



Stevens Square Community Organization
(612) 874-2840
<http://www.sscoweb.org>

Community Safety Meeting – September 22, 2016, 6:00 p.m. at 1925 Nicollet Ave.

Present: Aaron Szczech and Corwin Morton, co-chairs; Ward 6 City Council Member Abdi Warsame and policy aide Abdi Salah; Kathy Waite and Eric Dison, Minneapolis Police department; Matt Wilcox, City Attorney's office; Wendy Lowry, MN Adult & Teen Challenge; Rob Helmerichs, Rand Management; Emily Hyle, Stevens Community Apartments; Kori Kontz and Maris, Starbucks Coffee; Kirstin Wiegmann, Reverie Café + Bar; Ken Strobel, Howard Penas, Dee Tvedt, Michele McGaughey, Maureen Wells, Lindsay Mutegi, Paul Rede, Jessica F., Debra Behrens, Aria Campbell, Bill Ogren, Brie Luten, Daniel Fredrickson, Kathleen, Brad, and SSCO staff Steve Gallagher, Robert Skafte, Khalid Salah, Dave Delvoe

Note: A sheet with some of the printed information presented at this meeting is available at this [link](#) or by request.

Next Community Safety meeting: Thursday, October 27, at 6 p.m. at 1925 Nicollet Ave.

Neighborhood-related safety ideas and concerns: open discussion.

Topic: Complaints from community members about disorderly, harassing, intimidating, threatening, and violent behavior involving groups of non-resident males.

Presentation by the SSCO safety coordinator: [Information about 101 arrests of 17 repeat offenders](#) from 1/1/15 to 9/18/16 in the area from Lyndale Ave to 4th Ave, I-94 to 24th St. Repeat offenders, none of whom give an address in the neighborhood, include Jibril Osman Abdi (7/25/80), Nooh Mohamud Abdille (1/1/82), Dahir Yussuf Aden (1/1/85), Abdisemed Mohamed Ali (1/1/70), Ahmed Adan Ali (1/1/80), Mohamed Hassan Ali (1/1/79), Abdi Mohamed Areis (1/1/85), Ahmeddahir Mohamed Areis (1/1/89), Mohamed Ahmed Farah (1/1/84), Ahmed Omar Haji-Mohamud (4/1/76), Ahmed Abdi Hired (1/1/86), Omar Abdirahman Ibrahim (1/1/89), Ahmed Ahmed Jama (7/27/81), Ahmed Abdulahi Mohamed (1/1/86), Nur Abdirahman Mohamed (1/1/78 or 1/21/79), Sharmake Abdullahi Mohamed (1/1/90), Abdullahi Yasin Muse (1/1/82). Arrests include alcohol-related violations, public urination, trespassing, aggressive panhandling, disorderly conduct, assault, indecent conduct, criminal damage to property, weapons violation, and robbery. The groups first appeared in the spring of 2015 and the problems have since continued unabated. Hot spots include Stevens Square Park, MN Adult & Teen Challenge, LaSalle Community Garden, the 17th Street Overlook garden, Loring Nicollet Alternative School, Plymouth Congregational Church, Nicollet Ave businesses and bus stops. So far, the strategies used by law enforcement and SSCO have not succeeded at deterring or reducing this criminal behavior. Why are these groups here and what can be done to solve the problem?

Comments and questions from community members and public officials

- Community member: Groups of three to thirteen congregate and wander around the neighborhood during daytime hours, harassing residents.
- 5th Precinct Inspector Kathy Waite: Police receive calls regarding the homeless population and have been meeting with social service agencies to determine ways to help those who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Many of those involved have a lack of productive things to do during the day after the shelters close in the morning, and instead loiter at bus stops (or ride the buses) or wander around the neighborhoods. The Franklin-Nicollet beat officers do a great job of responding to complaints about people engaged in livability crimes, but the situation on the streets can still be uncomfortable for many neighborhood residents.
- Community member: Female staff at a local coffee shop is worried about safety late at night; the situation has gotten worse over the past couple of months.

