

7-23-14 Town Hall on Crime at St. Jude's

At the beginning of the meeting there were about 120 people in attendance. Councilwoman Ramsey introduced herself and said, "I decided to have this series of town hall meetings because crime has been predominant in the media, and affecting our quality of life." She then introduced Chief Serpas.

Superintendent Serpas said when he came back to New Orleans there were 160 officers in the 8th district, now there are a hundred, and probably only 90 by the end of the year.

"Recruitment is moving forward. We have a class of 27 graduating soon, and another 30 at the end of August."

Kappa Horn asked what he was doing to retain the existing officers. "Retention efforts include working side-by-side with the Fraternal Order of Police to make promotions with online training at a 5% pay raise. 400 have been promoted this year, and another 200 next year. We have 100 new cars, and soon there will be another 100.

I asked why officers were not allowed to take cars home, as this is on the wish list stated by officers at the NONPACC meetings. "Marked cars, *if available* can be taken home in the Parish, unmarked cars, outside the Parish."

"The Justice Foundation has given us \$550,000.00 for online recruitment, which is stating to take root. There is plenty of struggle: New Orleans hasn't hired new police for four years. New hires in Memphis may have to do without a pension."

The Chief then repeated a series of statistics heard during the Town Hall in Bywater, about young men with illegal firearms and drugs, and the success of the multi-agency gang task force.

A man living in the French Quarter said he was afraid to walk outside at night, and wanted to know what happens after the 30 State Troopers who are working 12 hour shifts in the 8th District leave after Labor Day. The question was answered with a question by the Chief asking why NOPD did Interstate Highway patrol, but everywhere else in Louisiana, that's a Trooper job.

"The Council has approved 1200 hours a week in overtime, and we do not remove officers for special events from their regular neighborhoods."

A person asked why there aren't 2 officers in each car. "We have been riding in one-person cars for decades. You want them there *fast*. We could use more Probation and Parole officers too."

A man asked, "What about the problems of race clogging the system? We should have no Details; the police re bullies, and they make-up charges along racial lines. What about victims of hate crimes?"

"We have a duty to respond to quality of life issues. All officers have body cameras, making us a better police force. The Justice Department and Public Affairs, with two FBI agents are in place to catch officers who are doing the wrong thing."

A citizen wanted to know how we (the public) could "stand up" for the police.

The Chief said, "Democracy, make your voice heard."

Another person: "We are not addressing the problems comprehensively: jobs, mental health, investment from developers. I'm a victim too, I was shot. You're not building that new jail to be empty."

"The NOLA for Life program is addressing those problems," the Chief said

Latoya Lewis an organizer from the New Orleans Workers' Center for racial Justice Stand with Dignity wanted to know why the Treme Community Center, which was hosting NOLA For Life, is still closed, after great renovation expense. It hosted Midnight basketball."

Nick Lambert asked, "Are there any other ideas, perhaps loosening the 2 years of college requirement, or recruiting some of the 47 percent of unemployed combat veterans?"

Serpas responded, "NOPD requires 60 hours of college credit, or Military service. The Police Training Academy cannot remediate skills for writing and math."

A woman who had just moved to New Orleans from Houston commented, "You make the community you would have, " to a round of applause. A man from Houston, who had also just moved here, wanted to know to whom, and where he could make a contribution.

"Cops 8," he was answered.

The Chief then introduced Commander Otha Sandifer of the 1st District (Rampart St.), who said violent crime was actually down 80 percent, and that 230 narcotics arrests were mostly due to "calls from the community to Crimestoppers."

Commander Jeffery Walls of the 8th District encouraged people to attend NONPACC meetings, and repeated figures of significant arrests in recent cases.

One person made a comment about needing beat cops and "stop and frisk."

Another person asked about the sheriff's department reservists. The chief stated, "There are 75 or 80 Orleans Parish deputies, but they are not certified as Peace Officers."

A 20-year employee of Bicycle Michaels on Frenchmen St. asked about the official position concerning the Brass Band playing all hours. "We didn't have that until about 3 years ago."

"It is a complex legal issue involving constitutional rights we cannot enforce against."

Councilmember Ramsey then introduced District attorney, Leon Canizarro. "We haven't had crime meetings before," he said. Regarding the current state of affairs, "It is a people's system, and people make mistakes. My office has a good relationship with the Police, and we've been able to get past the '60-day rule,' where people would be let out of jail after 60 days, because we couldn't make a good case. We've gone from accepting 50% of cases to 85 or 90%.

If you commit a murder in Orleans Parish, there is a 90% chance you will go to jail for murder.

We've had rape kits that were sitting in evidence for multiple years evaluated, and they are no longer backlogged. We have solved many cold cases. We have made progress, but *you* (indicating the crowd) must be heard by the State, that State cops need to do the traffic.

Even if we put a cop on every corner we wouldn't be able to prevent all the crimes. Cops live and die on *information*. Get involved. I know this like preaching to the choir, but bring the people you know who aren't here to the meetings.

Seems to me crime is more important than fixing streets, but the 700 people who met in Lakeview last night might not agree."

He then repeated the same three points he made at the Monday night Town Hall, and added, "Once we actually do rehabilitate non-violent offenders, our rate of recidivism is only 7 %"

Councilwoman Ramsey then closed the meeting saying, "This is not the end. We'll see you in Algiers next, and then we will prepare a report." The crowd had swelled to about 200 people.