

French Quarter Management District
Security Task Force Meeting – 3 pm on November 18, 2015
Antoine’s Restaurant

Introduction

Bob Simms welcomed everyone to the November meeting and reviewed the agenda. The attendees introduced themselves:

Members (10): Bob Simms, Emily Remington, Bev Fulk, Mike Tilbury, Mike Roberts, John Zimmerman, Dwyre McComsey, Gail Cavett, Ann Kessler, Vincent Marcello.

Guests (8): Officer Alicia Pierre, Brittany Mulla, Karen Sepko, Lydia Hobbs, Walter Findley, Morris Kahn, Marci Schramm, Georgia Rhody.

Members were polled about whether or not to postpone December meeting. Unanimous agreement to postpone until January 20, 2016.

NOPD

Strength is not any better – still at 1100 or less. Chief Harrison is trying to put more officers on the street with numerous initiatives, including creating the Violent Crime Task force, moving officers from desk jobs, allowing “unlimited” overtime and making major investments in NOPD like the new Police Academy and new police cars. Bob said that much of the dialog at recent budget hearings was about retention.

Crime Stat Charts

September showed improvement. October showed more crimes against persons, but armed robberies were down. November to date there has been no armed robberies compared to one year ago when there was one per day; there has been a 45% drop in armed robberies from last year.

Another chart itemized type of offense, period Jan-June 2014 and period Jan-June 2015; final column showed percentage of change - very impressive improvement.

One Team – LSP/FQTF/NOPD

Integration improving the more they work together. NOPD, FQTF and Trooper assignments are compiled daily and distributed. Trooper deployment is lighter and finishes earlier in the first few days of the week listed. Weekends they are at a stronger level and stay later.

French Quarter Task Force

Chart showed permanent shifts and pay tier for 77 shifts/week. Shifts had been totally committed, but now there are some openings. Color-coding illustrated how many officers were unable to do their shifts, for a variety of reasons. Although it takes a lot of work keeping shifts filled, they continue to be filled at 90 to 95% every week. French Quarter has the largest detail program in the city.

Map that is displayed on 8th District office wall was shown, a great help to those officers coming from other parts of the city. It shows three patrolling zones in the FQ, two of which overlap. Also shown are the locations of recent robberies.

The FQTF Stats chart showed that the program continues to be successful; 9,000 calls have been answered. April-Oct pie chart showed the three call types proportionately, with officer-initiated having the highest number. Next highest were dispatch calls, with app calls having the least.

French Quarter Problem Blocks

100 block of Royal: Ongoing problem of undesirable street people hanging out, but NOPD and TF giving more attention there so it has improved somewhat.

700 block of Royal and Pirate's Alley area: Photos shown of "artists" doing dangerous things with paints, which is not allowed. More photos showed street people passed out or urinating on trashcans and newspaper machines. Mike Tilbury reported they are making some progress since working with Cm Nadine Ramsey's office, and he will ask if the paper machines could be removed from around there. Officer Pierre and other officers have been responding quickly to complaints, and Officer Pierre has been picking up artists' "parked" belongings. Artists are now being more compliant about moving out at 6 PM. Scott Hutcheson has put together a list, Rules of Compliance that should set some much-needed guidelines.

800-1000 blocks of St. Louis: These blocks are dominated by two bars, despite being a residential area. Video images shown of street scene at 4:00 AM – very active. Because of the many complaints by neighbors, NOPD, Troopers and FQTF are now working together especially between hours of 3 AM-6 AM. Video shown after all three descend on the scene and people leave the street. Mounted officers sometimes pass there as well. There have been no armed robberies in those blocks for the last two weeks.

Other Problem Blocks: John Zimmerman, resident of 800 block of Bourbon, talked about that block becoming a "regrouping" area in early morning hours (4-6 AM). He feels the Troopers aren't doing as much as they should, and asked Bob if that could be improved. John is also concerned about large bags left setting around the street, and that Empire Janitorial Services isn't picking them up. "No other city would allow that." John Zimmerman noted the increased pickpocket activity. John voiced concerns of an eventual gun battle from backlash over fake drugs being sold.

Jackson Square also has a problem with personal belongings sitting around; Officer Pierre tries clearing them off the benches. She also described amount of time officers must be away from the street when processing people into jail, starting with removing every item from bags. Vincent Marcello advised that the Sheriff and NOPD are now working better together. Bob commented that a recent NOPD sweep found one person to have six outstanding warrants.

The "acrobatic" group that often performs across from Jackson Square has recently started using the 400 Block of Royal. They generate a large crowd that blocks the street and the sidewalks creating a safety issue. They are also very loud impacting the various businesses and residents in the block. Several would like the mall to remain open to traffic and have made their views known to Cmdr. Walls. MaCCNO (Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans) has produced a Guide to New Orleans Street Performance, which lays out clearly what can and cannot be done, acceptable distances, sound levels, legal hours, etc., in the French Quarter and Marigny, according to City Ordinances. It also explains what rights performers DO have, as well as a Code of Etiquette. It can be found on the MaCCNO website.

We discussed other problem blocks and most agreed that the Bourbon St. VCE area between 3 AM-6 AM is the worst of the worst.

Comments about the old trashcans remaining, still providing a source for scavenging, after installation of the solar cans. Recently Bob went to Dept. of Sanitation about it and was informed they HAD been removed. Although Bob produced photos showing their presence, nothing has changed.

2016 Initiatives

More police attention to 800-1000 block of Bourbon. Bob reminded attendees that once the EDD takes effect in January, LSP officers will be dedicated only to the Quarter, not in Marigny, etc.

Bob encouraged people to do what Mike Tilbury is doing – be a Block Captain.

Mike Roberts talked about three projects he's working on:

- 1) Installation of security cameras and license plate readers using the new RTA's fiber optic cabling. There might be some help with funding, since Homeland Security now considers the FQ a high security area. Mike will work with Cmdr. Walls on best locations for license plate readers. Motorola, who manufactures the police radios, thinks they might be able to provide live feed to the NOPD from private security cameras. Bob isn't certain that can be done based on pilots we undertook in the 500 block of Bourbon.
- 2) "The Swamp" club hired Mike to help with a training program for club security. He's talking with a training company, Private Officers International, who would be willing to come to N.O. to help train; the only thing they don't cover is the problem of keeping people out (fake ID's, etc.). New Orleans would supplement with those training classes, as well as handling the marketing. Mike feels that Bourbon St. needs to start thinking proactively in light of these times of heightened terrorism. It just happened not so far away, in Honduras, and he worries that Bourbon St. could soon become a soft target due to lack of protocols in the "Open Society" lax environment there. Private security for the clubs is too expensive so the competition amongst the different club securities needs to stop – they need to start working together. Comments by attendees about locals staying away from Bourbon St. because of not feeling safe.
- 3) Mike would like to get the clubs and pedicab companies working together to assure safe passage home for "impaired" customers. But Vincent Marcello, who owns pedicab companies, explained that drivers are not allowed to pick up intoxicated people due to the risk of personal injury, i.e. falling out of the open cab.

Related to transporting intoxicated people, Bev Fulk brought up the subject of rogue taxi drivers. A robbery victim told her about taking a taxi from the Quarter, and the driver being complicit with three other people in setting him up. Other meeting attendees related stories about outlandish fares being charged.

Meeting adjourned.

NEXT MEETING: January 20, 2016 at 3 PM – Antoine's.

Notes compiled by Beverly Fulk and reviewed by Bob Simms.