

Three Months, 27 Burglaries

Eastland Gardens, Police Seek Cooperation and Persistence

BY VIRGINIA AVNIEL SPATZ

Eastland Gardens and surrounding housing, including Kenilworth Courts, suffered a rash of burglaries in November and December. The Eastland Gardens Civic Association (EGCA) asked for additional police visibility and encouraged residents to watch out for one another and report suspicious activity. Burglaries continued.

“They think this is an older neighborhood, and we’re okay,” says one 25-year resident who asked not to be identified. “But we’re not.”

In the wee hours of Jan. 20, a lone man allegedly cut the phone lines to the resident’s home, disabling the alarm system she thought was protecting her and her houseguest. The man tried numerous windows before entering through a kitchen window. He woke the houseguest, demanding her purse, and struggled with her. The houseguest’s screams woke the resident, but the burglar escaped with both women’s purses, which contained personal and work-related items.

Unable to use the landline, one of the women found a cell phone and was able to call police. Response time was over 10 minutes, however, and the burglar was long gone.

A week later, neither woman had slept well, the resident reports, adding: “He was walking through my house. He might have had a weapon. We could have been killed. And we don’t know if it’s going to happen again.”

Following this, the 20th burglary in the area, the Metropolitan Police Department’s Sixth District launched two weeks of “dedicated crime patrol” and promised additional visibility. Commander Robert Contee of 6D says that such units patrol alleys, for example, and ensure coverage across shift changes. In addition, he says, “We are augmenting uniforms with different methods – plain-clothes officers, unmarked cars.” Asst. Chief Diane Groomes conducted a walkthrough of the area with local leaders. Burglaries continued.

“Our deepest respect and appreciation go out to the hardworking men and women of the MPD Sixth District who put their collective lives on the line every day to protect us and our property,” says EGCA President Greg Rhett. He fears, though, that perpetrators will simply lie

low if MPD does not have the resources to keep up continued presence until they’re apprehended. He also believes community cooperation is essential.

Rhett stresses that 27 burglaries occurred in Police Service Area (PSA) 601 – along the river, from Eastern Avenue to Benning Road – between Nov. 1 and Jan. 28. Contee believes, however, that there are several “different dynamics” at work, including persons very familiar with the area and juvenile involvement. MPD is taking a “dual approach,” including a variety of behind-the-scenes investigations in addition to patrols.

The mayor’s office did not respond to a query about continued funding, but Contee said on Jan. 30 that he expects to keep up additional attention “until we catch them or this subsides.” Ward 7 Councilmember Yvette Alexander planned a Feb. 3 community meeting at which MPD Police Chief Cathy Lanier was scheduled to address concerns.

The 20th victim believes that even catching the perpetrator(s) will not be enough. “You don’t put a band-aid on something like this. ... We have a PSA and a civic association. We ask constantly for more visibility from police. ... We need regular beats so that community members and police are comfortable speaking.”

Similarly, Contee asks officers to remain patient and disciplined. “It can be hard, circling back, even when it appears that nothing is happening,” says Contee,

who also asks for community patience and persistence.

“My heart really goes out to any individual who was broken into,” says Contee. “But we need neighbors and police working together, if we’re going to get this guy. ... If you see a guy walking down the street with a 42-inch television set or a Wii system, that is something out of the ordinary.”

Citizens are encouraged to call 911, which allows police to track calls and responses, when they see something suspicious. Information can also be texted to #50411 or called into the anonymous tip line, 1-888-919-CRIME. To reach PSA 601, contact Lt. Ronald Chase, 202-506-0712 or Ronald.Chase@dc.gov. To contact Greg Rhett of EGCA, call 202-550-4612 or e-mail jrhatt3009@aol.com. ★

Infrastructure in the News

Circulator Extension, Great Streets Project

BY VIRGINIA AVNIEL SPATZ

Circulator Bus Extension?

On Jan. 12, the DC Council’s Committee on Public Works and Transportation considered legislation to replace the “Blue Bus,” which has been operating for years between Georgetown and Rosslyn, Va., with a Circulator bus.

Circulator buses currently serve five business corridors within the city, including Georgetown to Union Station, Union Station to Eastern Market and Navy Yard, and Convention Center to Southwest Waterfront. Circulator service has more limited hours than Metro buses. Fares range from free for riders with a DC Student Travel Card and 50 cents for seniors/disabled passengers to \$1 standard fare; three-day passes and group sales are also available.

Councilmember Kwame Brown (At-Large) proposed an amendment extending Circulator service along Pennsylvania Avenue eastward to Southern Avenue. The “DC Circulator Bus Jurisdiction Expansion Amendment Act of 2010” was marked up by the committee and sent to the Committee of the Whole (COW) by a vote of 4-1. Brown’s amendment failed by a vote of 3-2, however, with only Brown and Councilmember Phil Mendelson (At-Large) supporting an extension east of the river.

The bill supporting the “Blue Bus” replacement but no extension east of the river is expected to be considered at the next COW legislative meeting, scheduled for Feb. 16.

An additional proposed Circulator route, differing from Brown’s proposal, would run from Barracks Row (Eighth Street SE) to Anacostia and Congress Heights Metro stations.

Some neighborhood listserv participants argue, as a matter of equity, for giving an east of the river extension priority over a Virginia route. Others suggest that bringing Virginia residents into Georgetown to spend money helps the entire city economically. Still, others note that Brown’s proposed Circulator appears to replicate a number of existing Metrobus routes – M6, 32 and Express 39 – while the second proposal runs the

same route as existing 90 and 92 buses. Proposing Circulators to replace or augment these routes could reduce ordinary daily service for those who regularly rely on Metro buses, some fear.

Following the committee markup, Mendelson told the Fairlawn Citizens Association, in an e-mail shared on neighborhood listservs, that,

“While it was disappointing that Mr. Brown’s amendment failed, killing the bill would not have improved the situation east of the river. ... I appreciate that so many folks are speaking out – I hope it will help push some of my colleagues to be more responsive.”

Meanwhile, John Lisle, a spokesman for the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), is quoted in the Washington Business Journal (Jan. 25) saying that DDOT had been considering an east of the river extension of the Circulator independent of Brown’s amendment.

Great Streets Update

The Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED) convened a meeting on Jan. 14 to update the community on the Minnesota Great Streets project. Presentations by DDOT engineers focused on road design concepts for the stretch of Minnesota Avenue from Clay Place to Grant Street and for Benning Road. In addition, pedestrian safety at the Minnesota and Benning intersection was discussed.

Participants at the sparsely attended meeting noted the absence in particular of a representative of the Donatelli/Blue Skye project, “Phase II” at Minnesota-Benning. This project comprises a substantial portion of the “new Downtown Ward 7” streetscape – the entire northwest corner of the intersection, along Benning and along Minnesota. The update did not include information on how that project will incorporate Great Streets elements, such as a 17-foot public right-of-way in front of the building, and other commitments to the community made in association with transferring ownership of this publicly owned property.

Jacquelyn Glover of DMPED says DDOT is expected to make another presentation in April, and DMPED expects to convene a meeting to update the community on Donatelli/Blue Skye plans in late February or early March. For specifics, e-mail Jacquelyn.Glover@dc.gov or call 202-213-8417. ★

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