



Agenda Report

20-785

Agenda Date: 9/29/2020

REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBJECT

Special Order of Business - Neighborhood Watch Program [Council Pillar - Deliver and Enhance High Quality Efficient Services and Infrastructure]

BACKGROUND

Neighborhood Watch is one of the oldest and best-known crime prevention concepts.

In the late 1960's, an increase in crime heightened the need for a crime prevention initiative focused on residential areas and involving local citizens. The National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) responded, creating the National Neighborhood Watch (NNW) program in 1972, to assist citizens and law enforcement.

DISCUSSION

Although crime trends have changed over time, the basic principle behind Neighborhood Watch remains the same. Neighborhood Watch brings residents and businesses in the same area together (e.g. mobile home park, homeowner's association, apartment complex, block/neighborhood, etc.) to establish connections, develop a neighborhood communication system and forge bonds toward a healthy and vibrant neighborhood. Essentially, Neighborhood Watch is a group of neighbors looking out for neighbors while collaborating with local law enforcement to reduce crime and improve the overall quality of life in a community.

Neighborhood Watch groups meet regularly to discuss existing challenges and brainstorm potential solutions or identify ways to keep a problem from occurring in the first place. Neighborhood Watch is homeland security at the most local level.

Neighborhood Watch groups have the ability to invite Police Department representatives to their meetings to discuss topics of interest, including:

- Crime statistics and trends
- Identifying suspicious or criminal activity
- Crime reporting (e.g. emergency vs non-emergency)
- Financial crimes and scams
- Bicycle thefts and registry
- Vehicle security
- Home security measures (e.g. environmental design, types of alarms/locks, importance of documenting serial numbers, bike registry, etc.)
- Mail and package theft reduction

- Personal safety (e.g. child/stranger danger, shopping center/mall, etc.)
- How to report an abandoned vehicle
- Animal control issues

Some Neighborhood Watch groups also coordinate social or philanthropic activities (e.g. neighborhood beautification project, emergency/disaster preparedness planning, register for National Night Out, etc.) to create additional meaningful ties.

Active Neighborhood Watch Groups

The Police Department currently has 42 Neighborhood Watch groups registered, 5 of which hold regular meetings.

Alternatives to Traditional Neighborhood Watch

With overbooked schedules, long commutes and new technology for communication, many residents have turned to non-traditional means for connecting with neighbors (e.g. online chats, electronic newsletter, neighborhood Facebook page, Nextdoor, etc.).

While these avenues provide the ability to quickly and easily share information, the communication is often delayed, it does not provide the camaraderie that face-to-face interactions can, nor should it serve as a replacement for contacting Public Safety Dispatchers to report suspicious behavior or criminal activity.

To some, sending a request for help may seem like a logical way to communicate. However, social media is not an appropriate forum to request police, fire or emergency medical assistance. Social media is not monitored on an on-going basis nor does this technology have the resources or redundancies needed in emergency situations.

Instead, call 9-1-1 in an emergency or 408-615-5580 in non-emergency situations. Text to 9-1-1 is also available to individuals who cannot safely call for assistance, those who are deaf/hard of hearing or have a speech disability. Public Safety Dispatchers work 24/7, 365 who have the ability to deploy police, fire or medical resources in real-time. General inquiries can be addressed during normal business hours (M-F, 8am-6pm; Sat 9am-3pm; Closed Sunday) at (408)615-4700.

Neighborhood Watch Enhancements During COVID-19

During COVID-19, the Police Department took the opportunity to work with the Communications Team to create a new Neighborhood Watch flyer (Attachment 1) to encourage participation.

The Department distributed this marketing piece to current Neighborhood Watch Captains to spark an interest in reconvening their group. In addition, the flyer was distributed on the Department's website, eNotify, Facebook, Nixle and Twitter accounts. Since that time, the Department has conducted 12 virtual Neighborhood Watch meetings and facilitated 11 requests to start new Neighborhood Watch groups.

Potential Program Name Change

Throughout the U.S. there are many names (e.g. crime watch, community watch, block watch, business watch, name of an HOA watch, community monitoring, etc.) for the program the City of Santa Clara refers to as Neighborhood Watch, yet all have the same concept.

The Police Department is evaluating all aspects of its community programs and services. In doing so, the Police Department is considering a change to the name of the program to move away from a “watch” concept to one that appears more collaborative in spirit. There are pros (e.g. name recognition) and cons (e.g. adjust public perception about program intent) to making a name change to a long-standing program. These factors are being taken into consideration before taking any action.

The names the Department is considering includes:

- Police Neighborhood Outreach
- Neighborhood - Police Partnership

Should the Police Department proceed with a name change, it will develop a phased plan to update the website, program flyers and communication plan to the community. At a later date, the signs hung in neighborhoods throughout the City would be adjusted to reflect the new program name.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This is an information report only and no action is being taken by the City Council and no environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) is required.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact to the City other than staff time.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City’s official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall Council Chambers. A complete agenda packet is available on the City’s website and in the City Clerk’s Office at least 72 hours prior to a Regular Meeting and 24 hours prior to a Special Meeting. A hard copy of any agenda report may be requested by contacting the City Clerk’s Office at (408) 615-2220, email clerk@santaclaraca.gov <<mailto:clerk@santaclaraca.gov>>.

Reviewed by: Patrick Nikolai, Chief of Police

Approved by: Deanna J. Santana, City Manager

ATTACHMENT

1. Santa Clara is a Neighborhood Watch Community flyer