

SAFETY COMMITTEE

November 7, 2006

4:00 P.M.

The meeting of the Safety Committee was called to order by Councilman Franklin, Chairman, with Councilmen Benson, Rico, Page, Robinson, Pierce, Bennett, Rutherford, and Gaines present. City Attorney Randall Nelson and Shirley Crownover, Assistant Clerk to the Council, were also present.

Others present included Daisy Madison, Chief Parks, and Chief Cooper.

Chairman Franklin called the meeting to order stating that this meeting was scheduled due to an incident in a previous Council meeting and that he would give an opening statement; that about three weeks ago Gary Ball and others from Highland Park were present at a Council meeting and other interested residents had joined in, and this had blossomed into a citywide concern based on crimes, burglaries, and police presence, and we have people speeding and causing problems in neighborhoods, and we are trying to work toward a solution with the Police Dept.. He added that District 5 and District 9 had signed on to things happening similar in their communities.

He went on to say that Chief Parks and Chief Cooper were here and other interested stake holders to address the problem and move forward with a resolution. He asked those in the audience to raise their hands if they wished to speak and that they would be allowed three minutes and then the Council would have some dialog as it relates.

Mr. Ben Parker of 28th St. was the first speaker. He stated that they had had a great meeting a few weeks ago involving Roger Tudor, Hayes Ledford and Chief Parks; that it had been a great meeting, and it really cleared up a lot. He stated that he represented business people; that some of this had been cleaned up, but they feared the problem had just moved somewhere else; that there had been shootings, and it got to the point that they had to get together as a group; that he had engineering people coming to his business and prostitutes were approaching them, and the situation was very dangerous. He went on to say that theft was continuing and at some point we had to address scrap dealers and the theft of copper. He stated that they wanted to work with the City Police Dept.; that drugs are coming in in trucks, and they could tell the police who they were—that they wanted to be eyes for the police. He stated that he would also like to address the Court System; that those being arrested were not staying in jail; that they would make a lot of progress and then the same people would come back. He stated that they did not have enough police; that the City as a whole needs help; that the criminals would just be pushed from one spot to another until the Court System changes.

Councilwoman Bennett asked if anyone present had been through the Citizens Police Academy.

Councilwoman Rutherford wanted to know if they normally cited people for prostitution through City Court or Sessions Court. Chief Parks responded that they go to Sessions Court, especially if they were in a certain distance from schools. Councilwoman Rutherford pointed out that it made a difference in fines if they went to Sessions Court. Chief Parks mentioned the Fox Team off of Rossville Blvd. that is focusing on prostitutes and street walkers. He mentioned one arrest on November 2nd at 5:00, noting that the person was let go and arrested again the next day—that this was the cycle they were dealing with. He noted that these people often go before magistrates. Councilwoman Rutherford stated that this was disgusting to her.

Councilman Benson stated that he liked the way the first person addressed the Council—that he addressed the Police and the Judicial involvement. He stated that the City could not hire enough policemen; that the problem was a breakdown of family, parenting, and the educational system. He made mention of the fact that we have no vocational training, and we need recreational opportunities; that we just can't look to the Police because that is a losing proposition. He stated that we had to look at the village, neighborhoods, neighborhood watches, and churches. He stated that he felt sorry for the Police because this was a breakdown in society.

Councilwoman Robinson asked Mr. Parker if she had heard him correctly when he said drugs were being delivered in a tractor-trailer truck. Mr. Parker mentioned prostitution, saying 6-8 would come at a time; that they park in a parking lot and the tractor-trailer truck is from Cleveland; that they had come four times in two days.

Mr. Gary Ball was the next speaker. He represented Ridgedale. He mentioned a man who had died two blocks from his office; that it was near homes of widows. He stated that he agreed with Councilman Benson that this is far-reaching; that people are “hunkered” down in houses, and you can't see their lights, and they have to live there, hoping that they can sell their property and move. He stated that he was just involved in this because of the people—that he was not wanting to cause trouble; that it was because these people had paid their dues and had no where to go. He stated that he tried to move people around and was working with the Police, and the Police were working with them with the assets they had. He made mention of the magistrates, noting that these guys were not community-concerned and just let people out; that they were letting people out, and they would be arrested again in a week. He stated that there were people that the Council could influence with other assets such as the School Board. He mentioned the 18-20 year old who shot the Hispanic guy—that he did not know if these boys were school drop-outs; that these gangs had nothing to do but to “stare” people down.