- Ward 6 City Council Member Abdi Warsame: I empathize with those who are suffering as a result of this problem. The same issues have surfaced in and around Eliot Park. About 20 males – maybe some of the same individuals – have been loitering at that park, often intoxicated and harassing others. Widespread concerns emerged at a recent community meeting in that area, including information that some offenders were getting into a housing tower for seniors. There are also similar complaints in the area around Peavey Park. The immediate response for the person(s) being harassed is to call 911 and ask that police respond. Our office has just become aware of the similar problems in Stevens Square and appreciates the information about what is happening and who is involved.
- Community members: Where are these groups coming from and why are they here? There are concerns about the same groups among residents of Public Housing high rises in the neighborhood.
- Community member: When these groups appear, the situation is often ambiguous for residents. It can be confrontational; the individuals approach and stand very close; they often fight among themselves; it can be very intimidating; and then they move on.
- Community members: It sounds like the groups are resistant to traditional police methods; they are not deterred by the threat of arrest or jail and continue to return to the same places to offend again. It appears that the groups feel comfortable causing trouble here.
- Community member: The groups have caused trouble at LaSalle Community Garden all summer, passing out in the garden plots, publicly urinating and defecating, drinking, harassing and threatening gardeners. When one talks with them, they often apologize, leave, and then come back the next day and continue to offend. Other groups who have loitered there in the past have been much more respectful when asked to leave or pick up their trash. Posting No Trespassing signs – and calling 911 to have police enforce them – has helped. SSCO has worked with the 5th Precinct and Community Attorney Matt Wilcox on trespassing enforcement there.
- Ward 6 policy aide Abdi Salah: Businesses complain about people soliciting their customers for money; issuing the offenders trespass notices is an effective tactic to keep them away.
- Sgt Eric Dison: I reached out to local businesses before this meeting, and a number of them expressed interest and agreed to attend. The nearby liquor store refuses to serve the people they know who cause trouble in the neighborhood, but in many instances the groups then recruit others to buy liquor for them. Staff at a local coffee shop is afraid of the groups, who don't comply when asked to leave or move on. The 5th Precinct is focused on the community garden and has made many arrests there this summer, often of repeat offenders who return to that same location.
- CM Warsame: I suspect that many of those who cause the problems suffer from mental illness and substance abuse. It's hard to talk about these subjects in their own community. The City has no policy or plan to address these problems – it is still figuring things out. There is no panacea. It's a big problem and it will take a holistic approach by the Mayor and other Council Members to solve it. The livability of neighborhoods throughout the city needs to be equal. Public safety is the immediate priority and we need to make gains right away. My experience of being threatened by one of the offenders in Eliot Park shows that this is a problem that potentially affects everyone, including public officials. We need a big police presence in areas where these problems occur. In the long term, the concentration of halfway houses and treatment centers in certain neighborhoods – especially Stevens Square – is a problem that needs to be addressed.
- Community member: In January, MN Adult & Teen Challenge staff came to this committee with similar complaints about groups of intoxicated males harassing, soliciting, exposing themselves to the female staff and residents of this treatment center to the extent that the residents were not allowed to go outside the building except when being transported. Thanks to CPS Chelsea Adams who conducted a security survey and recommended safety measures – including posting No Trespassing signs – and to the officers who increased patrols in the area, the problem subsided. Residents now participate in Block Patrol and engage in daily activities outdoors in the neighborhood.
- Community member: If mental illness is an issue, how do police put a mental health hold on someone who appears to be in crisis?
- Sgt Dison: I and many other officers have participated in crisis intervention training. The problem is that there is very limited space in mental health crisis facilities in the state. HCMC will often evaluate adult patients and then release them back to the streets. The situation is worse for juveniles.
- 5th Precinct Community Attorney Matt Wilcox: Placing a mental health hold on an individual raises civil rights issues. There is a high standard to be met, and a hold triggers a legal process and timeline.
- Community members: If one encounters a person who appears to be in crisis, one option is to call [COPE](tel:6125961223) (Community Outreach for Psychiatric Emergencies) at (612) 596-1223 and request the help of a County mobile crisis team. For immediate assistance for homeless people on the street, call [St Stephen's Street Outreach](tel:6128797624) at (612) 879-7624. There is a lack of psychiatric facility beds nationwide; on a per capita basis, Minnesota shamefully ranks last in the nation. The issue of increasing mental health services needs to be addressed locally, statewide, and nationally. Work with elected officials, join advocacy organizations.

- Community members: If calling 911 is working in certain situations, how do we get others to call? If it involves a business, let staff know what is happening and ask them to call. Businesses can also conduct routine periodic checks of their perimeter to see if there are any problems outside which might be deterring customers from entering. One approach is to first ask troublemakers to leave, and then call 911 if they refuse.
- Inspector Waite: Put the message about calling 911 on social media; let neighbors know that if they want a police response, call 911. The 5th Precinct can help get the word out via gov.delivery and its e-newsletter. Once a person has called 911, it's appropriate to call back and ask for an update on the call if there's no police response within a reasonable amount of time. This can actually speed up the response. If anything about the situation changes, call 911 back with an update.
- Community member: SSCO could post flyers or notices about calling 911 at apartment buildings. "If you see something, say something."
- Policy aide Abdi Salah: The 17 repeat offenders can have a bad effect on businesses. The Ward 6 office has begun reaching out to businesses along Nicollet Ave. The goal is to bring together businesses regardless of race or national origin to work proactively to build a stronger community.
- Community member: In regard to the community garden, it would help to make the area safer by cleaning up brush and cutting back trees and shrubs to open up the sight lines. Sgt Dison has contacts with MNDOT who might be able to help with the area along the freeway fence.
- Community member: There has been a hot discussion of the problems on Nextdoor. Social media can present a challenge (harsh responses, personal attacks) when people try to interact online to solve problems. Is there a culturally specific approach for Somali community members to address mental illness?
- Council Member Warsame: No. The concept of mental illness is a new phenomenon for the Somali community. People are not used to it. The Ward 6 policy aide met recently with a Somali organization that wants to start dealing with this problem – they may be willing to come to an SSCO meeting. In any case, there is a need to educate the Somali community about mental illness and treatment.
- Community member: If one approaches a group of males and strikes up a conversation, it appears that they are not aware that they are causing problems or harsasing anyone. They are mostly trying to be funny, not aggressive. Granted, it can be difficult to do this when there are a dozen or more males involved who are intoxicated. But the community's perception of the intent of the behavior may be wrong. We need to figure out safe ways to approach strangers – which is part of what Block Patrol does.
- Sgt Dison: The prevalence of mobile phones has diminished the amount of social interaction and increased the number of potential crime victims on the streets. People need to pay attention to what's happening around them.
- Matt Wilcox: Much of the behavior that upsets the community may not be illegal, and the police and City Attorney take that into account when they respond to calls or consider charging cases. It will take a holistic effort – beyond, but including, law enforcement – to solve these problems.

The committee thanked Council Member Warsame and Inspector Waite for participating in this discussion. Updates on the topic will be presented at the meeting on 10/27.

Meeting adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

Meeting minutes prepared by Dave Delvoye.