

May 21, 2018 Northside/Chatham Heights Neighborhood Meeting

Martinsville City Council toured the Northside/Chatham Heights area on May 21, 2018 beginning at 5:30pm. Those present for the tour were Council Member Hodge, Council Member Lawson, and Vice Mayor Martin. Council Member Bowles and Mayor Teague were not present for the tour. Staff participating included City Manager Leon Towarnicki, Assistant City Manager Wayne Knox, Police Chief Eddie Cassady, Inspector Andy Powers, Building Inspector Kris Bridges, Inspector Mark Price, and Officer Coretha Gravely. Mickey Powell from the Martinsville Bulletin also attended the tour. The tour traveled from City Hall to Dillard Street to look at a recently completed project and noting a couple of homes that could qualify for demo list. The tour continued from Liberty Street to Grayson Street, Clearview to Chatham Heights, through Banks, Myrtle, and Banner Streets then onto Cherokee Trail where there was damage from the recent flood. The tour concluded back at City Hall at 6:30pm. Towarnicki said it is good to get out in the neighborhood and discuss any issues that need to be addressed.

The Northside/Chatham Heights Neighborhood Meeting was held at Clearview Wesleyan Church, 925 Barrows Mill Road, Martinsville, VA at 7:30 PM, with Vice Mayor Chad Martin presiding. Other Council Members present included Council Member Kathy Lawson, and Council Member Sharon Hodge. Mayor Teague and Council Member Bowles were not present. Staff present: City Manager Leon Towarnicki, Clerk of Council Karen Roberts, Assistant City Manager Wayne Knox, Assistant Police Chief Eddie Cassady, Police Chief Sean Dunn, Officer Coretha Gravely, Inspector Andy Powers, and Inspector Mark Price.

Vice Mayor Martin called the meeting to order. City Manager Towarnicki detailed what to expect for the meeting and summarized the neighborhood tour.

Mark Price, Property Maintenance Inspector summarized inspections, notices and recognized those properties that required action. Price shared his contact number for citizens that would like to contact him with concerns. Price explained that all complaints are posted to the City website and follow-up documented if the complaint is valid or invalid and any action taken or needed.

A Martinsville resident expressed concerns about neighbor's overgrown backyard. Price explained that if the majority of the yard is cut and if he cannot see the overgrowth from the road, he might be limited on what he can do but would check into that property tomorrow.

Andy Powers, Inspections and Fire Marshall described the procedure for how a notice is issued and what happens after that. Powers explained that the notice is posted to the front door or window of any property that is not compliant. If the property is found to be compliant, the report will still be listed on the website. If a resident specifically wants a call back, please specify that request for a call back since that response is not always automatic. Callers with complaints should provide a name, contact number and address for records, however that information is kept confidential.

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George Sloan, 218 Grayson Street questioned a neighbor's tree leaning over his home and asked what options he may have. Powers explained the ordinance and requirements and the property would be looked at however, for tree complaints and because of having to get a licensed contractor involved, sometimes it could take several weeks or over a month to resolve the issue. Towarnicki and City Attorney Monday explained theoretically, if tree limbs are over hanging a property line then the property owner has the right to cut those limbs. If the tree or limbs fall and damage property, then the property owner where the tree or limb fell from can be held responsible for damages. Monday recommended sending a certified letter to the neighbor to make them aware of the tree and risk.

Zeke Zanotos of 619 Watt Street explained that the property down the road is vacant and there are trees down. He says the notice has been posted and asked the procedure of what to expect next. Powers explained the procedure of inspection, posting the violation with a time frame to have it corrected. There will be an additional reinspection and if the violation still exists then it is reported to public works where the property will be corrected and the owner billed. There has been some discussion about habitual offenders. Once a structure becomes unsafe, the home can be condemned and possibly demolished.

Richard Ingram, 900 Glade Street asked what the maximum limit was for untagged vehicles on a property. Inspector Powers explained that residents are allowed one untagged vehicle as long as it is shielded from view. He went on to explain that inspectors could not look under car covers or inside buildings.

Frances Ashburn, 113 Roselawn Heights expressed concerns about rats in the area and residents not maintaining property. She expressed concern about traffic coming in and out of the street throughout the day and night, cars parking on the side of the road and she said there is something bad going on in that area. Police Chief Cassady introduced Officer Chase Bennett, one of the neighborhood resource officers for this area. Cassady confirmed that they have increased police patrol in that area because of suspected illegal activities.

Deborah Hopkins of Barrows Mill Road expressed concern about tractor-trailers traveling her road and exceeding the speed limit, stating that there are numerous children in the area. There has been damage to the road and even damage to a neighbor's water meter because of the heavy traffic. Hopkins explained that the Police Departments speed monitor was further down the street and did not seem to make a difference in the speed of the tractor-trailers. Cassady explained a lot of the traffic is from the industrial party and the County is cutting timber off land further up the road. He explained that 6-7am, 10am-1230pm and 5-6pm are the highest data of speeders. Cassady will reach out to First Piedmont regarding their trucks and they will increase patrol in that area to hopefully deter speeders. Richard Ingram said Glade Street was the same with speeders and requested increased patrol.

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Debbie Sloan, 218 Grayson Street expressed concern about their neighbors, the children they babysit and the noise ordinance and asked if there an ordinance that controls children outside all-day and playing until late at night. Sloan said the children have no respect for the neighbors and they throw their trash on the ground. She said there is traffic in and out all day and night. She expressed concern about an apartment where the property owner evicted tenants, stating that the tenants left three dogs in the apartment for 3-4 days and claims that the landlord is already renting the apartment out again without cleaning it. City Attorney Monday explained that there is not an ordinance for this type of situation, the ordinance only affects noise from 10pm-7am. Monday said the City staff is very familiar with the home she was referencing. Under the Code of Virginia, when the City is unable to provide the relief a resident requires – any five citizens can petition the Grand Jury to panel any situation to be a nuisance. Unfortunately, that is where it tends to stop because people do not want to affix their name to the complaint. If the Grand Jury finds this location to be a nuisance, they can require the property owner to take action. Unfortunately, if a resident is unwilling to associate their name to the complaint there may be nothing that can be done. Monday suggested using a cell phone to record incidents for a record that would be admissible in court. Officer Gravely is familiar with the property residents and says the tenant has six children of her own along with her sisters 3 children. Inspector Kris Bridges explained that proving occupancy of a home is difficult so it is difficult to prove a family size even with those guidelines defined in the building code.

Police Chief Cassady asked residents to report unsupervised children especially if they are in the street or at risk of being hurt. Resident should call and report those concerns to the Police Department immediately.

Vice Mayor Martin encouraged residents to take one of Officer Bennett's cards and contact him if needed.

Pat McCain lives in the County on Augusta Street but uses City services and says everyone appreciates the City employees and everything they do.

Vice Mayor Martin thanked those residents for coming out and sharing their concerns
There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:22pm.

Karen Roberts
Clerk of Council

Gene Teague
Mayor