Mr. Ball went on to talk about rental property; that no one wanted to take rental people on, and they were the “scourge” of the City—they were slum lords collecting cash; that he could name the names of these people, but they donated to politicians and were protected, and they did not even have to get a business license.

Councilwoman Robinson wanted to know who these people were, and the names of Winston Knowles and Connie Fox were mentioned.

Mr. Ball stated that one ought to see how many properties CNE bought from Mr. Knowles. He stated that there should be some kind of strategy to resolve this and stated that the Council should listen to Chief Parks tell what he had learned about gangs; that gangs were on the horizon and that this would blow up.

Councilman Rico stated that he really appreciated what Gary Ball does in Ridgedale—that he is always there out in front trying to make a better neighborhood; that he does a good job.

Jim Malone was the next speaker, stating that he owned Malone Heat & Air. He asked if any of the Council had ever had a gun in their face—that he had and that it was not real funny; that he fought the man and that they hurt each other, and it was not fun. He stated that he had been broken into this past weekend and was spending a lot of money trying to stay alive; that they needed police protection; that he often worked at night and had to have a gun. He stated that people come over their fences in daylight and steal gas and coils out of air conditioners; that they did not know what to do—that they were stealing air conditioning equipment. He mentioned a church on Main Street where he had installed units, and these units were stolen—that this was pretty sad and something needs to happen; that you never saw a police car go by and questioned how many police we had; that he understood there was only three in this community and 18 policemen downtown; that we needed to spread the policemen around; that they need to be in the worst areas that are so bad; that things really get bad between November and December; that his insurance had gone up every year because of thefts, and they did not know what to do. He stated that this was not a joke anymore, and this was all he had to say.

Mary Sharp spoke next, as a landlord in Highland Park, Glenwood and Oak Grove. She stated that she was having problems with armed robbery and home invasions. She mentioned her concern about Glenwood Parkway, stating that she had not had these problems until this summer. She stated that she agreed with Councilman Benson—the problem was that youngsters had not had training; that she had noticed on television that in some prisons there are programs to train people while they are there; that in Los Angeles they get training in jail. She mentioned problems at 2601, 2603, and 2611 Glenwood Parkway and problems on Hickory St. and South Beech, with continuing trouble with drugs, especially on the corner where Officer Julie Jacks was killed.

At this point, Mr. Malone interjected that he felt the property where the City was proposing to build the Homeless Center was the worst thing for the City—that we needed to use the money to build a jail.

Ken Strickland spoke next concerning the house on Clio Avenue and thanked the Council for what they had done to help with this situation; however, he noted that the daughter of the owner still goes in the house at night. He stated that he was going to get a petition signed and everyone had to stick together; that people were breaking into Temple Baptist Church and also cutting tires. He asked that something be done about the other two houses.

Cynthia Cash, President of the North Brainerd Neighborhood Association, was the next speaker. First of all, she stated, she would love to take Councilman Benson on a tour of her community, where he would see that it was not just the youth causing problems—that grown men were training the youths; that they had training camps in the neighborhood—Eastdale and others; that there were gang members, drug corners, and camps. She stated that they had good, invested people in their neighborhood but also a lot of renters with unruly kids. She mentioned the recent incident at Frank's Grocery; that there was prostitution, and you also see parents on drugs; that kids are recruited into gangs. She stated that she was very proud to introduce Dr. Richard Brown, who is also a resident of the neighborhood. She stated that she did understand that we can't hire more officers and wanted to know what the plans were to combat crime that is on the increase. She wanted to know what they, as a neighborhood, could do to help, realizing that the Budget has already been approved for this year. However, she stated, they still needed something done—that they had two representatives on the Council, and the County Commission was also looking into this; that everyone needed to work collectively and do something to help parents and unruly kids. She stated that the elderly had paid their dues and bullies break into their homes—that these bullies know their patterns. She mentioned that Councilwoman Rutherford had suffered a killing in her district.

At this point Councilwoman Rutherford noted that Judge Moon had just come in and stated that she had visited all of the judges in the county; that Judge Moon had always given her advice and answers; that as for the shooting on Brainerd Rd., we just had to get “meaner” than they were.

