

**NOTES FROM THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL AND CHESHIRE POLICE DEPARTMENT COMMUNITY INFORMATION SESSION HELD ON WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 1, 2018 AT 7:00 P.M. IN COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE CT 06410**

Present

Robert J. Oris, Jr. Chairman; Paul A. Bowman, Vice-Chairman; Jeffrey Falk, Patti Flynn-Harris, Sylvia Nichols, Thomas Ruocco, Timothy Slocum, David Veleber.

Absent: Tim Slocum and Peter Talbot.

Staff: Sean Kimball, Town Manager; Assistant Town Manager Arnett Talbot.

Cheshire Police Chief Neil Dryfe; Deputy Chief Brian Pichnarcik.

Guests: Rep. Craig Fishbein, Rep. Lezley Zupkus, Rep. Liz Linehan, Sen. Len Suzio.

**1. WELCOME**

**Robert J. Oris, Town Council Chairman**

Chairman Oris welcomed everyone to the meeting. He stated that public safety is of important concern to the Town Council and Cheshire Police Department (CPD). This session is an opportunity for people to hear from Sean Kimball, Cheshire's new Town Manager, Police Chief Dryfe, Deputy Chief Pichnarcik. The Councilors are elected officials who will help with anything that needs to be done to insure public safety, and concerns, comments and questions will be addressed at this meeting. Mr. Oris commented on Cheshire being a community that works together, rises to the occasion, and it is a great community.

**2. INTRODUCTION**

**Sean M. Kimball, Town Manager**

Town Manager Kimball welcomed everyone. He introduced himself as Cheshire's new Town Manager, and he started in May following the retirement of Michael Milone in June. He spent seven (7) years in Simsbury town government. Mr. Kimball noted that Simsbury has the similar situation as Cheshire with car break-ins and thefts; the problem is state wide; and must be taken seriously. The information presented at this session will report on what is being done to address the problem. Mr. Kimball thanked everyone for attending the forum, and said there will be open dialogue on the issue. He encouraged the public to be proactive, check on elderly neighbors, check houses across the street, help each other and the CPD. The Town Manager's office receives at least one call a day about a car break-in. He said there can be more vigilance to make Cheshire a harder place for criminals to find success, and everyone can assist CPD with fighting crime. Mr. Kimball urged people to reach out to him, Town Council members, CPD, in order to work together on this problem.

**3. CAR BREAK-INS and THEFTS IN CHESHIRE**

***Police Chief Neil Dryfe and Deputy Chief Brian Pichnarcik***

- ***Overview: Facts and Statistics***
- ***Cheshire Police Response and Strategy***
- ***How Residents Can Help***

Chief Dryfe thanked everyone for attending the meeting. He presented an overview of facts and statistics on the car break-ins and thefts in Cheshire, and slides and videos on the ongoing problem. Chief Dryfe reviewed the information on the slides which cited thefts from motor vehicles, tampering with motor vehicles, and actual car thefts. Copies are attached to these notes.

Chief Dryfe reported that the people responsible for the activity taking place in Cheshire are solely and exclusively criminals coming to town, breaking into and stealing cars. The CPD is not blaming anyone for not locking their cars or leaving valuables in cars. Many of the criminals are driving into Cheshire in stolen cars, leaving them in town, and taking other cars, and they are responsible for the problem. It is the job of CPD to make their criminal actions more difficult. This year the numbers have spiked; there are many more incidents than last year; and they are predominantly in the south end of town (south of Town Hall). There are some clusters of criminal activity near the Waterbury town line, the central and north side of town near Southington. It is a statewide issue with incidents taking place in many towns with local and statewide media reporting. The problem has been the focus of regional Police Chief meetings and statewide police meetings, which Chief Dryfe and Chief Pichnarcik attend.

Graph – illustrates the breakdown of days of the week in which incidents happen; the pattern shows Sunday night to Monday morning with people finding their car stolen; the pattern is lower on Friday; is higher on Wednesday to Thursday; and Saturday has increased activity. There is no particular day for CPD to put four more officers on the midnight shift (working overtime), and the question would be what day to select.

Slides - The slides were representative of the motor vehicle break-ins and thefts in the first six (6) months of the year. Some mornings, CPD gets 7 or 8 calls reporting car thefts or break-ins. It is difficult for CPD to focus enforcement efforts on any particular day of the week or time of the year.

