Council meeting), and from CB12 general meetings. Being addressed by the CB12 Chair.
- Vance is opening an office in Washington Heights, in the same building as CB 12.

#### **34<sup>th</sup> Precinct Council**

34<sup>th</sup> Precinct Council has a new president, Steve Feldheim. Other members of the executive board were dismissed; no other volunteers found willing to serve on executive board. Elections in June.

#### **La Marina**

Nancy Preston of Moving Forward Unidos lives near La Marina and asks what can be done. She doesn't want La Marina to close but wants them to be a good neighbor. She doubts that no laws are being broken since there is valet parking on public streets. This is not legal unless there is an agreement with DOT but there is no record of such an agreement.

The issues are traffic and noise, and sheer numbers. There are sometimes 3,000 people at La Marina, many coming by car. Residents cannot get out or get back home. Could take an hour just to get from Broadway. The DOT changed the pattern of lights to speed traffic, but La Marina is in a unique physical situation of a bottleneck. Police cordoned off streets. Resentment among residents that public resources are going to help a business that is making them miserable. The contract with Parks limits seating to 500, but the FDNY registration allows occupancy by 2,094. The head of security at La Marina spoke at the 34<sup>th</sup> Precinct Council meeting and said there had been 100,000 people through the doors in one week-end without a single crime being committed.

Sunday is the big night. It makes it difficult for neighbors to get to work and school. Mom and pop businesses are failing. All the new businesses in the neighborhood are bars. Some bars advertise as being the place to go after La Marina closes; these bars close at 4 am, then people are on the streets.

How can this work so that La Marina makes a profit but it is still working for local businesses and the community?

Inspector Buzzetti of the 34<sup>th</sup> organized a meeting about Mama Juana, where Tuesday is the big night. Mama Juana said they were renovating, sound proofing, getting rid of old speakers and installing surround sound, and would call the neighbor most affected to test whether the sound was still a problem in her apartment. They held an event with loud music until 4 am. They said they weren't fully re-opened, just a special event, so didn't run the test with the neighbor. Buzzetti is holding monthly

meeting with business owners. Ydani Rodriguez cancelled meeting with residents and bar owners. Mowat-Wynn concludes the problem is compliance. Nancy suggests a DUI checkpoint.

Noise issues can be taken to the DEP, but regular decibel meters don't register the bass, which requires a special decibel reader. DEP doesn't take complaints after 2 am.

### **Discussion of Public Forum/Role of Public Safety Committee**

#### Debate about Focus and Process

Luis refers to a conversation before the meeting was called to order about scheduling additional meetings "because of the project we want to do about school violence": We need to bring in experts, go beyond this table, and our time is limited. Chris objects that the committee has been talking about a public forum for a couple of years, and that we just heard from Deputy Inspector Pichardo that school violence is not the problem. We need to look at the data and focus on what is the real problem. Luis responds that it is our job, regardless of what you think, to cooperate with the chair. One of the problems George would like to take on is a forum around violence in the schools. As the chair of this committee, Luis is going to try to work with the committee to do this well; we need to have a united front as a family.

Sheila inquires whether there is a subcommittee working on this, asks where this was discussed. Chris interjects that it wasn't discussed here. Luis explains to Chris that, as committee chair, he is privy to information that you don't have. Chris states that there is much prior discussion and development of ideas that is being ignored. Luis replies that the forum on violence in the schools has been introduced at the three previous meetings that he attended, and that, as assistant principal, he was taught to respect the chair.

In regard to bringing in outside expertise, Luis has already spoken to RAPP, an agency that works on dating violence. Chris objects that this is her field, there is a lot of expertise on the committee that should be utilized, and we should go with evidence-based programs. Luis states that he doesn't know how to play this political game, he is a straight shooter, says what he has to say and whoever gets hurt, gets hurt.

#### Agreement about need for forum and latitude in topics addressed

Working in the school, Luis sees that there is a need to inform parents. Parents don't know how to navigate the system, where to get help, the resources available that can help with healthy relationships. He agrees that violence in the schools is not such a big issue, so we are on the same page (although he recently had to suspend 8 kids, something he hasn't had to do in two years). We can bring in our issues under this forum. Nancy Preston suggests the NYC Task Force Against Sexual Assault, which does presentations and training

#### Problem of sufficient time and people to organize a successful event

Luis says that, in the school system, you have a committee that comes up with an idea. We don't have that time because our meetings are limited and open meeting laws prohibit discussing by email. He will see if we can get around that by printing the emails in the minutes. We meet for three hours and nothing is done. Chris suggests that Fe and other committees invite people to their meetings. Luis states that we need to go beyond talk. We need action. We are going to have the forum before school gets out in June.

Liliana attended the Y & E forum on youth and mental health with five experts; perhaps we could have two of them. The forum was impressive. Objecting that Luis and Chris have dominated the discussion, she explains that she is an experienced event organizer. The problem is that an event like this takes time and "manpower": we cannot pull this off with just 3 committee members participating, no matter how

often we meet. We need a large auditorium; we need to reach teachers, parents and students. We can't do it successfully in a few months. Luis and other members agree. Luis will speak to George.

### **Opening of Highbridge**

Paul Kittas: Concern that opening of Highbridge event and subsequent use of Highbridge will create safety issues because far more people will come than the antiquated access points and walkways can accommodate; the stairs down can be difficult. The Highbridge was not designed as a tourist attraction; this was a renovation, not new construction, so there was less planning. We need two numbers: how many people they expect for the event, and the holding capacity. Kittas suggests that police, and perhaps Homeland Security or the National Park Service, are needed for crowd control. Luis will speak to Mitch at the executive committee meeting and get planning going.

### **Criminalizing school disciplinary problems and youth infractions**

Discussion of how a child's life can be derailed by misbehavior if it is treated as a criminal act (e.g., makes a mark, it is called graffiti, and kid ends up with a criminal record, can't get a scholarship). Chris hands out a NY Times op ed about criminalizing disciplinary infractions at school, which provides data on the lifelong impact of suspensions, with many kids never going back to school. She refers to Pamela Palanque-North's repeated suggestion for an event to educate parents about the dire effects of the law on gang-related activity. Suggestion that part of the forum educating teachers, parents, and students on school violence provide information about keeping kids out of the criminal justice system.

**Adjourned 9:25**