

Community Meeting Regarding Recent Incidents in Woodley Park
April 23, 2014

Panel: Councilmember Mary Cheh (DC Council), Captain Melvin Gresham (MPD 2D), Chief Terrell Wilson (Chief of Police, Smithsonian National Park), Director Dennis Kelly (Smithsonian National Zoo), Captain Lance Ware (WMATA Metro Police).

Co-sponsors: Woodley Park ANC Commissioners Lee Brian Reba, Catherine May, Gwen Bole, and Jeff Kaliel; Woodley Park Community Association.

Moderator: Dr. Peter Brusoe

Minutes: Dr. Stephanie Zobay

Dr. Brusoe called the meeting to order at 7:35pm. The format of the meeting was outlined as follows: The panel would speak about the incidents on April 14 and April 21 as it pertained to their organization and then the floor would be opened for community questions, with one question allowed per member, until all initial questions were asked. Then a second question could be posed to the panel.

Councilmember Cheh requested to make opening remarks. She noted that it was important to know what happened in the first and second incident, and, given that plans were in place, what went wrong. Looking forward, what do we do to prevent future incidents? Is there an alternative for young people to engage in during spring break other than congregating at the zoo?

Capt. Gresham noted that on April 14, 2014 shots were fired near the 2600 block of Woodley Road, NW. Three people were subsequently stopped but did not have enough evidence to press any charges, as there were no positive IDs made. The motive is unknown as to why shots were fired into the air. No property damage or injuries were reported. Several agencies (Metro police, Zoo police, Homeland Security, MPD) exchanged intelligence information.

Capt. Ware noted that the intelligence exchange indicated some gang members wanted to meet at the Zoo and fight. More police/security forces were put in place at the Metro station. Patrons acting orderly were let into the Metro Station. Those acting disorderly were not allowed into the station, but directed down the street. Subsequent reports noted some of these individual jumped the metro gates at U Street/Cardoza Station. They became belligerent at Gallery Place, and were headed toward Union Station. All agencies were given this heads up. On April 21st, disorderly groups attempted to enter the Woodley Park metro. They were diverted and tried to access the metro at Dupont Circle and Foggy Bottom, ultimately catching a bus at Foggy Bottom. Victims were located at 3000 Connecticut Avenue NW and the intersection of Calvert St and Connecticut Avenue NW.

Chief Wilson noted that on Monday April 14, 2014 there were a few skirmishes at the Zoo in which the Park police took action and dispelled anything substantial. Councilmember Cheh asked for clarification of rumors that the Zoo pushed people out of the zoo and into the neighborhood before the incident occurred. Director Kelly clarified that the Zoo gates

were closed after the report of shots fired in Woodley Park had been received. An Active Shooter Protocol went into effect. No one was allowed into the Zoo at this point. The gates were closed at 1730 and the shots were fired at approximately 1700.

Regarding the Easter Monday event, there were a lot of families in the park early in the day. Intelligence communications noted social media indicators that possible disruptions could occur that day. Numerous patrols were assigned to monitor the Zoo. Later in the evening several large groups formed, becoming unruly to a degree, engaging in inappropriate behavior, and were asked to leave the Park. These groups went toward Connecticut Avenue. All law enforcement support agencies were in the park providing support and help. Zoo police were able to calm the situation in the Zoo. Councilmember Cheh asked MPD why weren't the groups who were asked to leave the Zoo followed by MPD? Director Kelly commented that there were dozens of MPD officers on site when the shooting occurred and noted that there were dedicated police to follow the crowds. There was no way that the public could have been contained at that time. The Zoo police were trying to monitor the large groups coming into and out of the Zoo, trying to monitor all clusters. Councilmember Cheh followed up by asking what would the police do differently after the action report. Captain Gresham responded that fixed posts rather than fluid movement of officers might have helped, but it was a difficult situation to monitor with limited information. He noted that the victims might have been targeted and were not random shootings, and were not from the Woodley Park Community.

Capt. Ware: Crime statistics in the Metro are low. Most of the youth disturbances occur in Tenleytown. The police must observe people's rights to assemble and have free speech.

Dennis Kelly, Director of the National Zoo identified his first priority to be safety – of visitors, staff, the collection of animals and the public. He noted that the Zoo is tasked with saving species by educating the public through the understanding of the animal kingdom. He noted that two million people visit the Zoo each year and it is a favorite destination of families with children.

Easter Monday has been a tradition and has been evolving. The Zoo continues to work hard to make it a safe event. 16,000 people came this past Monday. This also means work regarding trash and noise. Preparations for safety were begun months in advance in conjunction with many agencies. While the Zoo attempts to make projections as to who is coming, incidents still occur. From the Zoo's perspective, they need to go back to the drawing board and rethink what is being done to make the Zoo as safe as possible.

Questions:

1. The police took extraordinary measures and did all you could, and simply could not stop this. Only reasonable conclusion is we cannot have this event any more. Show of hands, please?
2. Resident of Anacostia- groups are traveling from one end of city to the other. Message is gang violence is on the increase. Unacceptable to say we are going to provide basketball for these kids. Are we going to fund gang intervention experts to work with gangs with out politicizing the process? Councilmember Cheh commented that she would like all to think about alternatives for these teens, and

we need to look at the more deeply rooted and menacing problems. Captain Gresham noted that gangs in the city are an issue and there is an active Intel Unit, which does monitor social media sites. MPD is aggressively pursuing leads and will continue to do so.