Ms. Cash mentioned that a lady had been shot on Tunnel Blvd. and also a 13-year old had been shot on the corner. She mentioned a three-way shooting on Tunnel Blvd., stating that people just wanted to live safe, and this was scary. She stated that they wanted the crime stats in the community and were not here to make the Police Dept. look bad.

Dr. Richard Brown spoke next. He stated that he did live in the North Brainerd area, but wherever you lived, there were issues that were similar and some neighborhoods were besieged by crime and everyone seemed to want to throw up their hands and say there is not a solution. He stated that the purpose of government is to provide safety to its citizens and that they were asking for the Council's help. He stated that we would have an epidemic if we don't deal with this.

He went on to say that demographics change but you could not change quality and quantity; that elderly people are locked in their houses and wanted to know when they could come out again. He stated that this was not an indictment on Steve Parks nor Chief Cooper because he thought they really needed to hear this feedback. He went on to say that we needed a higher visibility of police in the neighborhoods because we are seeing the results of no visible police cars in neighborhoods. He stated that he would like to see enforcement of existing laws such as the open container law, loitering on street corners, and underage drinking. He noted that there were open drug deals and people were frustrated; that some were calling the District Attorney and local judges; that the Police Dept. was stretched thin, and we needed a Task Force. He urged everyone to take back our streets; that as it is now you can't drive an automobile through some neighborhoods, and citizens can't do anything about this. He reiterated that we need to take back the streets in the neighborhood at the end of the day; that if we continue this degradation, we won't have good neighborhoods; that people migrate out and renters move in. He mentioned a "Stop and Frisk" Program to get criminals off the street; that we as a community need to do something; that when you step up enforcement, there are always a lot of complaints and crime knows no race; that if the Police pledged to do this in their community, they would support them. He respectively asked the Council to create a Task Force in high-crime neighborhoods to take back these neighborhoods and get offenders locked up.

At this point, Chairman Franklin was going to recognize Judge Moon, but Councilman Pierce asked to speak first.

Councilman Pierce stated that everyone liked to pass the blame on, but the problem was the Court System—that they render a verdict and people get out of jail; that they go back before the courts and get back out again, and it is not just the magistrates doing this but some of the judges. He mentioned a sex offender who failed to appear in Court and one day later he was out, and the Judge signed it on his own recognizance. He stated that we don't have places to house them, but there has to be a solution; that it goes beyond the Police Dept. and the City Council; that it now goes to the court system. He noted that everyone was crying out for more police visibility and mentioned the extreme cost of this; that we have 100 officers working around the clock, and it is impossible to add more officers.

Judge Moon came to the podium to speak, stating that he did not voluntarily come to this meeting and was not being paid by the hour; that he was asked by Mayor Littlefield to come. He first addressed the issue of bonds and mentioned the Bail Bond Reform Act, where the bond issue was totally re-vamped—that all people charged with a crime are entitled to a bond—that we begin with this premise that everyone is entitled to an OR Bond—then we begin to look at the seriousness of the offense, the danger to the community, and family ties. He stated that amending the Bond Statute was dangerous to the community. He agreed that laws were not being followed in Chattanooga by the magistrates and that everyone had seen that he had been critical of magistrates. He stated that he could tell the Council one thing—that he did not intend to be “politically correct”, either by lying or telling half-truths.

He asked the Council to get the perspective—that people really had to work hard to get put in jail in Sessions Court; that they are picked up for theft and get a suspended sentence; that they really have to do a lot of stealing to actually go to jail; that there was no one in the county jail who had not been committed three times. He reiterated that one really has to work hard to get put in jail!

Judge Moon mentioned that in 1940 there was a Gallop Poll of 40,000 educators and it indicated that the three biggest problems in schools were chewing gum in class, being in the halls without a pass, and smoking “rabbit” tobacco and people thought our kids were “going to hell in a handbag”; that the problems today are dope, guns, violence, and fighting. He stated that one of the big problems was that people have become desensitized to crime; that a bond can be made or a magistrate will give them diversion—that it is a lost cause in Sessions Court; that it can be stiffer on a person who is just 1/10th over the DUI limit than one who pleads possession of crack cocaine.

