

9/22 – Neighborhood Watch Meeting Minutes

Meeting started at 6:35 p.m.

Bob Vehon, Neighborhood Watch Coordinator, introduced Officer Mike Dunn.

Officer Mike Dunn started the meeting – great turnout – officer for 18 years.

Some streets have signage – but once program is established we'll get some new ones. Program is only as good as its participation. Neighborhood needs to actively participate and report suspicious activity, light outages, be alert of suspicious vehicles, write down license plate numbers, call 911 (if you see something suspicious), know schedules of neighbors, etc. to make program work. Recruiting is critical to the success of the program. Start with the nearby neighbors and work from there. We can see what's going on around the homes that are nearby.

Program Meetings

The program must have at least two meetings with City of Austin Police officers in attendance in order to have a registered neighborhood watch program with the City of Austin:

- 1.) Property;
- 2.) Personal Safety

The program should also schedule meetings at least quarterly with the program participants. Meeting need to be short, informative, and to the point.

What number to call, 911 or 311?

If it's happening right now (i.e. you see a suspicious vehicle or person) dial 911. Receiving that call creates reasonable suspicion and/or probable cause for the officer to make a stop. If it's something that obviously happened the night before and is not happening right now, call 311.

Crimes Against People and Property

Crimes against persons are priority for APD, but property crimes are on the increase and causing APD to devote a lot of time and resources. These types of crimes can be difficult to solve. These are difficult because these criminals are extremely good at what they do. They are extremely fast and operate in efficient teams.

Why are property crimes on the rise in NW Austin? The demographics and economics of the areas make them more enticing to criminals.

Most burglaries occur during week days while people are at work. Most home burglaries in this area occur on Mondays and Tuesday between 10:00 and 4:00.

Recent burglary occurred on Madrid during a period of time when individuals were out of the house for only about 30 minutes. Most burglaries of vehicles and incidents of criminal mischief occur at nighttime.

These criminals are a different type of criminal. They are extremely bold. What to do if someone breaks in at night?

Develop a plan that works best for you and your family.

Alarm systems can be helpful but do not guarantee your safety. Use it if you have but also important to have a backup plan.

Best idea is to get out of the house and call 911.

You can, of course, defend yourself and your home with deadly force, but these individuals put a very low value on human life. You might think twice about taking someone's life, but this type of criminal will probably not even think twice.

Pepper spray is also good option.

Create a safe or panic room out of an upstairs closet. Make sure it is a solid core door and has a deadbolt lock. Get to that room quickly with a cell phone and call 911.

What are criminals looking for? Criminals are after Flatscreen TVs, gaming systems, Jewelry, Jewelry Boxes, Coin collections, laptops, etc.

How bad is this neighborhood relative to other areas around here? It's about the same, but highway 183 is so close that some of the statistics are skewed.

Businesses (such as those in the Gateway area) and apartments along 183 get hit really hard.

Are crime sprees related to door to door sales persons or those doing work on homes after storms hit? No statistics on that, but criminals have been known to use that type of activity as a false identity and to create opportunities for crimes against property.

The neighborhood cannot prohibit individuals from soliciting. We need to verify whether anyone soliciting in the neighborhood is required by city ordinance to have a permit or identification card of some type. Officers encourage you to call 911 if you are having trouble with a particular solicitor.

Home Security Surveys

Officers will come out to your home and check your home security (lighting, fencing, landscaping – is it off the ground so as to prevent criminals from using as cover around your home, doors, alarm systems, etc.) If you meet the requirements, you can, depending on your insurance, get a 5% reduction on your home insurance rates and 15% if you have an alarm system.

Officers prefer that neighborhood's questions regarding potential criminal activity that might have occurred (i.e. helicopter flying overhead at night) come from the program coordinator.

You can also subscribe to the Citizens Observer at the APD web site. This service will update you on what's going on by sending you a text message to your cell phone.

After the second meeting, the neighborhood can purchase neighborhood watch signs.