3. Why is the zoo free of any type of search? Screening and magnetometers are in every other Smithsonian museum. Director Kelly: It would be difficult but something to be considered when the Zoo goes back to the drawing board. While every other Smithsonian does it, it will change the zoo.
4. Several statistics were provided regarding shootings, and the fact that gangs are threat to justice everywhere. Why has the city not addressed this problem before it got over here? We cannot run away from the problem. It wasn't a problem 4 years ago? What has happened? What can you do to work with community to let them know who the disruptive individuals are? Captain Gresham: He believes the 7th and 6th districts work closely with the community. There are Outreach program in both districts.
5. Why hasn't the Zoo hasn't implemented TSA type security checkpoints? What future security measures can be implemented? Director Kelly: There are lots of options and the Zoo is consulting with many experts. The Zoo used to have 11 entrances and they are trying to reduce this. The National Zoo is supported by the taxpayers and the legacy is to remain open from 6am to 8pm.
6. Was it confirmed that there were weapons in the Zoo? No weapons were reported or seen or known while visitors were in the zoo. In the neighborhood, no weapons were recovered.
7. Easter Monday is the problem day, maybe the Zoo should cancel the activities that draw the people.
8. Did you find the gun when the shots were fired in the air? No weapon found.
9. Clarification of chain of events? Did shooting have anything to do with those forced out of the park? No evidence supports this. There was a cross-flow of people coming in and going out.
10. Regarding notification of schools in the area - what is the protocol for notifying the schools? Regarding the April 14 incident, no formal notice given to local schools, only personal notification was given to Aiden Montessori. In general schools are notified by a Twitter feed that you register for.
11. The tone of crowd outside the zoo was bad. How can you notify the community of potential incidents? Captain Gresham: The MPD is always in a position to do better and this can be considered going forward. Dr. Brusoe: There are neighborhood watch lists and there is a PSA Advisory group.

Dr. Brusoe noted that both David Catania and Muriel Bowser had staff members present at the meeting.

12. Are the suspects teenage males? As far as shooting go, yes, but there are female gangs in the area as well.
13. Resident called for help with traffic control this past week. Why were there not more police directing traffic, towing parked violators, etc. instead of just ticketing cars? Captain Gresham: MPD plans to improve on this.

14. Bike police were following large groups of youths. When will we know if event will happen in the future? Labor Day? Director Kelly: The issues occur around spring break and Easter Monday. The Zoo will work with the ANC to coordinate how we go through with this. Easter Monday is a 100-year-old tradition and how do we keep everyone safe? The Zoo will talk to folks in the Fall as that is when the planning is done for this event.
15. A ton of people and the police were in front of the zoo. Immediately before this, northbound Connecticut Avenue was closed. Was that related to this? Yes, the first victim was found at 1710 and the second victim was found at 1730.
16. Can there be more clear notification to the neighborhood watch list and schools when a massing of police occurs? Were there enough staff at the Zoo to handle portable magnetometers on Easter Monday? Don't know.
17. What is the attraction for rabble rousing on Easter Monday? Has that gone on for 100 years? Director Kelly: Not sure. A community member shared that the tradition was born of racism and segregation, stemming from when blacks were not invited to the White House Easter Egg Roll. The event has attracted crowd that do not want to celebrate peacefully. Some things outlive their usefulness.
18. Is there any possibility you might meet with community again to share updates? The community is not of one view. Director Kelly: yes
19. Considering CCTV: is there any footage of this happening? The Zoo does have CCTV but it won't scan across the street. Metro does not have any footage.
20. What about portable cameras in triangle? Captain Gresham: This is still an ongoing investigation. You can install personal cameras that monitor the doors of your establishment. Not sure if cameras on Connecticut Avenue will continue.
21. Violence tended to be later in the day – can you consider having a morning activity and end later in the day? Has violence been in afternoon to early evening? Captain Gresham: Both incidents in afternoon
22. What type of publicity was disseminated in the media informing the community of this event? Director Kelly: We want to consider every idea.
23. We urge the police to be aware of Spring Break and man up -- there are too many people for the police to handle.
24. Has the Zoo coordinated with local businesses and ascertained what their needs are going forward? Director Kelly: The Zoo is a member of the local Business Association and is in communication with those merchants. They know when busy seasons are. What about security for them? The Zoo partners with MPD for security outside the Zoo.
25. Are there other times throughout the year with this same potential? Weekends, summer? Historically we have not seen problems except Spring Break and Easter Monday.
26. Thanks to all on the panel for trying to help out.
27. What type of event would have to occur for a more dramatic response? Captain Gresham: Each and every incident predicates a different response.
28. Any indication that people are from outside the city coming in to the city to raise Cain? Captain Gresham: Yes, many from are from Maryland, Temple Hills and Hyattsville.
29. What is the outreach to other neighborhoods? Who has gone to that neighborhood to communicate? Captain Gresham: The School Resource Division and Outreach

Coordinators are in the 6th and 7th Districts. These teens don't come to see animals; they come to socialize. We need to give them events to socialize.

30. Can the event be shut down for the safety of community? Director Kelly: We will have a plan next fall.
31. Is there a citizens advisory group to the Zoo? It is called FONZ (Friends of the National Zoo).
32. Would anyone be interested to come to Anacostia Library on Good Hope Road to talk about working on solutions? We have to be one city about this.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40pm.