



## **Oakwatch: The Oakland Code Enforcement Project Meeting Minutes**

Wednesday, July 15, 2020, 6:00 – 7:30 pm via Zoom.

**Oakwatch Mission:** The Oakland Code Enforcement Project works to improve the quality of life in Oakland by bringing people and institutions together to identify code violations, advocate for their remediation and monitor the outcomes.

**Present:** Andrea Boykowycz (OPDC), Liz Gray (OPDC), Bruce Kraus (Councilman, District 3), Eric Macadangdang (President, Pitt Student Government Board), Matt Landy (Associate Director Student Conduct University of Pittsburgh), Sergeant Ron Griffin, Leah Friedman (City of Pittsburgh Office of Community Affairs), Gwen Bolden (Pittsburgh Parking Authority), Officer David Shiffrin (Police Zone 4), Sarah Kinter (Permits Licenses and Inspections), Tyler Viljaste (Pitt Student Government Board), Mavis Rainey (OTMA), Commander Daniel Hermann (Police Zone 4), John Tokarski (Department of Public Safety), Alex Toner (Office of Community and Government Relations, University of Pittsburgh), Megan Naji (Intern - OPDC), Jamie Ducar (Office of Community and Government Relations, University of Pittsburgh), Trisha Margiotti (Off Campus Housing, University of Pittsburgh), Mark Oleniacz (SONG), Elena Zaitsoff, JoAnn Cohen, Officer Guy Johnson (Pitt Police)

### **I. Introductions | Elena Zaitsoff, Chair**

### **II. Public Safety**

- a. Commander Hermann reported: Zone 4 only has 2 webcams right now; city has ordered 30 more to accommodate remote meetings. Between June 1 – July 15, 3 robberies, 6 burglaries, 10 thefts from persons, 7 thefts from residents. Individual stats not immediately available. 41 part 1 crimes total. 33 arrests, mostly for simple assault (10) robbery (3), fleeing/eluding (1), marijuana possession (2), possession of controlled substances (1), indecent exposure (1), criminal trespass (1), disorderly conduct (4), theft-related other. Liz noted that Panther Hollow Bar on Semple is transferring its license to a new operator, will be re-opening. Cmdr. Hermann noted there's a camera in that area to capture any suspicious activity. JoAnn asked if City Council had approved a program to reduce theft from auto, does anyone have any information about that? No.
- b. John Tokarski notes that public safety meetings are all remote; Zone 4 meeting tomorrow will be remote via Zoom, not in-person at the JCC as originally planned. Resumption of citizen police academies tonight via Zoom, continuing for the next 5 weeks. Currently in the planning stages for conducting the academies again in the fall. National Night Out now October 6. Committee is asking cities to pull back on sizeable events, emphasis more on local neighbor-oriented events. JoAnn asked about a brochure she saw entitled "what to do if police come to your door?" – felt

this would be helpful information for people to have, as unexpected visits from police can be discomfiting. John said he would look into this.

- c. Officer Johnson: 11 reported incidents in June, only 1 arrest; some criminal mischief on campus, graffiti seems to be a problem at the moment. 4 thefts on campus. Many student athletes on campus right now, at the Bridge and other buildings; more coming in next week. They're required to self-quarantine for 14 days. Commander Hermann noted Zone 4 is following up on the graffiti complaints. Arrested 2 women for tagging the Columbus statue today. Expecting Columbus Day and Election Day will precipitate more.

### **III. City Councilman Bruce Kraus**

- a. Following up on Residential Permit Parking Program changes – Bruce is picking up from Councilperson Strassburger, still getting up to speed. Current conditions are not as bad as they could be given students are not as present and bars and restaurants are closed; but Oakland is clogged with vehicles and the hospital workers continue to come to work. Bruce has been working with Chief of Staff Gilman to see what can be done to re-introduce RPPP enforcement. The City has a contractual obligation to honor the permits residents have purchased by enforcing the rules. Liz is concerned there's no enforcement and the coincidence of street paving by PWSA – PWSA will be re-paving all the lead line replacement patches on Central Oakland streets at the worst possible time. Bruce noted there are cost reasons for lumping all the re-surfacing together. Suggested Rachel Rampa at PWSA would be a good person to talk to. Elena said she doesn't understand why meters can be enforced but RPPP can't. Gwen reported all areas are enforced for meters as of July 1, including the surface lots. Rationale for prioritizing meters over RPPP enforcement is with restaurants not being fully open, and that being a good portion of why RPPP exists in most areas – it's not a high priority. But anecdotally, some people who have leases in the garages are foregoing renewing them in favor of hunting for spaces on the streets. Bruce noted that we have an obligation to enforce the rules and that meter/parking lease revenue is the only commuter tax Pittsburgh can levy, an essential component of city's budget solvency and pension funding obligations. Andrea noted that there are still open spaces on the street, there's a reduction of the number of commuters coming into Oakland by car, felt it likely this was due to people teleworking, not convinced that correlation of reduced RPPP enforcement implies causation in the case of people canceling leases in the PPA garages.
- b. Rental registration. Asking Sarah Kinter to weigh in on this. Bruce noted the biggest obstacle to implementing a rental registration law is the Realtors Association – city has spent a lot of years in court battling with the Realtors Association on this issue. Sarah concurs. PLI has been ramping up the requirements, feels the city will win the fight; PLI created rules and regulations for enforcement in 2018; built model for implementation into OneStopPGH. Ready to go, but the legal battle has been very long. Bruce noted Air BNB has become a nightmare all over the city, being used for out-of-control parties. Air BNB is aware of this issue and is implementing some restrictions in their agreements. Elena noted that over-occupancy of Air BNBs is a problem; Air BNB doesn't take any responsibility for the actions of renters. Liz observed that we have landlords have tenants who are in turn renting the apartments out as Air BNBs, not actually living there. Liz asked what court the Rental Registration issue is in right now – Sarah confirmed

