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Jan 15 2020

Community meeting about the rise of crime in Uptown informative and contentious

Posted by UptownMessenger.com at 11:59 am [community meetings, court, crime](#)



Surveillance photos show vehicle burglaries in the 5700 block of Camp Street on Monday, Jan. 13. (via NOPD)

By Sue Strachan, Uptown Messenger

Having your car broken into via smashed windows has become the new normal in New Orleans.

On Tuesday, Jan. 14, a group of neighborhood associations hosted a community meeting at the Jewish Community Center to “discuss the recent uptick of crimes and ways to combat it,” stated a notice from the Faubourg Delachaise Neighborhood Association.

The meeting, which was moved from a meeting room to the larger Donald Mintz Auditorium, attracted more than 100 fed-up and concerned citizens who wanted answers and solutions.

What they came away with is that, particularly with juvenile crime, there is no single solution, and that any improvement is an evolving process including New Orleanians, the City Council, the NOPD, the Mayor’s Office, state legislature, and the local, state and federal judiciary.

On the panel were Orleans Parish Criminal Court Chief Judge Karen K. Herman, Orleans Parish District Attorney Leon Cannizzaro, Orleans Parish Juvenile Court Judge Mark Doherty, New Orleans Police Department Capt. Jeff Walls (Commander, Second District), and City Councilmen Jay Banks of District B and Joe Giarrusso of District A.

Event organizer Shelley Landrieu, the executive director for Twinbrook Security District, Hurstville Security District and Audubon Area Security District and consultant for Upper Audubon Security District, kicked off the meeting by saying that three main topics were to be addressed: the uptick in crime, the no-pursuit policy, and what is being done in the court system with recidivism.

Juveniles in the court system and recidivism

While Herman and Cannizzaro explained how an adult defendant goes through the court system, what interested the audience more was how juveniles were processed — and why it seemed like the same youths kept on committing crimes.

Doherty, who has been an elected Juvenile Court judge since 1999, explained to the crowd how a juvenile goes through the system, as well as the limitations imposed on the court, emphasizing the restrictions put on the court by Risk Assessment Instrument, or RAI, and a lack of funds to provide certain services.

He also spoke about what the court is doing to solve what is referred to as “catch and release,” or as Cannizzaro said: “Catch, release and hope.”

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When juveniles are arrested and go through the RAI process, they are either released or, if the crime is deemed serious enough, moved to the Youth Study Center, the juvenile detention facility.

The person doing the risk assessment is not allowed to see a juvenile’s previous arrest reports, only evaluating the crime in front of them at that time, Doherty said.

“I would be stopped in the street or when I ran into a friend in the grocery store, and they would ask what is going on in juvenile court and why is it a revolving door,” Doherty said. “Kids arrested in the morning are out in the evening.”

According to a Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights spokeswoman: “The RAI was specifically developed to determine whether a child who has been arrested poses an immediate public safety or flight risk. They are assessed not only on their charge, but on a number of factors, including previous offenses.

“The RAI was developed by a number of stakeholders in the justice system, including the juvenile court judges. And it in no way takes away a judge’s discretion to jail a child before their first appearance in court. Judges can – and have – institute overrides of the RAI for certain offenses (like car burglaries) or individual children. Ultimately, every detention decision rests with the judges.”

Understanding the public’s frustration with repeat offenders on the streets, the Orleans Parish Juvenile Court judges banded together to implement a new policy earlier this month. A juvenile with an open court case won’t be released from custody until they see a judge. The policy also puts an automatic hold on a juvenile who is arrested, if that juvenile already has a case open.

Doherty said this new policy has been long overdue. “It is not the final solution to stop juvenile crime, but this this the first step to stop the revolving door,” said Doherty.



These suspects were seen Dec. 29 in the 500 block of Walnut Street. (via NOPD)

Where to get the money?

Other solutions come with a price tag.

Doherty stated that they need to put electronic monitoring in place – the court doesn’t have it anymore.

He also stated that there needs to be more after-school and weekend programs. “Every week I have parents ask me ‘Why don’t you have boot camps?’” he said. “But no one wants to fund them.” The need for more early education programming was also brought up.

Another issue is that the parish doesn’t have probation services; they are provided by the state of Louisiana. Currently the ratio, Doherty said, is one probation officer for 45 juvenile offenders. In Jefferson Parish, the estimated ratio is one to 20. The difference? Jefferson Parish funds its probation office.

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Audience member Allen Pertuit asked, “Where is the money going?” Many other people in the audience echoed the sentiment, with one asking why the city didn’t get any direct funds from the “big football game last night,” referring to the BCS Championship on Monday.

Giarrusso brought up that the five millages – totaling \$22.6 million – up for renewal in 2020. The question, if voters approve the renewals, is how to bundle them – do they all go to safety, streets, the library?

An audience member said many of the ordinances listed on ballots are vague, with Giarrusso and Banks agreeing to look into making them more focused on where the money is going.

Property taxes were also addressed, with both Giarrusso and Banks noting that not all properties are on the rolls for taxes. According to a [Bureau of Government Research report](#), 60 percent of properties in Orleans Parish are not on the tax rolls.

“I promise you,” said Banks. “We [the City Council] are fully intentional on how we spend the money.”



Suspects in a red Ford F-150 were seen in multiple vehicle burglaries. (via NOPD)

No pursuit policy

Walls stated some sobering facts about the NOPD Second District: In 2019, there were 866 auto burglaries reported in the district, compared to 584 in 2018.

Surveillance video has helped catch criminals, but they are getting smarter, he said.

And NOPD officers are not allowed to pursue criminals; under the department’s consent decree ([Vehicle Pursuits, chapter 41.5](#)), “...pursuits for property offenses, misdemeanor offenses, traffic, or civil infractions are prohibited.”

Parental accountability

Many in the audience were particularly interested in parental accountability.

Walls said they have started using a [state ordinance 92.2](#) on “improper supervision of a parent or legal custodian,” which allows police to arrest or fine parents for their children’s crimes. It is used mostly with parents who do not supervise their children.

While many in the crowd offered solutions that seemed realistic to them – one woman said the parents need to go through a probation program with their children – but did not take in consideration other issues.

Banks noted that parents often have to hold two jobs because wages are so low, so they are unable to supervise their children in a way that many in the crowd could. “Not all bad kids have bad parents,” he said.

Getting involved

Banks also stressed something simple that everyone could do: Say “good morning” to the youths they see on the street. “They may not answer you, or they may grunt,” said Banks. “But one day they may acknowledge you.

“And you may be the only person to be positive to them their whole day.”

Uptown resident Kathryn “Tiki” McIntyre was frustrated on a number of points – her house had been broken into — with a focus on what she sees as a community malaise of not getting involved, particularly not showing up at neighborhood association meetings.

Many on the panel emphasized the elections next November, when the magistrate and judges are up for re-election.

Reporter Sue Strachan can be reached at sustrachan16@gmail.com.

This story was updated on Jan. 22 to include information from the Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights and to reflect that the juvenile risk assessment instrument is not the same as the public safety assessment used in Criminal District Court.

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Police blotter: Man injured in drive-by shooting, 79-year-old woman robbed in Hollygrove Vehicle recovered after armed carjacking in Hollygrove neighborhood