

CLEARWATER HOMELESS INTERVENTION PROJECT, INC.
QUARTERLY NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 17, 2003

Those attending the meeting are listed as follows:

Chief Sid Klein, President, CHIP Board of Directors
Martin Altner, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Emma Blackshear, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Ed Brant, CHIP Program Director/The Salvation Army
Carole Ciokiewicz, CHIP Executive Director
Officer Joseph Falcone, Clearwater Police Department
Larry Finkle, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Sergeant Thomas Fisherkeller, Clearwater Police Department
Dorothy Gebicka-Ukrzewski - CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Mary Lou Guthart, Secretary, CHIP Board of Directors
William B. Horne II, Clearwater City Manager
Corporal Michael Kachurik, Clearwater Police Department
Dimitrios Kanaris, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Myles Kline, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Jose Lind, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Boris Lozanov, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Rosa Matos, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Officer Leonard Merritt, Clearwater Police Department
Barbara Otis, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Brian Schuh, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Mary Sowa Sochocki, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Ralph Stone, Clearwater Assistant City Manager
James Tsouris, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Pat Vaughn, CHIP Neighborhood Representative
Jimmie Yates, CHIP Neighborhood Representative

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

In accordance with the requirements set by the Community Development Board, the first meeting of CHIP/St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen area residents was called to order by Ralph Stone, Assistant City Manager (Economic Development) at 4:00 p.m., in the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen Chapel. Mr. Stone extended a welcome to attendees comprised of city staff and CHIP neighborhood representatives (home, business owners and property managers).

Mr. Stone advised that this is the first in a series of quarterly meetings to be scheduled so that mutual concerns may be discussed and resolved. He then presented attendees with an overview of the meeting agenda.

Additionally, Mr. Stone advised that there are many good things about to start happening concerning policy and improvements in the area surrounding CHIP. He mentioned that the City Commission will be presented with an updated redevelopment plan for downtown which has been expanded to include the area under discussion back to Highland Avenue between Court/Chestnut and Drew Streets. Mr. Stone stated in view of significant infrastructure dollars, one of the initiatives was directed to improving the quality of streets in the area along with policy initiatives which will address some of the problematic uses in the area, including but not limited to, day labor, check cashing centers, tattoo parlors, pawn shops, which are characterized by poorly maintained facilities, loitering and other indications of neighborhood deterioration.

He additionally mentioned that the St. Vincent de Paul soup kitchen is located within property zoned commercial where the use was permitted when established in 1991 and currently remains as a permitted use of the property. Additional information will be forthcoming on the city's policy initiatives.

Mr. Stone introduced Chief Sid Klein to discuss staffing issues, transitional housing update and neighborhood improvements. It was requested that attendees introduce themselves prior to speaking for accurate recordkeeping.

Dr. Jannelli requested an independent mediator/facilitator attend the neighborhood meetings. Mr. Ralph Stone was the facilitator for this meeting and with the presence of Mr. Horne, both gentlemen provided the city's perspective in matters of mutual concern.

Meet New Police Department Staff

Chief Klein referred to the meeting agenda and advised attendees that organizational changes will be taking place within the police department, and on this note, he took

the opportunity to introduce Sergeant Thomas Fisherkeller the newly assigned commander of the CHIP bike team. Additionally some members of the bike team -- Corporal Michael Kachurik, Officers Joseph Falcone and Leonard Merritt were also acknowledged by Chief Klein. Chief Klein mentioned that these officers share space in the CHIP facility and their responsibility is police presence in the area in and around CHIP. It was explained that as much time as is needed is spent maintaining police presence in the area with time set aside daily to handle administrative duties.

Marty Altner, a neighborhood property owner, inquired as to the amount of time spent by the bike team in the CHIP facility versus patrolling the area. Sergeant Fisherkeller advised that the bike team spends as much time enforcing laws in and

around the area time permitting, however, administrative responsibilities require that at certain times, officers need to be elsewhere. It was further explained that every day of the week an officer is assigned to the door of the soup kitchen from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Their job during that time is to check individuals requesting to be fed to ensure that they have proof of residency. If they don't have proof of residence, they are directed to CHIP to enroll in the program. Officers' work hours are scheduled so that coverage of the area is maintained from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m. daily.