it's in Common Pleas court with Judge James. Crux of the argument has shifted to the fee for service. PLI conducted a city-wide fee schedule study, came up with a sliding scale fee to recoup costs for PLI's inspections; PLI confident the fees are reasonable and well-founded, feels the city is well-positioned to win this particular argument.

- c. Lawn Street Promenade and the Capital Budget. Committee is taking a tour on Friday 2:00 pm. Bruce did submit this project on the wish list for the second year in a row. Feels very encouraged that the city's committee is coming to investigate.
- d. Oakland Gateway Ventures – Bates Street Properties. Bruce's understanding is the partnership is bankrupt and a few of its representatives have fled town. The city has discussed taking the properties under conservatorship and appending them to Zulema Parklet. Sarah noted that the city can't just take people's property, and that the conservatorship program is pretty narrow. No precedent for eminent domaining these properties, so the city is stuck. The city is filing criminal complaints here, the problem is tracking down the owner, and if there's no service from the court there's no way to proceed. Liz noted that one of the partners, Bob Dauer, is a partner in a law firm downtown, believes that the magistrate's office has a warrant for his arrest. PLI is in discussions with the City law department to determine how to compel conformity. Bruce notes that it's impossible to continually return to the public and just say there's nothing that can be done about it. Perhaps this is an issue to be fought at the state or federal level. We have to have a better answer than 'our hands are tied.' Sarah noted there's no timeframe in which condemnation has to be abated.
- e. Bruce noted how appreciative he is of the presence and engagement of Pitt's SGB at this meeting.
- f. Re: COVID - Things are probably going to get a little worse before they get better. Tremendous uncertainty. Enormous harm has been done to the city budget – we're currently \$130m down, which is a staggering shortfall. There will be painful decisions to be made in the near future.
- g. JoAnn asked if anything could be done to support landlords who might need help.

#### **IV. News from City & County Departments**

- a. Leah: moratorium on evictions has been extended through August 31. Eligible residents can apply for rental and mortgage assistance if needed, part of the CARES rent relief and URA's Housing Stabilization Program.
  - County programs: <https://covidrentrelief.alleghenycounty.us/>
  - URA programs: <https://www.ura.org/pages/housing-opportunity-fund-programs>
  - The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency: <https://www.phfa.org/pacares/>City has partnered with Allegheny Health Network to provide extra support to first responders who are fielding many more stressful calls lately. Leah's email is [leah.friedman@pittsburghpa.gov](mailto:leah.friedman@pittsburghpa.gov).
- b. Gwen: anxious to get enforcement teams back, it's slow-coming.
- c. Sarah: BuildingEye has not been updated in a while because of some new features that have been built into the system – but it's going live this week and there will be more information

available in following a parcel through the court system, etc. Sarah would like to present these new features at the next Oakwatch meeting.

**V. News from our university partners, Q&A:**

- a. Liz asked Alex about revisions to the Be a Good Neighbor program – Eric noted the community compact is under faculty and staff review right now. Alex notes that the university continues to plan for classes to begin on the 19th, working with health department guidelines. Trying to space out student arrival to avoid crowds. Semester will be condensed, no residence after Thanksgiving. Working with 5 local hotels to house some students for the upcoming term. University will be encouraging students to wear masks, providing orientation for all faculty staff and students. Rolled out a resilience plan in which all staff and faculty are encouraged to work from home wherever possible. Expect to see a lower-than-usual employee presence on campus. Pitt police are continuing to patrol as usual, CGR and SGB would like to work with them and community partners to find some new ways to communicate with students about responsibilities to follow public health guidelines as well as good neighbor relations. Non-athletes are not being required to quarantine as they return to campus. Eric noted university guidance for students to self-quarantine should be out mid-August.
- b. Tyler: SGB is still sponsoring free legal services, including guides for community residents looking for legal assistance (<http://sgb.pitt.edu/student-services/student-legal-services/>); community compact was drafted last month, currently under final review, expected to be published to the community shortly; community check-in event open to all Pitt community members, an opportunity for students to ask questions and share concerns, feel free to submit questions or comments using this link: <https://www.facebook.com/events/302446081135271/>

**Next Oakwatch meeting:** Wednesday, September 16, 2020, 6 - 7:30 pm

**Featured speaker:** Ian Reynolds, Disruptive Properties

**Via:** ZOOM

**Contact Oakwatch:** [lgray@opdc.org](mailto:lgray@opdc.org) or 412.335-0933