

May 3, 2007

Licton Springs Community Council Report for May

North Precinct Advisory Council Report for May 2, 2007

Our May meeting opened right on time. The Council President did the usual introductions and turned the meeting over to Precinct Commander Mike Washburn for an award presentation. Getting her thirty-five years of service plaque was Sergeant Diane Newsom. (She says she started when she was 12.) Sergeant Newsom is the first female officer hired by the Seattle Police Department.

Well this month's NPAC meeting was one that seemed to pique everyone's interest. Our guest and speaker for the night was Lieutenant Eric Sano, who is the commander of the City's Vice Unit. The Vice Unit has two divisions and the one that Lieutenant Sano heads deals with "street crime." For the most part that means prostitution and the crimes that go hand-in-hand with that activity (drugs, petty theft, etc.).

Prostitution in Seattle seems to be an ongoing problem that hasn't seen much change in the number of people involved. However, there has been a notable change in the way the business is marketed. Ads for "services" are easily found in both the "Stranger" and the "Weekly" (print publications) as well as on the Internet via "Craigslist." Even the "johns" have their own website where they exchange information about (rate) the girls. To address these problems, the Vice Unit works closely with the prostitution prevention network. (That's a REAL organization.) Once the girls have been enticed or forced into engaging in the act of prostitution, it is very difficult to pull them away. Many are drug-addicted and find prostitution a convenient, if not easy way, to support their habit. Many of those engaged in prostitution (men as well as women) are victims of abuse and other social disorders. They tend to have low self-esteem and rely on their pimps to "take care of them." They move about the country frequently and have few resources to call their own. The level of prostitution in Seattle remains fairly constant.

The Vice Squad uses a variety of techniques to thwart both the buyers and sellers of flesh. Under the RCW's (Revised Code of Washington), "pimps" and "madams" are treated the same. The act of "prostitution" is a misdemeanor, and as such doesn't command what one might call a "stiff" sentence for engaging in the act. There has been talk of raising the social penalty by publicly identifying the "johns" (or "players" as they like to call themselves). There are both pro's and con's to that approach. The Vice Squad has set up several "sting" operations in Seattle by advertising on "Craigslist." They have been quite successful! As long as that level of success continues, it's unlikely that photos of the "johns" will be showing up in the paper or on the Internet. These "sting" operations are one of the main topics of conversation in the "chat rooms" of the "players" websites. They (the players) post notices about phone numbers to be avoided, locations used in "sting" operations and other ploys to avoid apprehension. Even though the street-crime Vice Squad has only four members, they conduct their activities city-wide. The areas of Seattle that see the highest number of prostitution offers are Aurora Avenue North, the International District, the area

around the Space Needle, and Beacon Hill. Contrary to what many people believe, Prostitution is NOT a "victimless crime"! The prostitutes are victims, the "johns" can be victims, the families of both can be victims, and society as a whole becomes a victim. (WE pay the price!) Jobs are lost, families and/or carriers destroyed, disease spread, and other criminal activity promoted.

The Vice Unit is putting up the good fight and they are helping to keep this crime in check. Like every other part of the law enforcement community, they too are understaffed. Even though the Unit pays its own way, they too could use more help. The Mayor's budget includes funding for MORE POLICE OFFICERS. It is YOUR letters, e-mails and phone calls to the City Council that make the difference between a request and reality! We are hearing this from a number of people on the "inside." The City Council IS influenced by the number of people from the public sector that press these issues. CALL or MAIL AGAIN!!! You ARE having an influence.

Ken Thompson

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