

Minutes of the Greater Rockridge (Beats 12Y and 13X) NCPC Meeting
Thursday, April 14, 2011, 7 pm
Rockridge Branch of the Oakland Public Library

Present:

NCPC officers - Frank Castro, chair; Barbara Minton, vice chair; Denise Boisvert Jorgensen, treasurer; Janet Somers, acting secretary

OPD personnel - Sgt Maureen Vergara; Ofc. Randall Chew (PSO for Beat 12Y); Ofc Trent Thompson (PSO for Beats 13X, Y, and Z); Neighborhood Services Coordinator Patricia Rose

Attendees - approximately 20

I. Introductions

People went around the room introducing themselves. Patricia Rose explained her job as liaison between the community and OPD.

II. Beat 13X Report - Officer Trent Thompson

Overview and stats: Ofc. Thompson is in charge of all of the Beat 13s (13X, 13Y, and 13Z). He said the Rockridge part of 13, 13X, hasn't been "plagued" with burglaries as 13Y and 13Z have been. 13X had five residential burglaries with force this month (all "kickins"), up from three last month. Stolen vehicles were down to one this month from three last month. Thefts were the same both months at six. By contrast, 13Z (Montclair) is "inundated" with burglaries. Ofc. Thompson: "These burglars have found their niche [there]. I think it's the terrain. Houses built on hills, and nobody's got alarms. ...People are using their alarms on this side. So why go over here and risk the chance of getting captured."

Suspects: Ofc. Thompson is doing the investigations of the burglaries. He believes they are being done by two sets of two-three-man pairs. He has ID'd and documented some people in the area who have "no business" here, some from North Oakland, some from Fruitvale. But he can't do anything unless they're caught in the act. OPD. They're not on probation or parole so OPD can't search their houses.

Alarm systems: No losses were reported from houses with activated alarms. Three victims had dogs but had been taken the dogs to work with them, not wanting them to be lonely.

MO: Losses have included tvs, Macbooks, desktop iMacs, and jewelry. Ofc. Thompson: "They're going into the bedrooms, rifling through drawers and the cabinets for jewelry." He advises moving your jewelry "somewhere else." The burglars are "doing their homework. They're watching... documenting times you're home. I have actual witnesses.. that ... have seen people go up to houses within minutes of people leaving their driveways. They go right up to the front door, see if anyone's home, and if not, they boot the door in and do the job really quick; they're in and out of there." He believes the criminals in 13Y are between 18 and 25 years old. They go around back looking for open windows, walk the perimeter to see if anybody is watching. They're picking houses where the front door is a little bit hidden.

Question re time of day/days of the week: Vast majority are on Mondays and Thursdays, between 8:30 and 4 pm. "Everybody goes to work on Monday. A lot of people take Fridays off. These burglars are not violent; when confronted with witnesses they scatter and run. They're doing their best to find times and days when you're not gonna be home."

Question re location of burglaries: “They’re happening off of major thoroughfares. ...a lot are happening on Harbord. They take little side streets that they can easily get back on the major thoroughfares like 13 to.” He couldn’t be more specific. “Its happening all around.”

Technology, details, and rapport with victims aid in recovery: Ofc. Thompson has tracked down and recovered computers using LoJack, a laptop tracking service. He also has used Backblaze, a backup system that (with the help of backed-up data) allowed him to get search warrants and “get the stuff back through the IP address.” He has located some owners through Facebook after that. Ofc. Thompson: “You have to have a good rapport with the victim ... Once I was allowed to view [her] Backblaze account I could work with her more. ...I have access to all the pawnshops here...I have software... But ‘cash for gold’-type places don’t ask for any ID; those places are killing me; they’re bypassing the pawnshops. If your jewelry is stolen, be as descriptive as you can on your police report. Write down the serial numbers of your computers and your tv. Take photos of it all.”

Suppression effort: OPD is conducting a burglary suppression effort in 12X and 12Y and all of 13 starting next week. “We’re looking for people sitting in cars and we’re gonna hit them hard. North Oak is being hit hard and we’re going after it.”

Signs and other deterrents: Ofc. Thompson: “Smile-you’re-on-camera signs are great even if you don’t have a camera.” An attendee mentioned that she has a “beware of dog” sign although she doesn’t actually have a dog. Ofc. Thompson said you can get a “dog-bark box” that sounds a vicious dog noise if someone knocks on the door loud enough.

Question re OPD’s recent training on dealing with dogs. Ofc. Thompson: “The training wasn’t effective... We’re not going to force entry into your house if there’s no movement and we hear a barking dog – we’re not going to go up against your dog. It’s the last thing we want to do.”

To email Officer Thompson:
tthompson@oaklandnet.com

III. NCPC (Frank Castro) report on NCPC’s crime stats

Castro said he and Suzanne Sargentini have been starting to compile crime stats by getting info from OPD that comes out every week and matching it up with info from crimespotting.org. They group crimes into four categories: against persons, against property non-auto, against auto, and quality of life. He displayed a map indicating locations of the various crimes. Castro: “Crime is actually going down. We’re noticing, though, that it’s moving around.” He mentioned that it seemed to have moved into a neighborhood around Desmond and 51st. Castro: “On crimespotting.org you can zero in on any neighborhood and see what kinds of crimes are happening in any area. The longer we use this the better we’ll be able to see patterns.” In answer to a question, he said he has no info yet on how crime this year compares with last.