Videos – the four (4) videos were from security cameras of Cheshire residents, showing suspects coming up to a vehicle, trying the car door. If a car was locked, the suspects ran away, and moved on. Chief Dryfe noted that it is difficult to determine “who” the suspects are in the videos.

Chief Dryfe commented on the articles about the break-ins and car thefts in the Waterbury Republican American, and his use of the word “extensive” in referring to Cheshire. There had been 89 confirmed thefts in town; there is only enough evidence to show that force was used in two thefts. This was at a fitness center when people left visible items of value in their car; windows were smashed, items stolen, and suspects left the area. People call to report incidents in the morning; assure CPD their vehicle was locked; but CPD cannot find any evidence of forcible entry. The criminal suspects are not forcing entry into cars, unless there is evidence of visible valuable items.

CPD has done some research on easy access to cars, including key fobs. Some cars can be started without the key fob by pressing a button. Chief Dryfe said a car can be started without the key fob in the car. With a car parked close to the house and within range of the key fob it is possible to press the button and start the car. As a safety measure the car will run until it stops and it will not restart. Some cars reported missing have been found to have the keys or key fob in the locked car. It appears that if a vehicle is locked people are not going to force their way into the car...these are not criminal masterminds...and people have been arrested in stolen cars in other towns. Chief Dryfe commented on the fact that Cheshire is 33 square miles; has 151 miles of local roads; borders on eight (8) different communities; and there are 25 ways to drive into Cheshire. Some weeks there is no motor vehicle criminal activity. It is difficult to stumble on these people committing the break-ins. CPD has increased its midnight shift officers with support of the Town Council and Town Manager, and there is saturation patrolling in the neighborhoods with the cruiser lights on. After midnight, the cruiser lights are shut off and officers set up on the main thoroughfares leading into town. CPD takes zero tolerance approach for motor vehicle violations, stopping cars coming into town, but this does not mean zero tolerance for enforcement. CPD is making contact, increasing the level of visibility, conducting more random patrolling around residential neighborhoods. With the current criminal activity, a car is on the street, 3 or 4 kids get out, go onto each side of the street, driveway to driveway, pulling on car doors, get nothing, and move onto the next street. They are not particularly targeting Cheshire. A car is stolen; it is driven out of Cheshire; and nothing indicates to a patrolling officer that it is stolen so the car is not stopped.

Deputy Chief Pichnarcik explained that Cheshire is not set up with high density housing or dense populations. There is no way to determine, from an analytical standpoint, the pattern of times and location of this criminal activity and attacking the problem. He commented on "bait cars", which require getting the right street at the right time on the right day.

Chief Dryfe encouraged the public to call CPD with helpful information, and police officers will come out and investigate. He stated that Cheshire is a very safe community, and if people "see something, say something now"...as this narrows down the time frame for CPD. If the suspects are going driveway to driveway, there is the opportunity for police officers to get into the neighborhood quickly. Chief Dryfe believes there are multiple groups from multiple towns doing this criminal activity. He cited an arrest in New Britain when a suspect had possession of a wallet missing from a Cheshire car, and credit cards had already been used.

The highlights of the presentation were summarized by Chairman Oris. Neighborhood visibility by property owners; Town Council authorization of additional CPD patrols; More police officers on the overnight shifts with efforts to be more visible...and sometimes not visible.

Chairman Oris cited his concerns about innocent interaction that could occur between a resident and those involved in the criminal acts. He asked for the Chief's recommendations about this issue.

If there is any interaction, Chief Dryfe said someone should call 911, be a good witness, and get details of the perpetrator and activity. He does not recommend physical interaction for anyone. Sometimes there are groups of kids involved and greater physical contact could take place. The Chief is not aware of any such incidents in Cheshire.

Chief Dryfe stated there have been some incidents in Town where perpetrators entered a garage with use of a garage door opener. This is significant escalation of the activity in to the house, and items have been stolen. People must be aware that their garage is closed.

At the request of Chairman Oris, Chief Dryfe reported on the CPD receiving Town Council approval for a license plate reader which will further insure safety. The State Police and many municipal police departments use the reader, which has three cameras on the vehicle hood. The reader enables police officers to scan license plates; if a car is stolen, on the hot list, there is an alert on the laptop in the police vehicle.

#### **4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS**

The following questions and responses were part of the information session.