Mr. Brian Schuh (Genie of Clearwater) made reference to a recent altercation behind his building located at 1367 Park Street and requested officers continue to maintain police presence at that location.

Transitional Housing Update

Chief Klein advised that demolition of the existing structures located at 1353 and 1357 Park Street commenced on September 3; construction is slated to start soon with completion anticipated during June 2004. At present, there is nothing further to be added to what was presented to the Community Development Board (CDB) at the July 15 hearing.

Boris Lozanov addressed the issues concerning the feasibility of relocating the soup kitchen and the possible decline in area property values. Chief Klein advised Mr. Lozanov there were no changes in the status of the soup kitchen and that the property values issue was addressed at the CDB hearing with testimony supporting an increase in property values. Chief Klein will share supporting documentation with Mr. Lozanov. Mr. Lozanov also expressed concern about alcohol, drug and prostitution activity in the area.

On the issue of property values, Martin (Marty) Altner, on behalf of the property owners in the area, and Mr. Paul Charles expressed dissatisfaction in that at previous City Commission meetings and the CDB hearing, that considering the changes planned for their neighborhood, each area resident present at the hearing was only given three minutes to speak. It was Mr. Altner's feeling that situations like this have a decided negative impact on the citizens who work and reside in the area. He took exception with so called "experts" who testified at length and the limitation imposed on the residents/property owners who wanted to be heard. Mr. Altner felt that this was prejudicial, however he is prepared to go forward and requested that his comments be included in the minutes.

Mr. Stone advised that he has reviewed the tape of the CDB meeting on C-View and stated that one of the items that needs to be the main focus in terms of the existing conditions of the neighborhood is the homelessness issue, particularly the homeless individual who displays a resistance to improving his way of life.

Mr. Stone stated, that in his opinion, without the benefit of Chief Klein, the CHIP program and the St. Vincent dePaul Soup Kitchen, the neighborhood would have experienced more decline than what is observed at present. Because of many factors, location of the neighborhood, deterioration of the commercial corridor, its lack of marketability, these kinds of neighborhoods in other cities around the county and parts of the State, even with absent owner problems, see similar kinds of problem uses. This is not a situation unique solely to CHIP or the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen area.

Chief Klein requested that the neighborhood and city personnel move forward on working together for the benefit of the area under discussion.

Neighborhood Improvements

Chief Klein continued with addressing organizational changes that will have a positive impact on the police department and in and around the facilities this meeting addresses.

On Monday September 15, Chief Klein had the opportunity to appear before the City Commission to request authorization to staff six (6) sworn officer positions slated to be eliminated due to expiration of grant funding. The City Commission agreed with Chief Klein's proposal and upon authorization of the City Manager, Chief Klein has been empowered to move ahead to create a team of officers (one Sergeant and five officers) for assignment specifically to the downtown area. Chief Klein defined the geographical boundaries specifically as Missouri Avenue west. With the addition of this team, the police department will be able to permit the CHIP officers to concentrate in the immediate area. Once this newly formed team is in place, and schedules and assignments are adjusted as necessary, the officers who operate out of the CHIP substation will be able to concentrate in the areas surrounding CHIP and the soup kitchen. It is anticipated that this newly formed team will be operational by the end of 2003. Additional information will be forthcoming.

Chief Klein also requested that residents not wait for quarterly meetings to address items of concern; that if anyone has an issue that are within the parameters of the officers assigned to CHIP to address, he requested that Sergeant Fisherkeller be contacted as it is the responsibility of this team to follow up on any issues related to CHIP and/or the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen.