He went on to say that the law is influx and that as Dr. Brown had pointed out, drugs are an equal opportunity destroyer; that to stereotype drug use is ridiculous and short-sighted. He went on to say that our law system is based on the presumption of innocence until proven guilty and everyone is entitled to a bond. He mentioned another law that was not being followed—that a person commits an offense and is on bond awaiting trial and commits a new offense, and the law says that the bond shall be doubled, and this law was not being followed. He stated that there was no consistency—with the understanding that all people are entitled to a bond and many of the bonds set are shockingly low—that bonds are not to punish people but to assure that they will appear in court; that we need to look at the safety of the community in setting bonds, and frankly he did not agree with how this is now being handled.

Judge Moon went on to say that there was a phenomenon going on—that about two years ago he had his first grandparents in court for making methamphetamine; that what is significant about this is that in the last 25 years we have had a strata or a society where grandparents are raising children, and we are now losing this strata; that we have more grandparents going to jail for meth and cocaine and are losing this important strata and kids are being raised unsupervised.

Secondly, he mentioned, he grew up in East Lake and was in a gang, stating that he hated law school; that when he heard the phrase “It takes a village—“ he knew what they were talking about—that it involves neighbors and teaching. He questioned how many even knew who their next-door neighbor is now; that the community structure is isolated, and we shut our eyes. He stated that when we talk about the American family today, it is a single parent and one-half of the children in the inner city are illegitimate. He mentioned an event that he and Chief Parks had taken part in where only 15% of the kids said they wanted to go to college; that when the event ended 60% wanted to go to college. He mentioned a wonderful camp hosted by the Boys’ Club, where they took inner city kids to camp—kids who lived most of their lives within a six-block area with no transportation. He stated that the experience was wonderful until the kids were in their tents at night and heard toads and owls, and they were terrified, and some of them had to be taken home.

Judge Moon stated that everyday as a Judge, he looks at peoples’ faces, which is non-judicial; that he sees men who beat women and are not good fathers. He stated that he could not make these men good husbands or fathers, but he could make them wish they had been.

He stated that it just takes one church, one teacher, and one neighborhood association doing more to salvage kids—that the judges and Council can’t do it, and it does begin at home; that we have to teach by example or not teach at all; that kids don’t come with instructions; that we can talk about programs, money, and more police officers but what it boils down to is accountability; that in the short term what we need to talk about is that kids don’t grow up in the same environment that they did 25 years ago; that the Boys’ Club had scholarships, but they did not have enough kids that wanted them and people on Lookout Mountain did not understand this; that he could take the Blue Bloods down to the inner city where they could see a Mercedes drive up and pick up a boy and tell him he could make more money selling dope than getting an education.

Judge Moon explained that we have a different criminal now—criminals who have been desensitized because of drugs; that they forget they are looking at other humans and forget that they are humans themselves. He stated that we could not look to judges, police, and elected officials to solve these problems—that it takes a village; that young people are all we have, and he thought all of us have the responsibility to set an example and not “dumb down” our standards. He stated that we were the 57th most dangerous city in the nation.

He talked about Richard Guiliano in New York City, which was a safer city than Chattanooga, stating that something was wrong here; that New York City had “zero tolerance” for crime—that they had a lot of problems getting to this point and mistakes were made, but Mr. Guiliano had cleaned up New York City. He stated that he did not understand judges who are soft on crime; that we have 200 over capacity in our jails—that even with over-crowded jails, people still have to work hard to get in them. He stated that out of the thousands of bonds made, it is not perfect—that General Sessions Court is the most efficient in the country today.

Judge Moon stated that he appreciated the opportunity to be here—that when he told his wife he was coming she told him to remember that he was not always right but that he was never in doubt. He asked for questions.

A young man in the audience asked him how he felt about boot camps, where kids are forced to have discipline.

