

Council District C Town Hall on Crime, July 21, 2014

Councilwoman Nadine Ramsey introduced herself and assured the attendance of about 50 people this was her "hands on approach" to the exploding crime problem.

" We cannot police our way out...we have to support families," she said, and then introduced Commander Chris Goodly of the 5th District.

Commander Goodly briefly addressed recruitment and said in his three-and-a-half years as leader of the 5th District his officers are down from 112 to 79. He encouraged us that arrest records have improved, even in the face of fewer police, and the best way we could help was to not let up in reporting crimes by using Hot Sheets, available online, at the Precincts and at NONPACC meetings. "Even anonymous complaints are helpful, and especially narcotics activity," he said.

Commander Goodly also said that while the SafeCams (registered security cameras) can be very helpful with "investigatory surveillance," there are only 18 in all of the 5th District, (compared with 1500 in the 8th.)

Kappa Horn then asked about raises for police, and stated that if the money being provided for new recruits wasn't being used, it should go to existing officers.

The next question was about the Crime Cameras owned by the City. They are defunct. They were purchased (by the Nagin Administration) but the technical infrastructure to make them work was never funded.

One person asked about a public-private partnership with Entergy, because "They have plenty of cameras."

The next person, a large man with a holstered gun on his belt, wanted to know about more jobs and a Youth Center. He stated "The police can't be everywhere, and I'm concerned we'll be losing our freedoms with more police and more cameras. And what about the panhandlers? Those people got to go!"

An older man said he'd been living on 1200 block of Bartholomew Street for 2 years now, with no crime problems until about 3 months ago when a house on the 1300 block became occupied by young men wearing "Bartholomew/Alvar" t-shirts. He went on to say they openly sell drugs off their porch, and there had been gunfire in front of his house with a bullet lodged in his neighbor's car that looked like it had been keyed. "The cops sounded nonchalant when I reported this crime. I can't afford a \$1300.00 camera system, and I will sue the City, NOPD, and the Mayor if I can't get protection!"

Commander Goodly responded that there has been a fair amount of success in gang activity arrests, but they often pop back up with new people in 3-month cycles.

At that moment, about 6 p.m., Superintendent Ronal Serpas and District Attorney Leon Canizarro came to the front of the room. "We're working on it- and I don't want to sound like I'm whining and crying," Serpas said. "Budget management, of the City of New Orleans, has just been digging out as of now. Body cameras show that we do it right and enhance officers' morale.

Gang activity has been prioritized along with Child Abuse and Domestic Violence. We're hiring and moving forward. We've promoted 400 officers with 5 percent pay raises. The new 5th District station opens tomorrow. You're right, base officer pay has not risen since 2007, with the across-the-board City Employee raises. However, our pay is within pennies of the State and Jefferson Parish, just not as high as Houston and Dallas. We look for every opportunity to find money, including grants, some of which are now covering DNA investigation, and the pay of about 24 of our officers.

258,000 people who were arrested over the past 20 years in New Orleans are three times more likely to be in possession of illegal firearms, and," said the Chief, making an impassioned plea, "THIS is where I need the CITIZEN OUTCRY, no matter what the NRA says. The people decide this."

One person asked about stop and frisk, a groan could be heard from the group, now of about 80. The Chief responded, "With the body cameras, we are meeting the constitutional standard."

Terry the Teacher asked about "Officer Friendly," who used to be in the schools (teaching citizenship) when she was a kid. Chief Serpas related there are ten new School Liaison Officers, lamenting the woefully small number, and then explained, "Numbers of failing third graders are used to predict the number of jail beds needed in the future."

He went on to say, "Violent crimes are most often crimes of passion, but private video cameras do help with property crime and 'crimes of incivility,' disruptions in the quality of life. Repeat offenders drive the criminal justice system."

One of Commander Goodly's officers then approached the man from Bartholomew Street to get his information.

Mr. Canizzaro introduced himself, "I came to the town hall out of curiosity because a couple from Marigny asked what they could personally do about violent crime in New Orleans? All violent crimes are repeats because they (the criminals) were never held accountable, and the reasons are: #1, lack of education, #2, No job, and #3, a drug problem.

In the five years I have been District Attorney, we have rehabilitated 2000 non-violent offenders. What doesn't work is not getting involved. Getting involved is WHAT WORKS. Give us more witnesses, get us more evidence. In my 5 years the police have gone from a 50 percent arrest record to 85 percent. Instead of 'I pay taxes, fix my streets,' it should be 'I pay taxes, Make Me Safe.'

Mary Ann Hammett said, "If you want more involvement, you need more communication." Commander Goodly stated the established lines of communication: eblasts can be signed up for on the NOPD website. "I know we can be slow to respond, but don't stop contacting us!"

Councilwoman Ramsey said there would be time for two more questions.

Derrick Floyd, President of the St. Roch Neighborhood Assoc. said, "We're losing lives. What is the specific strategy?" Goodly responds, "St. Roch was the first effort of the Multi-Departmental Gang Taskforce, which has resulted in many successful arrests. I get reports on St. Roch every Friday."

An older gentleman suggested moving a million dollars from a Kellogg Grant on addressing racism to the police; "I went to one or two meetings and nothing ever came of it."

Commander Goodly then introduced his officers present at the Town Hall.

Councilwoman Ramsey introduced her staff, and announced that besides holding two more Town Halls on Crime, her office would be staying involved by compiling a report.