

**2006 Activities Report**  
**of**  
**The Takoma Park**  
**Public Safety Citizens Advisory**  
**Committee**



January 2007

## **Background**

The ongoing objectives of the Public Safety Citizens Advisory Committee (PSCAC) are:

- To act as a conduit between the Takoma Park residents, the Takoma Park Police Department (TPPD), and the Council by soliciting and conveying information regarding community needs and expectations, long range visions and goals, and any problems and/or specific incidents that might arise in matters of public safety.
- To be an active participant in the continuous process of advising the Council and the TPPD regarding the designing and implementing of policies, plans and programs for Community Oriented Policing, Neighborhood Watch, Neighborhood Safety Contacts and other resident based public safety and quality of life activities.

In carrying out these objectives the Committee will:

- Maintain an ongoing, active partnership with the TPPD and stakeholder entities in the City.
- Design, and with input and decisions from the Council, the TPPD, and other City Departments, implement the above objectives.
- Consult periodically with the City Manager.
- Make a presentation to the Council at least once a year to include discussions and descriptions of community needs and expectations in the public safety area, activities being carried out to address these needs and expectations, and recommendations for further progress.

## **The Plan for 2006**

PSCAC's plan for 2006 was to focus on four main projects:

- A. Data gathering to assist the City Council in determining the costs and benefits of maintaining a full-service police department, specifically as it relates to the 911 Communications and Detective functions;
- B. Review of recruitment strategies nationwide to provide recommendations for a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy for the Takoma Park Police Department;
- C. Continued assessment of community oriented policing in Takoma Park to determine its effectiveness, viability as a separate team in the department, cost, and whether it meets the needs of the community;
- D. Increase the coordination between various neighborhood and business organizations and associations to better coordinate public safety, crime prevention and quality of life strategies and programs.

And to continue with ongoing objectives and tasks as follows:

- E. Assist the police department in finding and securing funds if needed to upgrade the current "Records Management System" if needed;
- F. Continue to actively recruit members for the Public Safety Citizens Advisory Committee (PSCAC) and Neighborhood Safety Contacts (NSC) Program;
- G. Provide liaison to the Emergency Preparedness and Safe Roadways Committees.

## **The following is the performance summary for the above listed projects and activities planned for 2006**

Task A – Was to gather data to assist the City Council in determining the costs and benefits of maintaining a full-service police department, specifically as it relates to maintaining the 911 Communications and Detective functions.

- Considerable effort was expended early in 2006 to collect the needed data from MCPD. After early cordial contacts with the MCPD supervisors in the relevant operational areas, PSCAC was, after repeated tries, unable to receive clearance from the City's senior staff to meet "officially" with the MCPD personnel involved. This intransigence on the part of the City of course made it impossible to proceed with this effort. Consequently **PSCAC notified the Council by letter, that it could not do the required data collection and was dropping the task.**

Task B – Was to review police department recruitment strategies nationwide and provide recommendations for a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy for the Takoma Park Police Department (TPPD).

- **This task was completed** and a letter recommending various such strategies was submitted to the Council. The recommendations were discussed with the Council on 22 January 2007.

Task C – Required the continued assessment of community oriented policing (COP) in Takoma Park to determine its effectiveness, viability, cost, and whether it meets the needs of the community.

- **This is an ongoing effort.** While the members of the currently reduced COP team are doing an outstanding job frequently applauded on various City list-serves, it is also repeatedly remarked that all members of the Department must practice COP not only the COP team.
- The current focus is to obtain an idea of what residents perceive as community oriented policing. Early indications are that the behavior of officers as urged in the old "Officer Friendly" programs is a large contributor. Another major contributor is the "customer service" aspects of the contact between officers and the public during and after an "incident". While the contact is likely to be over unpleasant circumstances, how the officers interact with the public has significant results or after taste, so to speak. Consider having to go for a root canal, the attitude and conduct of the dentist during and after the procedure goes a long way towards how the dentist and the professional performance of the dentist is perceived afterwards. The performance reviews of all department members must include "customer service" as a sizable, meaningful component. Supervisors should also be evaluated as to how well their people perform. Such evaluations should take place at all levels of the chain of command; all the way to the top.
- The cost of obtaining the necessary performance is considered to be part of regular training and supervision. If the appropriate standards are set and vigilantly enforced, no additional costs need be incurred.
- The bottom line is that with the exception of the COP team members whose performance is outstanding, the current level of satisfaction in the department's performance in the COP area appears to be mediocre if that. The long promised City wide survey would determine this much better.

Task D & G – Required increased and continuing coordination with various neighborhood and business organizations and associations to coordinate crime prevention and quality of life strategies and programs.

- PSCAC members take active part in two other Statutory Committees related to public safety, the Emergency Preparedness and the Safe Roadways Committee.
- In addition they are individually members of various neighborhood associations (e.g. PEN, OTRA, SOSCA, and North Takoma) as well as keeping track of the doings in the Old Town Business Association. Some are involved organizing citizen's patrols in their neighborhoods. In all instances the intent is to coordinate crime prevention, public safety and quality of life strategies and programs. This is harder to manage than it may seem. It is amazing how frequently one or another organization embarks on a "public safety" type program or presentation going it alone. Most do not even invite the TPPD to participate. Pride of "discovery", no doubt. PSCAC will in 2007 work with Housing and Community Development to make the various City associations aware of the usefulness of coordinating their "safety" meetings with the TPPD.
- A PSCAC member is also on the Community Center Liaison Committee.
- Two members of PSCAC are on the board of Safe Takoma.