Judge Moon responded that boot camps are a program much like penicillin—they can either cure a person or kill them—that a lot has to do with the individual; that like OR Bonds, it is out of a sense of responsibility—that if people don’t come to court, they are not responsible—that if they are on bond, we can bring them in—that bond companies serve a good purpose. He stated that he liked alternative sentencing—that he was not a social worker; that boot camp worked for some and was not effective for others, just like any alternative sentencing—that what you were doing with boot camps was approaching the problem at the back-end. He stated that he had told Zach Wamp that if young people cannot safely get an education, then nothing he could do in Washington would mean a thing. He went on to say that when you ask kids who their heroes are, they will say Michael Jackson or some Sports Person—that inner city kids think they will grow up to be a professional athlete. He stated that he did not know the solution; that some people expect judges and elected officials to take the place of parents and want them to raise their kids—that the people who made the kids need to raise them—that it is a personal responsibility. He went on to tell how he grew up in East Lake in a four-room house and was a member of a gang—that what he got in his home, money could not buy; that he was taught by example, and his parents set a good example; that people need to take responsibility for the kids they make and not depend on the government to raise their children. He stated he would have liked to have had six children but could not afford them—that parenting is a personal responsibility.

Councilman Pierce reminded Judge Moon that he had not voted today, and the polls close at 8:00 p.m.!

Judge Moon stated that it was okay that Councilman Pierce had spoken and that he would not be held in contempt of court! He went on to say that people need to quit being so sensitive; that inner city people can't solve the problems on Lookout Mtn., and Lookout Mtn. people can't solve the problems in the inner city—that they are two different communities—that crime is everywhere and is an equal opportunity destroyer; that we need to be less sensitive and everyone get on the same page and get past profiling; that everyone bleeds the same and everyone suffers the same, and we need to do away with being “politically correct”.

Someone in the audience asked Judge Moon to define a “village”. He responded that it was the people in the neighborhood—everybody!

Chairman Franklin thanked Judge Moon for sharing this, stating that we appreciated him and that all of the City were stakeholders as well. He stated that it was about a village and community police; that when people shared information and compared notes, we all have similar problems and need to continue to find a way to resolve them. He urged those in the audience who were not a part of a neighborhood association to become an active member and make sure that our streets are safe and everyone to begin to work together, with neighborhood watches being at the forefront so that we can take our streets and neighborhoods back. He stated that the Council would continue to communicate with those who were present, and he thought this summed everything up.

Chief Parks asked to speak briefly, stating that he could talk all day about this; that he would be leaving this job in a few weeks, but he would not be leaving the profession. He thanked the folks present for coming, stating that he knew these people and just did not meet them today. He asked that we recognize the police officers for what they are doing—that they are out there taking risks and making a difference. He agreed that this City had seen gains in crime, which gives one a perspective. He stated that he mostly agreed with what Dr. Brown had to say but that he disagreed about officers stopping and calling parents—that the people they dealt with had parents who don't want to talk about their kids but want to talk about the police being the problem.

He went on to say that they had received support of the people, the Council, and the public at large but when you talk about curfew laws, you run into problems, and it comes back to focusing on the police; that it is the age group from 14-21 that they were dealing with that is driving crime in this community, and this is not unique to Chattanooga—that everywhere we are facing the same issues, and it is the age group from 14-21; that one of his colleagues from California says it is a “gathering storm” that we have to deal with; that this age group is desensitized to violence and the norms of society; that it comes from a lack of parenting and supervision.

Chief Parks stated that they had seen the gangs, on street corners and on Tunnel Blvd.—that the killing has to stop, and it requires the support of people at large; that we have to have dialog—that pawn shops are money laundering; that we have the opportunity to pass in this State, as has been done in Knox and Shelby counties, to require a thumb print—that pawn shops are nothing but money laundering. He went on to say another merging problem is precious metals, which it will take some issues to regulate. He mentioned money laundering with precious metals, such as copper from air conditioning units, where they will get the copper and exchange it for drugs. He stated that the problem would continue, but in the meantime, the people here today have to bear the brunt of this. He went on to say that it was going to take support—that we need more officers; that they moved resources as they could, and we need to take back our streets to a level of safety. He noted that police officers work at great risk; that it was said we needed 10 police officers in schools to provide a level of safety; that he thought they did the right thing; that it had to be the general consensus of the people to fund security at schools, and this would impact us; that crime is up, but the police are out there working and making more arrests and are working hard; that we had to be focused; that with the 14-21 year age group, we will have an increase in violent crime; that we have too many kids with guns and kids who do not care. He stated that be assured, the Police Dept. will follow the rules and focus on the problem; that they were not out there to harass people but were dealing with a problem and would continue to work with the community they live in. He stated that they would do all they could to reverse what has happened and get in the right direction.

The meeting adjourned at 5:36 p.m.