Q. Why are these incidents happening in the last 6 to 12 months.

A. Chief Dryfe stated there is speculation about this. At regional chief meetings there is thought it is due to reforms in the juvenile court system and sentencing. He cannot give a factual reason why the break-ins or thefts are happening.

Q. Is there any independent data being done on the matter.

A. Chief Dryfe is not aware of anything at this time.

Sen. Suzio, Co-Chair of the Children's Committee, explained there were changes in juvenile laws going back to 2015 which have a significant impact on this issue. The most significant changes are in the law enforcement areas – it must be in the best interests of the juvenile and protection of the community – and both must be met. Few judges are enthusiastic about putting kids behind bars, and there is a catch and release policy for local law enforcement officers. Sen. Suzio strongly believes the changes in the law are a detriment to the community and children, and he is working to get the law changed for either of the criteria.

Q. With owners locking cars with key fobs leaving finger prints on the door, can other DNA be found on the doors.

A. DNA can be taken from the recovered stolen cars. Chief Dryfe noted that the fingerprints and DNA of juveniles is not in the data base to match up.

Q. When there is illegal use of credit cards at a gas station, there could be reading of the license plate by security cameras.

A. Chief Dryfe said in such instances there is retail outlet video reading, and not someone driving a stolen car. When arrests are made it is out-of-town kids...they piggyback with the credit card sales/stolen wallet to link back to the crime in town.

Q. The State Legislature has made some changes...people get caught they get community service; or take kids on a tour of the Cheshire Correctional Facility. We should find out what is going on nationwide with this problem and get answers.

A. CPD is in a collaborating effort with towns outside Cheshire, and if there is something out there CPD will know about it.

Q. Thanks to CPD and Town Council for all they are doing. A car was stolen at 6:15 p.m. in the neighborhood, and everyone was made aware as this is what good citizens do. Request made for CPD to provide information/list so people can protect themselves. Lock your cars; strip the car of everything inside; put garage door opener inside the house; key fobs can be wrapped in tin foil (inside house) to stop someone from starting a car.

A. Chief Dryfe suggested a 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. routine – insure your car is locked; key fob should be out of range of the vehicle; and the #1 thing to prevent being victimized is locking your cars.

Rep. Fishbein expressed his sensitivity to this issue as he has gone through the theft of his personal car. He also spoke about juvenile criminal activity, noting that without parental permission, a juvenile's statement is inadmissible. This could be changed with a future legislative act. Rep. Fishbein talked about the importance of courts looking at victim restitution.

Rep. Linehan commended the great group of legislators representing Cheshire, and providing judges with a tool to help children on both issues. As a community, Cheshire neighborhoods can start community watch programs, neighbors looking out for neighbors, check garage doors, get phone numbers, and check on activity in the neighborhood.

Rep. Zupkus serves on the Public Safety and Children's Committee. She commented on the need to work together; look out for ourselves and each other; and the legislature working on the issues of concern.

Sen. Suzio said JJPOC will be working on changes in the law, and the effect of juvenile crime and correlation in the law. He hopes to get the laws changed for the good of the juveniles and the community.

Councilor Nichols commented on the importance of getting children to be responsible, and people being good neighbors, looking out for each other. People should band together, and it will make a difference in Cheshire.

Councilor Flynn-Harris thanked everyone for attending the information session. She said people are listening and this presentation will be on the town government access cable station. She noted there are so many questions for the CPD and Council about what is being done about the situation in Cheshire. Ms. Flynn-Harris advised there have been many discussions between the CPD and Council; they are paying attention; no one is immune to this problem; and citizens can contact the Council, CPD or State Legislators.

Councilor Bowman thanked everyone for coming to the information session. He stated it is important for people to know the CPD and Council are persistent and diligent, and will not let this situation go. There is hope for a better resolution and soon.

Councilor Veleber thanked the people who attended the session. The presentation was informative and educational, with the CPD's campaign for locked houses, car doors, and garage doors. If the preventive program is a success, these criminals will not be coming back to Cheshire...they will know CPD and the Council are out there.

Chairman Oris stated the Council and CPD are with the community members on this serious issue. The CPD officers are on it; Councilor/Police Chief/Town Manager/Assistant Town Manager phone numbers and e-mail addresses are on the website for public contact. Everyone is working hard for the community.

## **5. ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman Oris closed the public information session at 8:32 p.m.

Attest:

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Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk