

MAYOR'S NEIGHBORHOOD ROUNDTABLE

Via Zoom Monday, December 13, 2021, 5:30 p.m.

Meeting Notes

Attendance

Ten residents and three City staff attended.

Mayor Gaylor Baird
Chief Teresa Ewins – LLPD
Richard Piersol - Country Club
Karen Diensbier – Eastridge
Greg Baker – Everett
Paula Baker – Everett
Geri Cotter – Irvingdale

Pat Bracken – Irvingdale
Dennis Hecht - Meadowlane
Bill Vocasek – West A
Fred Freytag – Witherbee
Russell Miller – Witherbee
Jon Carlson – Mayor's Office
Wynn Hjermstad – Urban Development

Welcome and Introductions

Tracy Corr, Chair, began the meeting with introductions. Geri Cotter volunteered to take notes.

Mayor Gaylor Baird's Comments:

COVID-19:

- Lincoln hospitals are under tremendous strain.
- Currently, there are 121 individuals hospitalized with COVID-19.
 - Eighty of those patients are from Lancaster County.
- Despite the numbers, the vaccine is still very effective. It is estimated that the numbers would be 10X greater without it.
- 63% of eligible Lancaster County residents are vaccinated.
- \$18 million in emergency rental assistance funds have been distributed.
 - We anticipate receiving \$30 million more to help residents impacted by COVID pay rent and utilities.
- Those needing rent and utility assistance should call 402-413-2085.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING:

- We are making progress. Community Development Resources (CDR) has been established to provide capital, technical assistance, and training opportunities for small businesses.
- A \$10 million Capital Campaign to finance affordable housing has begun.
 - There is a CARE Committee to ensure that those needing assistance are heard.
- Lincoln/Lancaster County has received \$6 million in grants and matching grants for affordable housing with the goal of creating housing at various price points.

Chief Teresa Ewins – Chief of Police, Lincoln Police Department (LPD)

402-441-7237; LPD101@cjis.lincoln.ne.gov.

Chief Ewins reported that typically in positions such as hers, new hires come in with a plan for what they hope to accomplish in their first 100 days. As 12/13/2021 was her 104th day, she began by outlining her accomplishments to date:

- Chief Ewins and her team began reviewing the existing policies. Based on that review, the following changes and/or plans for changes were instituted:
 - Well-kept beards are now permitted.
 - Policies are now written in gender-neutral form.
 - All policies will be put in front of the public.

- Policies will be translated into languages most commonly encountered in Lincoln.
 - Every officer will be outfitted with a cell phone to enable on-site language assistance.
 - Officers will become more visible in the community. To create more time for this responsibility, other LPD personnel will handle activities such as taking phone reports.
 - More public education to reduce crimes is planned i.e., reminding residents not to leave unattended cars running to warm them up.
 - Suicides are high. Officers want to be able to better connect those in need with sources of help.
- Chief Ewins then reported on her plans for the next 100 days.
 - Finalize the policy review.
 - Reorganize the current five geographical Teams into 4 Teams without losing coverage.
 - LPD is hiring, with a goal of increasing diversity and representation. Attendees were asked to help spread the word. There will be a new class starting in January.
 - Chief Ewins then opened the floor to questions.
 - Q:** There have been an increasing number of catalytic converter thefts in the city. What is LPD doing about this?
 - A:** The City Council recently approved legislation to cut off the ability to sell catalytic converters within the city limits. This won't stop the thefts, but hopefully will reduce them, since it will make it more difficult for the perpetrators to profit from the thefts.
 - Q:** You said that the number of suicides was high. What is the number of suicides to date?
 - A:** There have been 31 suicides this year.

Chief Ewins then said that she assumed that there were probably questions among the attendees regarding an article in the Lincoln Journal Star the previous day accusing LPD of not acting in response to complaints of sexual harassment. She said that she would like to address any concerns, but that she would be limited in what she could say because it was a personnel issue. She added that LPD has reviewed the complaints and does take all such complaints seriously. She continued that the Department is not targeting anyone, but they do hold individuals responsible for doing their job.

Q: There are a number of homeless people who walk up and down the residential part of 13th Street south of South Street. Since this is outside of the downtown area, are these individuals on the Department's radar screen to provide them with assistance with winter coming?

A: The City is stepping up its mental health assistance for the homeless. LPD knows of the various locations around the city where the homeless tend to congregate and try to connect them with services. You can't, however, force people to accept help.

Q: Has there been an effort to vaccinate our homeless population?

A: (Response given by Mayor Gaylor Baird) The Health Department has been proactive in getting the homeless population vaccinated. Two doses have been made available, but not all returned for the second dose. In addition, women and children were relocated from the shelters to permit the guests to be more spaced out.

Q: What has surprised you most about Lincoln?

A: I have been pleasantly surprised by Lincoln. In many ways, Lincoln is ahead of law enforcement in other cities.

Announcements

No announcements

Next Meeting / Agenda

- The status of our water supplies and wells
- Trimming of City Trees

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:18

Respectfully submitted, Geri Cotter