Chief Klein addressed other neighborhood improvements such as the Mobile Medical Van which is now parking on Park Street (in front of the soup kitchen) and not on Pierce Street. This is in response to residential complaints and is done in an attempt to direct traffic flow to Cleveland Street. The van is present Monday and Fridays, for approximately three hours each day. Pinellas County Home Services,

the organization responsible for the medical van will work with Ed Brant and find amicable solutions to the concerns of area residents.

Chief Klein advised that the soup kitchen has graciously agreed to allow CHIP to install a lock on the back gate to monitor foot traffic in the areas of major concern to residents. Only soup kitchen volunteers will be able to operate the gate as a code or key will be required.

Ms. Pat Vaughn commented that she has noticed a favorable change in this regard.

Chief Klein referenced a letter written by Dr. Gilbert Jannelli (who was unable to attend the meeting); however, his concerns/suggestions and Chief Klein's responses to them are indicated below.

Concerns:

1. Trespassing of CHIP's clientele on property located at 1343 Cleveland Street.

Response: Enforcement will continue. We will now have the opportunity to increase patrol efforts with the addition of a downtown team.

2. Homeless sleeping, defacing properties at the above address, CHIP, the soup kitchen building and adjacent parcels.

Response: Ordinance violations will be addressed and enforced with the addition of the new patrol team.

Mr. Larry Finkle requested a contact number for immediate response to problem issues in the area. Chief Klein directed attendees to telephone the Communications Center at (727) 562-4242. (that number is staffed 24/7) to request officer presence.

Suggestions:

3. Provide portalets (such as those used at construction sites) outside the CHIP facility.

Response: This is not viable as it violates city code.

4. Request Fire Marshal (Fire Department) to inspect both building (CHIP & St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen).

Response: Chief Klein advised that this has already been done and both facilities are in compliance with the required codes.

5. Relocate soup kitchen.

Response: Chief Klein stated that relocation of the soup kitchen is outside of CHIP's control. Additionally, they are two separate and distinct entities, and CHIP leases the property from St. Vincent de Paul. Possibly, at some point in the future relocation will be discussed, however; at present it is not a consideration.

In this regard, Mr. Stone advised that at the City Manager's direction, Reginald Owens, Economic Development and Housing Director, has established a Homeless Task Force, and one of their initiatives is to attempt to find a long-term solution to the homelessness problem in downtown; and ideally out of the downtown area. This will be studied long-term with funding and operating issues taken into consideration. National initiatives are being studied by the task force; the City Manager attended a U.S. Conference of Mayors in February where one of the strategies discussed was relocation of the homeless. The larger cities are first in line for federal funding since the problems they are faced with exceed that of lesser populated cities. Solutions to the plight of the homeless will continue to be one of the major issues that Mr. Owens and his task force will continue to address.

Ms. Vaughn suggested an increase in public awareness so that the citizens of Clearwater are aware of the city's involvement in the homeless initiative. Marty Altner suggested that funding for Clearwater may be made possible with the assistance of Congressman Young who is chair of the Appropriations Committee, House of Representatives and other factions. Chief Klein stated that Congressman Young, Representative Kim Berfield, and former Senator Latvala are cognizant of Clearwater's homeless issue and support funding assistance for the CHIP program.

Mr. Horne advised that the city will continue to be competitive in obtaining additional resources for CHIP.

In response to a question posed by Larry Finkle relative to the relocation of CHIP and the soup kitchen if funds were available, Mr. Horne commented that if the city had adequate funds, it would only be able to manage what they own. Also, the entire point of the resource issue is to get enough dollars so that individuals and organizations are still able to accomplish their mission.

Additionally, Mr. Horne, in response to a commentary about the noticeable increase in the city's homeless population, explained that food is a natural draw for people who have no other means of eating. This is just one of the dynamics which explain why people are attracted to this area. Additionally, since no law exists which bans soup kitchens, there will always be a church/organization to help feed the homeless.

6. Increase the lighting at CHIP facility and the soup kitchen.

Response: This is being looked at.

7. Increase police patrols from 6:30 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. every day.

Response: We are attempting additional coverage with the implementation of the new downtown patrol team.

