



Legislation Text

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Police Department

Reference: Neighborhood Watch Programs

To: Mayor Gregory Mills and Members of City Council

Through: Michael P. Martinez, City Manager

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PURPOSE

To provide council with information on neighborhood watch programs, including the effectiveness of these programs, crime prevention and reduction opportunities, and challenges associated with traditional neighborhood watch groups.

BACKGROUND

Neighborhood watch programs are one of the oldest and best known crime prevention concepts in the United States. Neighborhood watch takes many forms, to include formal groups that meet regularly to loosely organized groups that utilize social media to share information. These groups may be led and organized by law enforcement or concerned citizens. Ultimately neighborhood watch is any group of people living or working in a particular area who desire to decrease crime and improve safety in their neighborhood. Neighborhood watch is designed to work in concert with law enforcement, and formal groups may be assigned a law enforcement liaison. The liaison is a designated point of contact for the group to provide and receive information about criminal activity.

While formal neighborhood watch groups may be the most recognizable of these initiatives, advances in technology in recent years has provided many neighborhoods the ability to communicate and share information even in the absence of a traditional group. It is difficult to know how many of these informal associations exist and how effective they may be in preventing or reducing crime.

Regardless of the type of neighborhood watch program a neighborhood has or desires, they are relatively easy to start. The Brighton Police Department stands ready to assist residents who wish to start a program. The following five steps outline how to get started:

- Recruit and organize as many of your neighbors as possible.
- Contact the Brighton Police Department and schedule a meeting.
- Discuss community/neighborhood concerns and develop an action plan.
- Hold regular meetings and train on relevant skills.

- Establish communication methods and take action steps.

The research on whether traditional neighborhood watch programs work is mixed. A 2008 Study by the Department of Justice indicated previous reviews of literature yielded mixed results on the effectiveness of neighborhood watch. Earlier studies involved small sample sizes and other limitations that impacted credibility of the results. Some programs were effective while others were not. This study ultimately determined that neighborhood watch was ineffective at reducing or preventing crime. This same study did highlight some instances where there was a significant reduction in crime (16%) that was associated with neighborhood watch programs, however the reasons why they achieved these results remain unclear.

The Brighton Police Department has been an active participant in the National Neighborhood Watch program. The historical experience with these programs is that they start strong, typically after some catalyst event, but participation and involvement from the community fades quickly and within months the neighborhood watch group is no longer active. Neighborhoods that are most in need are often reluctant to organize and participate in these programs.

New technology such as Nextdoor and neighborhood social media groups offer many of the same advantages of traditional programs, without the need to attend meetings. Younger generations are more apt to participate in these virtual neighborhood watch initiatives. Brighton Police participate actively on Nextdoor, sharing critical, real-time information at the neighborhood level and engage with our community. Brighton Police are unable to view individual conversations at the neighborhood level, but we encourage participation in discussions on our agency Nextdoor page. Nextdoor requires members to use real names and verified addresses, which helps to create trust and accountability. Participants using Nextdoor are able to post messages about individual incidents, crime trends, crime prevention tips, and much more. The attached neighborhood watch information sheet has additional detailed information, along with contact information for the department's Community Engagement Liaison, who is available to assist residents and neighborhoods in establishing programs.

CONCLUSIONS

There are no downsides associated with increased collaboration and communication between individual neighborhoods and the Police Department. Brighton PD remains committed to the concepts of community policing, which includes partnering with the community to address crime and quality of life issues. Neighborhood watch programs are an extension of this philosophy and we desire to be good partners regardless of the format used.

Brighton Police Department recently re-classified an existing position to add a dedicated Community Engagement Liaison, who facilitates the PD's involvement in these types of programs. One aspect of the Community Engagement Liaison's goals is to build connections with community groups, including HOA associations, neighborhood groups, etc.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Not applicable

OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

Not applicable

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Not applicable

ATTACHMENTS

- Neighborhood watch information sheet