



MIDTOWN PONCE SECURITY ALLIANCE

Eye on Midtown – 12/28/2007

SPECIAL SAFETY MEETING FOR UPPER MYRTLE STREET RESIDENTS

From time to time the MPSA meets with residents to discuss localized situations and issues (if you would like for one to be held for your corner of the neighborhood please let us know!). We recently held one of these "mini safety meetings" in order to begin addressing a pattern of neighborhood security incidents affecting residents in the upper Myrtle Street area. In recent weeks the residents in that area have sent us reports concerning robberies, aggressive vagrant activity, and trespassing issues.

During the month of November the Atlanta Police crime mapping feature on their website listed 8 robberies in the MPSA service area, 3 of which occurred along Myrtle above 8th Street. Residents also reported things like:

- People having sex in the back yards of upper Myrtle Street residents
- Trespassing vagrants making themselves at home on front porches
- Street people harassing pedestrians walking along the streets

Major discussion points:

Robberies – Two residents at this meeting told of being robbed at gunpoint on Myrtle Street. Both incidents occurred during or shortly after the 9pm hour on different nights. They described the suspect as a young black male, (17-21 years of age), baggy clothing, short hair, medium skin tone, and carry a silver gun with 6-8 inch barrel.

Residents in the area believe a gang is working together, using [a business at 10th and Piedmont] and Piedmont Park as meeting places, and working by cell phone and laptop. Residents in the area further believe that this little crime ring uses vagrants as lookouts, including a crazy-acting individual rummaging through garbage cans. Another member of this little crime ring was described as frequently wearing tan pants, green coat and hat, wearing white sneakers, and rides a bicycle.

Residents also reported expensive cars in connection with their observations of this street ring. Sgt. Cooper will consult with various officials with APD as he investigates these reports.

We urge people not to carry more money and credit cards than necessary. One resident suggested to always keep a little bit of money in case of a robbery so as not to upset the perpetrator.

Police response to incidents – Residents expressed frustration to the fact that police generally do not arrest the subjects when they intercept them. Sgt Cooper explained that police officers must carefully assess a candidate for arrest so as not to become a subject of a lawsuit for violating someone's rights. Scenarios under which an arrest will more likely occur:

- The police officer must witness the criminal behavior himself, or otherwise have probable cause (as opposed to reasonable suspicion).
- The officer must find contraband on the subject.
- The witnesses must assure the officer that they will testify in court. Under this arrangement the subpoena issued by the police officer is an official court document obligating witnesses to appear in court. A judge can issue a warrant if the witness fails to appear in court at the proper time. If you witness an incident and wish for police to arrest the subject you must be prepared to follow through.

Alley Traffic - Further discussion centered around the suggestion of blocking traffic onto alleyways. This is generally not allowed, as long-standing easements exist along alleyways. If everyone living along the alley agrees, this might be feasible.

Public security cameras - These cameras cost \$11,000 each – cost prohibitive for the MPSA to pursue – but if a group or organization sponsored the installation of these cameras, Midtown Blue would monitor them from their headquarters at the 999 Peachtree building.

Police shortage – It will likely be years – once city administration commits adequate funding and resources - before we have enough police officers on the streets of Atlanta and thereby make supplementary patrol efforts such as ours redundant. Currently no substantial city wide public debate on public safety challenges exists, let alone any concrete proposals to meaningfully enhance Atlanta's public safety situation.

MPSA Membership - We urged those in attendance to join the MPSA. Sgt. Cooper now serves Midtowners as our neighborhood cop. The MPSA also coordinates the monthly public safety meeting, where Midtowners come together to discuss public safety issues with APD, and other law enforcement agencies and public officials. We gained two new members at the meeting, and others plan to join and attend safety meetings. The MPSA also coordinates a communication network, court watch program, and other programs to address public safety issues and enhance community spirit.

The MPSA only has about 20% saturation into the potential membership. 95% of our revenues go toward patrol hours, with the remaining going toward inevitable administrative expenses. Current funding allows 55-60 hours of MPSA Patrol coverage (out of the 168 hours in a week). We would therefore like to double our membership to bring us closer to 24/7 coverage. This is not an impossible task but we need volunteers to assist us as block captains. Several people volunteered and we hope others will follow. We will officially launch the 2008 membership drive shortly after the first of the year.

Street Lighting – Residents leaving porch and other exterior lighting greatly enhances the existing public lighting along the streets. We recommend keeping porch lights on all night long, and use motion sensors for the side and rear of buildings if continuous lighting is not desirable. Burned-out street lights should be reported to Georgia Power by way of their customer service hotline (888-891-0938). The Midtown Neighbors' Association is sponsoring the installation of 20 additional street lights in the neighborhood. That work will begin soon.

Jail space shortage – Inadequate space exists at the Fulton County Jail to effectively address crime problems in the municipalities. We hope to see this dire situation a major political issue during the next election for the Fulton County Commission.

Day Labor Center – Apparently the city once operated a day labor center. We would like to see these re-activated in order to eliminate the undesirable levels of public loitering by street people near home improvement stores. In general Midtowners have observed a noticeable increase of vagrant activity in the neighborhood. A myriad of church feeding programs and social services compound the situation created by the Peachtree Pine shelter.

Parking permits – residents inquired about the enforceability of the parking permit system. Once the permit system becomes fully enforceable, any parking violator will be liable to towing or ticketing by any APD officer including those working for us.

SINCE THIS MEETNG - the residents on this block are starting a block watch for the upper Myrtle Street area. They have set up a Yahoo group to share information with each other and with us. The usefulness of these block watches is not limited to safety and security issues.

UPCOMING SAFETY MEETINGS

Safety meetings are always held at 7pm on the second Monday of each month, at Mary Mac's. The next three public safety meetings will be on January 14th, February 11th, and March 10th. We plan to have Col. Mock of Midtown Blue at one of these safety meetings to instruct Midtowners on the use of pepper spray for personal defense purposes. We are looking into providing pepper spray for sale at this meeting.

STAY SAFE! Please encourage your fellow Midtowners to join the MPSA!

- Your Neighbors at the Midtown Ponce Security Alliance

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