8. Tell soup kitchen and CHIP members to walk on sidewalks to and from each facility.

Response: The appropriate signage is in place.

9. Prevent the homeless from sleeping on soup kitchen property (fence in the entire complex with an 8' fence).

Martin Altner (owner of Spanish Gardens) requested an update on the fence issue. Carole Ciokiewicz advised Mr. Altner that CHIP would only maintain the fence that they would provide (to be located behind the existing fence line) and would not maintain the current fence surrounding Spanish Gardens. Current plans consist of installing a separate fence; mutually agreeable to all parties.

10. Have a secretary take detailed notes at each quarterly meeting. Have a city official attend the quarterly meetings in addition to Chief Klein.

Response: This is in place.

OTHER NEIGHBORHOOD CONCERNS

Resident Jose Lind requested an update on the properties located near Jack Russell Stadium he heard as being available space for the soup kitchen. This was deemed to be a rumor. Ms. Mary Lou Guthart sustained the fact that the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen has no intentions of relocating at this time. The City Manager reiterated his previous comment which was that with enough resources, the opportunity presents itself to anyone interested in relocating.

Additionally, Mr. Horne stated that the county is presently looking at the entire issue of homelessness; and that this issue is not unique to Clearwater. The primary concern is that any facility established in North County should address all of the North County area, and service has to incorporate a multitude of needs of the homeless. Models that follow these guidelines are the ones that are currently successful across the country. Mr. Lind expressed concern about the ever-increasing number of homeless individuals coming into the CHIP area; his concern is the wider the expansion of service, the more homeless individuals will congregate

in the area. Mr. Lind expressed his priority as being the safety of his community and maintenance of the financial investments of area residents. He requested that the city, CHIP and St. Vincent de Paul work together to remove the facilities for the homeless from his neighborhood.

Chief Klein corroborated Mr. Horne's comments in that the City of Clearwater does not have the resources to do this; also for it to happen it has to be a collaborative effort with Pinellas County; and will require mega federal dollars to make it happen even though we are all in agreement that is the direction we would like to take. Also, Chief Klein stated that this isn't going to happen in the near future and will take time; and he requested input as to what can be done in the interim in terms of containment, control and management to lessen the impact to the neighborhood.

Brian Schuh requested that city staff aid the residents/business owners to co-exist in the area. Mr. Schuh conveyed that he would like to see an attempt by CHIP or the soup kitchen to perhaps adopt streets in and around the soup kitchen and clean up the area. He also requested pro-activity toward the neighborhood residents to assist them in maintaining the area.

In this regard, Chief Klein stated that Mr. Schuh's request was reasonable, and requested specific ideas concerning the possible implementation of an "adopt a street" program. Additionally, once the transitional housing complex is completed, the residents of that complex should take pride in the area and assist with cleaning up the area. Ed Brant suggested that it is possible that a clean up detail might be organized for the Saturday chore schedule mandated for individuals enrolled in the CHIP program.

Mr. Myles Kline, resident of Creekside Manor #1, advised that some of the residents in that complex were once in the situation of being homeless. He inquired about an incident that occurred on Franklin and Waverly Streets with many armed police officers several days prior to the meeting. Mr. Kline was advised that this incident occurred as a result of notification of an armed and dangerous man. Mr. Kline warned the people residing at Creekside Manor to stay away from the area. This gentleman inquired as to whether he exercised correct procedure in this instance in light of the fact that he was accused of frightening his neighbors by the complex administrator.

Chief Klein corroborated that it was the correct action for Mr. Kline to take and went on to further describe the incident and suggested that Mr. Kline contact one of the CHIP officers who will speak to the administrator to sanction Mr. Kline's actions.

Ms. Pat Vaughn stated that the area has seen an increase in drug and prostitution activity in the past year. She said that drug activity is conducted openly and requested additional enforcement of these types of activity.

