

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING HELD ON MONDAY,
AUGUST 26, 2013 IN THE MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM AT THE COMMUNITY CENTER

The meeting began at 7:30PM

Members Present: Rick Ransom, Chair; Jackie Carrington, Vice-Chair; Janet Parker and Dea Zugby.
Representing the City: Cpt Tom Kemp, of GBPD. Petitioner: John Abell

Mr. Abell mentioned that the arrest of a gentleman who worked at the Greenbelt library for viewing and storing child pornography on his computer was brought to his attention by the Greenbelters Yahoo Group. He stated that the incident was mentioned by and posted on the WTOP and WJLA websites before the city/police department informed Greenbelt residents. He felt that the city should have a policy to inform residents of any arrests involving child pornography.

CPT Kemp displayed a copy of the media release that was issued in September 2012 after the defendant was convicted. He admitted it was a little later than he would have liked because of the many demands made on the department for Labor Day weekend (conviction occurred August 27 of 2012). He noted that the Department sends a police blotter to local media outlets based upon certain criteria and dependent upon the nature of the crime (which involves several factors including the rights of the accused and protecting the victims.) However, they cannot control what is printed or reported. He also mentioned that the GB police keep in contact with and provide education to school aged children through DARE and Safety Officer Programs (and there is mention of inappropriate contact by adults as well as inappropriate behavior by youths themselves, i.e., sexting, etc.)

Mr. Abell inquired about the city releasing information (names, etc.) about anyone arrested for child pornography in the city. City Attorney Robert Manzi conducted thorough research on Mr. Abell's concerns (see letter dated March 27, 2013 to City Manager) and provided several reasons why it would not be appropriate for the city to adapt most of Mr. Abell's requests in his letter to the City Manager dated March 27, 2013. Chief Craze cited Department Policy and explained media relations of GBPD in his subsequent letter to the City Manager dated May 7, 2013.

Question: Could such cases be mentioned in the police blotter without mentioning the names of the accused or victims? Answer: It could raise more questions than it answers, leading people to attempt to determine the identity of the arrestee(s). It also may run counter to Department policy regarding release of information for other arrests. CPT Kemp said he would speak with the Public Information Officer and review policies concerning arrests for child pornography if CRAB and other Boards recommended it and Council so desired.

It was generally agreed that the city could provide education to warn residents on the dangers of child pornography through Greenbelt CARES and make public service announcements on the city's public website. CPT Kemp said the Department could enhance their focus on issues involving child pornography in their contacts with schools and in other youth-related programs.

Overall Mr. Abell was satisfied with Mr. Manzi's and Chief Craze's letters in response to his concerns and the meeting with CRAB to discuss them.

CPT Kemp gave CRAB an update on the final decision not to pursue a city-wide curfew for youth. The Board also reviewed and approved the minutes from the meeting of November 19, 2012, which had covered the topic of a curfew extensively.

Recommendations to Council concerning arrests in Greenbelt for Child Pornography Offenses:

1) That Greenbelt CARES be tasked to initiate a public information campaign to make parents and others aware of the dangers to children of being victimized by persons involved in initiating, collecting and disseminating Child Pornography.

2) That the Greenbelt Police Department be directed to increase their contact with schools and with other youth information activities and focus more directly on the dangers of children participating in child pornography, including youths themselves taking self-photos or photos of each other via sexting, etc. that are legally considered Child Pornography.

Prepared by Rick Ransom & Jackie Carrington