

VVPA Minutes for January 15, 2008

Treasurer's report

No report this month.

Police report

Accompanied by patrol sergeant Tim O'Brien, East District Captain Brian McDonagh reported:

1. creation of new JCPD newsletter called "Jersey City Watch" which is distributed at community meetings and can be found online at www.jcpdonline.org
2. success of JCPD Christmas party with about 1500 children in attendance and 2000 toys distributed [Laura Frascilla added thanks to Pershing for their generous contribution via the VVPA]
3. drop in citywide crime in 2007 by 15 to 20%
4. drop in East District car theft from 272 in '06 to 199 in '07
5. two arrests from rash of violent muggings in June, 2007; 16-year-old actor will be tried as adult
6. downtown "tight unit" has been set up; 1-2 officers patrol on bike or scooter
7. East District Community ComStat meeting occurs on 4th Tuesday each month, 7:00 pm at Public School 4 on Grand Street at Varick; Police Chief Comey and the detective commander discuss cases pending and closed and invite the public to work together to mitigate and eliminate problems; all are encouraged to attend

Questions from attendees:

1. Explain the mugging at Carry Drug on Jersey & Bright Streets. Man carrying briefcase of money was held at knife point and mugged; believed to be cased out and not a random act.
2. What is the update with security cameras throughout the city? JC has the largest CCTV system in the state. There are 90 cameras linked into Central Avenue headquarters. Most cameras are along the waterfront; these are from a grant from the federal government through Homeland Security. More cameras are proposed for Jersey and Newark Avenues and Grove and Grand Streets.
3. Have the police gotten new radios recently? Yes, state of the art. A new Communications Center is being built to house and link communication of all emergency services.
4. What is the JCPD non-emergency number? 201-547-5477; also there is an updated email address: policeeast@jcnj.org Either of these is used to communicate non-urgent safety concerns.

Margaret O’Gorman, executive director, Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ

The ten-year-old foundation supports rare and imperiled wildlife in New Jersey. There are over 300 species of birds and over 70 species of reptiles in NJ; over 1000 species of wildlife.

NJ is unique for the following reasons:

1. at a bio/geographical crossroads – southern-most state some northern species can survive in; northern-most for some southern species
2. huge diversity of habitat – coastal, pinelands, highlands, beaches, forests, cities, farmlands, wetlands
3. on the Northeast Flyway for migratory birds – more birds pass by Cape May Point than any other point in the USA

The peregrine falcon is an endangered species of NJ. This bird is a raptor that mates for life. The most notable identifying physical characteristics are its “sideburns” and its long wings. It survives in all environments except rainforests. In cities, the birds feed on pigeons. In the 1950s, there were no peregrine falcons whatsoever east of the Mississippi. Through conservation efforts, the number of pairs in NJ currently is 18.

The foundation has installed a nesting box for a pair of peregrine falcons at 101 Hudson Street, Jersey City. This location is closely monitored by two cameras. They constantly capture the birds and the nest from the laying of eggs (usually in March) through fledging, 8 weeks after birth when the newborn birds leave the nest. The public is invited to tune in through the foundation’s website: www.conservewildlifenj.org. Support for the foundation is appreciated: PO Box 400, Trenton, NJ 08625. Margaret welcomes contact through her email: mogorman@conservewildlifenj.org or phone: 609-292-1276.

A few words from VVPA President Tony Sandkamp

Thank you to Dan Webber, VVPA First VP for his efforts in organizing the January senior outreach night featuring food and entertainment. Thanks, also, to the Resurrection Parish for donating the school hall for the event.

Thank you to Pershing for their contributions to the JCPD toy drive and to Laura Fraschilla for her efforts in organizing that contribution.

Peter Brennan, Jersey City Municipal Councilman at Large

Brief introduction and thank you to Captain McDonagh for hard work and to Chief Comey for lowering crime numbers in the South District. July saw 22 new recruits graduate from the Police Academy. July, 2008 should have over 50 grads. Chief Comey would like to graduate over 100 recruits in upcoming years to re-supply the force after many anticipated retirements.

Questions from attendees:

1. What are JC's biggest challenges?
Crime (JCPD is doing great job, but crime is not ever going away entirely; new JCPD group formed specifically to combat gang activity) and managing the exploding development (the West Side is being heavily re-developed).
2. What is JC doing to contend with the increasing street congestions as well as increased ridership on the PATH?
Mayor and county executive just met with dept. of transportation to increase bus service in JC. However, regular bus ridership is down due to jitney buses which are generally considered to be problematic due to difficulty in regulating. JCPD does what they can to manage the menacing traffic behaviors by the jitneys (stopping randomly, not pulling to the curb). The Light Rail service is also heavily used with daily passengers up to 40,000.
[from Ward E Councilman Steven Fulop: the PATH is expanding service to 10 cars over next couple of years.]
3. Do you have any updates about the Power House?
JC officials want the Port Authority to move the transformers.
4. What about the Toll Brothers project?
The proposed building may go up to 40 stories. There is a planning board hearing regarding this tomorrow evening.
5. {One member of the VVPA calls on Councilman Brennan to be instrumental in requiring a good design of both the building and surrounding grounds from Toll Brothers. Asks him and fellow city officials to use good forethought and call in official and community organizations for their input in design. Member cited example of construction of PS4, a school between Grand and Bright Streets at Monmouth Street. Located across the street from a major hospital and a shopping center, it's no wonder emergency vehicles have trouble getting through traffic. This was not a well-thought-out plan. Please don't make similar mistakes through oversights in planning the Power House Arts District neighborhood.
[Councilman Fulop adds that Toll Brothers has invited input from the community.]}
6. What is your position on the Sixth Street Embankment?
This is a battle that's been dragging on for years and it's always in and out of litigation. Councilman Brennan grew up 2 blocks from the embankment and it was always an eyesore. Doesn't want the Light Rail going in but there are many questions surrounding what conversion to a park would cost the city. The acquisition of land alone is at least \$3 million but could be as high as \$10-20 million. Then the construction of a park could be another \$10-20 million. JC has no money earmarked for this project as it has for Van Vorst Park in the past and Hamilton Park currently. The city could get tax revenue from a developer. However, Councilman Brennan has no official position on this.

7. How is the city's budget?
In the next couple of weeks the budget will be released. JC is inheriting \$45-50 million of debt from previous mayors.

Councilman Brennan welcomes communication from the community through his office (P: 201-547-5204, F: 201-547-4678, email: brennanp@JCNJ.org).

Alice Deupree, architect for 307 Barrow Street, LLC

Ms. Deupree was joined by Charles Harrington, attorney and Joe Gianforte both from the developing company for a proposed 12 unit residential structure with parking at the corner of Wayne and Barrow Streets. This lot is the downtown JC historic district and is oversized at 75 x 100 feet. Developers are seeking variances for the following areas:

1. multi-family dwelling (construction of this building will not, however, increase population density)
2. height of building to match surrounding structures (intended to look like continuous townhouse from street)
3. lot coverage (86%)
4. rear yard

The primary façade will be on Wayne Street with entrance for the parking on Barrow St. It will have four 2-bedroom units over 3 floors; units will have communal terraces at the back.

There have been on soil tests as of yet. Developer intends to do screw pilings to minimize inconvenience to neighbors. Will take at least one year to build.

Announcements from members

Line Dancing at Grace Van Vorst – beginning Friday, February 1 from 6-8pm, \$7/adult, kids under 16 free; contact Joyce Davison: 201-659-2211/201-451-5107, joycegdavison@hotmail.com; ALL WELCOME