4. Beat 12Y Report – Officer Randall Chew

Overview and stats: Between the last NCPC meeting and this one there were four auto burglaries (up from two in the prior month), one commercial burglary, 14 residential

burglaries (up from seven last month), one robbery (up from zero last month), seven stolen cars (up from two last month), and seven incidents of vandalism. Of the residential burglaries, six were cases where windows or doors were left unlocked; three were pry-ins using tools; four were body-force (“kick-in”); one was breaking glass to reach in and unlock a door. The robbery was at KFC on Telegraph, which Ofc. Chew noted has a security guard in front, and was done by a couple of teenagers. He described it as “a brutal attack.”

Stolen car patterns: Ofc. Chew said he’s trying to get a better picture of the stolen cars. “There’s a little area that it’s focused in.” He mentioned the 5500 block of Lawton, 5600 block of Miles, 5800 block of Ocean View, 6400 block of Colby, some on Chabot, etc. “They’re kind of all over. We’re trying to see if they’re near any bus route, so [the perps] can pick up a car and dump it and then take public transportation. I’m working on figuring out a pattern.”

Possible unreported crime near James: Ofc. Chew: “I got flagged down by a resident of James St., complaining the neighborhood is getting broken into a lot. I told them there’s not been one report generated from James so there’s no way we can tell.”

Question re filing incident reports: Is filing an incident report after a break-in a waste of time? Ofc. Chew: “It can give us information on the MO, etc. ... We’ve received an order from the chief for people to make online reports of residential burglaries. When we had higher [staffing] numbers we’d always send someone out and then report it to our investigative team. That level of investigation simply isn’t happening any more. The officers that go out are coming from one violent incident after another and they’ve been told by the chief that people are supposed to file online reports. ...Then the PSOs like us tell you to call us and tell us about the burglars. So there’s confusion right now within OPD. It’s true that an isolated incident won’t be investigated on its own. But it could possibly be part of a trend. So the information could be valuable.”

Assignment of officers based on calls for service: An attendee commented: “We’ve been told by Batts et al that OPD has dwindling resources. They’re going to assign those resources to the hot spots, directly based on calls for service. ...So cumulatively it’s good to report everything.”

Question: What if you don’t have a computer? Answer: you can request a form to report by mail from the dispatcher. Police may come, it may take 2-3 days. (Also, the library has computers). You can’t report a car theft online because it goes into the DMV stolen vehicle system. You just have to wait for an officer to come out.

Priorities from last month:

1. Problem neighbor 63rd and Telegraph: Ofc. Chew has been monitoring the site for illegally working on cars and motorcycle noise and hasn’t noticed anything. “It seems pretty quiet.”

2. Nude Sushi: Ofc. Chew has been monitoring it. “Seems like it’s doing good right now, pretty compliant.” But an attendee complained they’re “still loading cars with food at 1:30 a.m.” and noted honking, etc. Ofc. Thompson: “It’s their property and if their business requires loading cars in the back ... they’re allowed to do that.” Ofc. Chew will have a talk with the owners and will send the neighbor the Muni code section on noise and nuisance. Sgt. Vergara suggested notifying Nuisance Enforcement Administrator Arturo Sanchez.

3. Manila drug house: An attendee complained about traffic coming and going to the house, people seen throwing up outside, etc. "The tenants seem to change very frequently." She said the resident is now "suspicious that we're after him" and confrontational.

Sgt. Vergara said the problem is that the resident has a medical marijuana license and is allowed to grow it. There have been no reports of anything illegal such as sales, but OPD will monitor for sales when the resident starts growing again (he is not growing presently). She advised anyone who smells marijuana to contact the drug hotline, which is anonymous. "We all are aware of Manila. We want you put everything in detail on the drug hotline." A neighbor said a letter of complaint signed by several neighbors has been sent to the landlord by certified mail. Sgt. Vergara asked the resident to email her a copy and said she planned next to contact the landlord. She said there had already been a meeting with Nuisance Enforcement Administrator Arturo Sanchez.

Sgt. Vergara discussed the legalization issue. "...When people start growing in their homes, even if it's legal, they get ...robberies and violent criminals Smell etc... The mayor and the city council need to be aware of these...quality of life issues. The lawmakers need to hear from YOU what it is to be forced to smell that quantity of marijuana growing. The police can't do anything about a smell. That's our dilemma." An attendee expressed the opinion that the existence of the growing of marijuana "is not a police issue any longer; it's an issue for the city. The mayor and the council see it as revenue." He said in order for this to become an OPD issue, neighbors must call the drug hotline and give details. When there is evidence of sales, officers can "jump in."

4. Videotape of possible attempted mail theft: The guy was never seen again.

V. Priorities for next month:

13X: none

12Y : (remove Nude Sushi, 63rd St. neighbor, and videotape of possible mail theft)

1. Manila drug house

2. New priority: tagging in Desmond/Glendale/Manila area: There has been tagging (graffiti) on doors, trash cans, street signs, etc. in this area. Attendees reported gates having been opened, front doors knocked on at odd hours like 4 a.m. and 7 a.m., and kids loitering in the area whom they think are from Oakland Tech. Some have contacted the principal and site officer. Sgt. Vergara said the door-knocking warrants calls to 911. "If someone showed up at my door at 4 a.m., that's not right. I'd call 911." She also said OPD can contact the patrol officers for the nighttime issues as well as the school police.

VI. Miscellaneous discussion:

Question: Definition of burglary? Answer: When an inhabited structure is broken into, regardless of whether or not anything is taken. Opening a gate is "trespass."

Crime-deterrent signs: Some neighbors have made and are using signs to deter burglars. Frank is willing to help distribute them. Contact him at fjcastro@yahoo.com if interested.

VII. Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 8:35. The next meeting is May 12 at 7 pm.