Task E – Prescribed that PSCAC continue to assist the police department in finding and securing funds to upgrade the current Records Management System (RMS) if needed.

- PSCAC is supporting the TPPD in their effort to implement the purchased Geographic Information System (GIS). The Department is currently searching for an intern to assist them in their efforts.

Task F – Urged an ongoing effort to actively recruit members for the PSCAC and for the NSC Program.

- PSCAC gained three new members in 2006, Aaron Houston, Fred Schultz, and Charles Thomas. We are sorely in need of members from Wards 2, 4 and 5. Steve Cavallo moved from the area and resigned.
- PSCAC held a NSC recruiting meeting on 19 March. In spite of determined efforts to attract residents from various neighborhood and tenant associations to come to this meeting, only the 26 or so "old stalwarts" showed up. This in spite of three attempts to entice newcomers to come, by e-mail, telephone, and letter. Continuing recruitment of NSCs will be one of our major tasks in 2007 (see below).
- There was an additional problem with NSC recruitment. At the start of the operation of the Emergency Preparedness Committee (EPC), it requested to take over from PSCAC the responsibility of managing the NSC effort. Unfortunately, after a number of months they decided that managing the NSCs did not fit with their goals in as much that the EPC was a "policy advisory" committee.

Task G – Required that PSCAC provide liaison to the Emergency Preparedness and Safe Roadways Committees.

- See "D" above.

## **Additional activities in 2006**

The Public Safety Citizens Advisory Committee engaged in the following additional activities during 2006. These activities included (in no particular order):

- The Automated External Defibrillator (AED) acquisition effort – Although unintended, this seems to be an ongoing, or maybe more correctly characterized as unending effort. PSCAC has continued to put the recommendation to buy and install AEDs in the Community Center and the New Hampshire facility. Senior City staff continues to recommend against this for cost (other than purchase price) reasons. The last time this was in front of the Council, the City was asked to come back with the detailed cost impacts. This has not yet taken place.
- PSCAC developed and unanimously approved a policy for the “Attendance of Committee Members”. This policy recommendation was forwarded to the Council for approval. Response from the Council is pending. In the meantime, the committee continues to operate using this policy.
- Community Oriented Policing issues are continuously worked by the committee with a view towards obtaining a common understanding of what the “look and feel” of COP would look like to residents. Also see “Task ‘C’” above.
- PSCAC provided a plaque for outgoing Chief of Police Cindy Creamer. We described our appreciation of the way the TPPD and the committee worked together on various quality of life issues in the City.
- The Chair and Vice-Chair of PSCAC took part in the preparations for the TPPD Chief search as well as the subsequent interviews.
- PSCAC prepared an Emergency Preparedness flyer in English and Spanish (translation by City staff) for insertion in the Takoma Park News Letter. This effort was undertaken by PSCAC in preparation for the coming hurricane season. The Emergency Preparedness Committee again indicating that this effort would not fit with their policy advisory role.
- PSCAC has started collecting information, studies, etc. indicating that the crime rate of immigrants committing crimes against immigrants and of immigrants committing crimes against the outside community is lower than in homogeneous non-immigrant communities. Also that “outsiders” committing crimes against immigrants is however higher and probably way under counted.
- TPPD resource augmentation recommendations were also submitted late in the year. Also see under Task “B” above.
- Several times during 2006 PSCAC submitted verbal recommendations or support for various resolutions to the Council, these included attempt by MCFRS to remove the Ladder Truck stationed in the City, and supporting Chief Creamer’s recommendations for take home cars.
- The two PSCAC members are also currently developing for the Emergency Preparedness Committee, several concepts for communicating with residents when there is no electrical service in the City.
- PSCAC has continuously advocated the installation of appropriate ADA compliant signage within the Community Center.
- A large, illuminated sign for indicating the location of the Police Department has also been repeatedly recommended.

## Activities planned for 2007

Continue with ongoing activities including:

- Focus on resolving the issues surrounding Community Oriented Policing. Organize local meetings to obtain input on what COP should look and feel like from ground up. Develop in conjunction with the TPPD a set of recommendations for the Council on how to make COP more effective, or as some may put it, how to “operationalize” COP.
- Keep pushing to buy and install AEDs in the Community Center and the New Hampshire facility and to install ADA compliant signage.
- Continue to aid in the development of means to communicate with residents when electricity fails.
- Continue to recruit members for the PSCAC particularly from the Wards that are currently not represented.
- Make a major effort to revitalize the NSC Program.
- Support the TPPD in bringing the GIS program on-line.
- Actively support the Safe Takoma initiative.
- Continue advocating the online availability of detailed, beat by beat crime statistics including arrest and closure figures.

## New activities

- It has been suggested that police resources may be further optimized by reevaluating enforcement priorities. For example, several cities nationwide direct the police to make marijuana enforcement their lowest priority, enabling the police to focus on violent and property crimes. One such city, Seattle, is expected to release a detailed report on the effectiveness of their ordinance, passed in 2002. We also intend to take a close look at data from other municipalities that have employed such policies.
- Establish an operating mode where PSCAC’s activities are more evident to the Council.
- PSCAC members are interested in finding ways to educate large numbers of residents about crime avoidance and personal protection, including legal and effective means of self-defense when necessary. This project would begin with in-depth discussions with residents already involved with crime prevention (such as the Orange Vest patrols), as well as attorneys and self-defense experts. Ideally, proposals would be presented to the Council for funding of community trainings and other teaching channels (such as ads, brochures, etc).
- Working closely with the TPPD’s senior management the committee will start a preliminary evaluation of various volunteer and cadet programs to see how such programs may be used to augment the City’s police resources.