

Takoma Park Public Safety Citizens Advisory Committee annual report 2009

submitted September 28, 2009

The past year has been a challenging transition time for the PSCAC. The abrupt, unexpected departure of more than half of the committee members last fall left the PSCAC with just four voting members (out of 12 potential seats) throughout 2009. Additionally, the resigning members included the officers, leaving three of the remaining committee members no choice but to fill these essential positions or else the committee would have perished.

Responding to the vacant position of committee chair, recently held by Andy Kelemen for several years, Chuck Thomas agreed to serve as interim chair until the committee had a critical mass of members to participate in choosing the chair. The remaining three voting members concurred: Fred Schultz (vice-chair), Dave Borden (secretary), and Aaron Houston.

The PSCAC has begun tasks toward filling the vacant seats and making the committee useful to the city council. The voting members of the PSCAC respectfully submit this report.

I. Infrastructure

a. Filling the committee seats with qualified members:

In the spring, three Takoma Park residents applied to serve. If approved, the number of PSCAC members would have been just two members short of the number of PSCAC members in recent years, with at least five of the city's six wards represented.

One applicant, Terrill North, who regularly attended our meetings, was invited by the chair to serve as a "de facto" member (with no vote, but participating in our meeting discussions and volunteering substantial time on various tasks). He not only did so, but also took the initiative on spearheading one of PSCAC's newest initiatives this year (gang prevention and mediation, as detailed later in this report).

The current members of PSCAC have been eagerly awaiting the city council's decision regarding the three pending applicants, after which we have intended to embark upon an ambitious search for a diverse array of residents to apply for the remaining seats.

b. Mission:

The four current members were in agreement nearly a year ago that PSCAC should recognize and live up to its mission as defined in the establishing ordinance: **to serve as an advisory body**

to the city council and the police department on relevant matters.

PSCAC should be engaged in soliciting input from the public and doing in-depth research into important public safety issues in our city, presenting this information to the city government, and making concrete policy recommendations. Of course, the city council should expect the PSCAC to prioritize the council's direct requests for advice.

Throughout the year, when discussing our objectives and activities, we always tried to ensure that they were in accordance with this mission.

c. Bylaws, Statement of Purpose and Operating Procedures and Practices:

All current members agreed that these documents would help PSCAC stick to and carry out our mission most effectively. Unfortunately, personal and professional time constraints have delayed our development of these documents thus far.

II. Programmatic Work

a. "Stay Safe in Takoma Park" doorknob-hanging flyers:

This project was initiated by Chuck Thomas in 2008, before serving as chair. The intention — in addition to giving the public useful information — was to raise public awareness of the committee in order to maximize community input into our decisions about what to recommend to the council. It was wholeheartedly endorsed by the 2008 officers, voting members, police department, and city government.

Sadly, another voting member who had volunteered to co-facilitate the flyer distribution had to spend extensive time instead with a loved one fighting a life-threatening illness. The project was therefore delayed in 2008, putting it into the laps of the four remaining members in 2009 struggling to keep the ship afloat while awaiting the appointment of more members to divide the labor on various other projects.

By mid-2009, the current chair's time was stretched even further by other community service endeavors, causing even more delays.

Fortunately, plans are finally underway: The chair has begun contacting neighborhood association leaders and public safety contacts to solicit their help, and the response has been positive. Each of the other voting members and the "de facto" member have agreed to help with these calls (as well as to building managers and renters associations) this week. We anticipate that a large majority of the homes in the city will be covered by the end of this year (especially with the support of the new members when appointed).

b. Gang prevention and mediation:

Having recently solicited direction from Councilmember Seamens, the PSCAC researched what options are available to our city to reduce gang activity. Our "de facto" member, Terrill North, reviewed best practices from the National League of Cities and several initiatives led by the local non-profit organization IMPACT Silver Spring:

- * **Mixed Unity**, a youth-focused coalition producing anti-gang events;
- * **Voices of Peace (Voce des Paz)**, a parent-focused coalition for sharing information on anti-gang strategies;
- * **Safer Silver Spring**, a coalition of community groups with current participation by the Montgomery County Police Department; and
- * **Gandhi Brigade**, a new non-profit organization coordinating youth/adult dialogue across each coalition.

PSCAC is now facilitating introductions and other relationship-building efforts between leadership of these community-based initiatives and Police Chief Ricucci, who has expressed strong interest.

c. Juvenile justice, community conferencing and victim restoration:

In response to a recent rash of car break-ins, a heated debate erupted on one neighborhood listserv about juvenile justice. Several angry residents argued that a juvenile who vandalizes or steals property from within someone's car should be tried as an adult and given a long prison sentence. One resident responded with information about "community conferencing," an option available to people victimized by juveniles in Montgomery County.

Specifically, county courts allow victims and the juvenile offenders to meet — facilitated by the Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County — to work out a restorative solution instead of incarceration.

The PSCAC chair invited a speaker from the CRCMC to our most recent meeting; unfortunately, she was ill and had to cancel. She agreed to speak at an upcoming meeting, which PSCAC will widely advertise to the public. Chief Ricucci also agreed to speak at the same meeting.

d. Community-oriented policing:

The city ordinance establishing the PSCAC specifically mentions community policing as something on which we should be studying and advising.

Last fall, at the last meeting of the 2008 PSCAC, the committee unanimously voted to endorse

Michael Israel's white paper to the city council about community policing — probably his last writing before passing away a few months later.

The 2009 PSCAC intended to request a meeting with the city council earlier this year to discuss the specifics of the 2008 PSCAC's white paper. We regret that we did not do this sooner; however, **we are hereby requesting this meeting at your earliest convenience.**

e. Marijuana enforcement:

In 2007, the PSCAC discussed the local ordinances and ballot initiatives passed in numerous cities nationwide directing the police to devote more resources toward violent and property crimes by making marijuana enforcement its lowest priority. The PSCAC did not make any recommendations on the matter to the city council.

In November 2008, the citizens of Massachusetts voted overwhelmingly to decriminalize marijuana statewide. Despite the timeliness of the issue, the PSCAC devoted its time in 2009 to the aforementioned infrastructural and programmatic work, and anticipates the same in 2010 unless advice is requested by the city council, the police department, or the general public.

f. License plate scanners:

The PSCAC chair attended the public forum organized by a member of the public (subsequently invited to serve on the PSCAC), at which this timely issue was discussed. The chair also invited the organizer to speak at a PSCAC meeting so that all voting members could learn more about the issue. By that time, the decision for the police to obtain and utilize the scanners was already made, so no action was taken.

The police chief assured the PSCAC that the data would not be used in ways about which the members of the public expressed concerns at the public forum. Some members of the public and city council remain concerned; thus, if requested, the PSCAC offers to look further into the matter and prepare a report and possible recommendations to the city council.

g. Neighborhood watch:

We recently learned, through an March issue of *The Gazette*, that Montgomery County's police department provides trainings and official recognition of qualifying neighborhood watch programs. PSCAC has just begun looking into the possibility of making recommendations that would spawn official neighborhood watch programs in our city.

III. Communication and Leadership

The current chair assumes responsibility for failing to maintain adequate communication with

the city council and clerk in 2009. Realizing that too many other obligations are in the way, the current chair intends to resign from that office as soon as the current applicants are considered. Assuming that "de facto" member Terrill North is appointed, he has agreed to serve as chair — and the three members present at the most recent meeting expressed their support.

Thank you for your time and consideration! The PSCAC looks forward to discussing this with you further.

Respectfully,

Chuck Thomas, chair

Fred Schultz, vice-chair

Dave Borden, secretary

Aaron Houston, voting member

Terrill North, "de facto" member