In response, Chief Klein advised that the police department spends an inordinate amount of time doing "reverse sting" operations, where an officer acts as a decoy in an attempt to arrest those involved with the hopes of deterring these types of activity within the area. Additionally, Chief Klein advised that the department is also involved in a "mapping" program. Mapping refers to alienation of a prostitute from a specific area; that once a prostitute is arrested, the department signs a petition with the Court stating that if this individual shows up physically in the area again, the individual is subject to arrest. The current law is being reviewed so that harsher penalties are imposed for this type of activity.

Ms. Vaughn announced that on Monday, September 22, 2003 through the cooperation of the City Manager, Chief Klein, and Developmental Services Director Jeff Kronschnabl, she will be part of a ride-along through the neighborhood to point out problem areas. If anyone has an issue they would like to bring forward to the city concerning code violations they can do so via Ms. Vaughn and are requested to contact her prior to September 22.

Ms. Vaughn mentioned the laundry on Evergreen and Cleveland Street and labeled it "a drug hole". She inquired as to what constitutes a nuisance establishment and what can be done legally to condemn and demolish this structure.

Ms. Vaughn also requested that the city take care of its properties located behind Marv's Meat Market and the FINA Gas station which are not maintained; bushes are overgrown, and as a result, this is where the homeless gravitate to sleep.

In this context, Mr. Kline mentioned a house on the corner of Betty Lane and Pierce Street where the shrubs are totally overgrown. Mr. Stone requested that Ms. Vaughn address the above locations during her ride-along.

Neighborhood resident Rosa Matos (1353 Pierce Street) stated that she built her house eight years ago through a program with the City of Clearwater and Community Development Corporation in their attempt to improve the area. Ms. Matos was assured, via letter at that time, that the area was a safe place to live.

She stated she is very disappointed and discouraged with the City of Clearwater. She has incurred peeping toms, homeless individuals on her property utilizing water from her spigot; also, she has been followed while going into her house. She stressed the dangers involved particularly since she is raising children in this environment. Ms. Matos does not consider the area safe enough or an appropriate environment for children/families. She has advised her children to immediately begin to defend themselves should someone attempt to enter her home. She expressed her opinion that this is not the area for CHIP.

Ms. Matos stated that this is the first time she has been able to attend a neighborhood meeting and suggested that in consideration of the working individual who would like to attend, future meetings need to be scheduled later on in the day possibly during early evening hours.

It was the consensus of the attendees that the next meeting should commence at 6:30 p.m.

Mr. Tsouris requested additional police presence in a two-block radius around CHIP and the soup kitchen. Chief Klein explained that with the creation of an additional downtown team, the current Bike Team will be able to spend additional time monitoring that area.

Mr. Altner conveyed his respect for the work the soup kitchen is doing. Also, since the area being discussed is considered a working class area, Mr. Altner observed that there was no representation from the Hispanic residents at the meeting. He added that this population consists of hardworking individuals and most families have many dependents. Mr. Altner encouraged city staff, and Chief Klein to work with the appropriate government officials toward the creation of a proper, well-funded, centralized facility that would not negatively impact any neighborhood.

Mr. Altner also expressed concern for the non-English speaking children in the area. It is his hope that the children in the area remain safe. In this regard, Mr. Altner recommended that everyone at the meeting make a concerted effort to honestly work together, eliminating all smoke-screens, and remain in communication with each other toward the common goal of protecting the neighborhood and the children and maintain the financial investments of residents and business owners.

Mr. Stone introduced Clearwater City Manager Bill Horne who concluded the meeting by expressing his concern that the city has not created expectations that cannot be fulfilled with its citizens. Part of his job as City Manager is to advise individuals what they can reasonably expect, and what they cannot, so that no one perceives an unrealistic expectation. He continued, that while the city would like to do better, there are some realities that have to be lived with. Additionally, he stated the City of Clearwater does not have enough police officers to meet the needs of its residents; also that crime is citywide. Also, Clearwater has a police force that perhaps may be slightly undersized for what is presently needed; but police officers come at a price, and the Commission is now considering how to go forward with the current complement of officers and what future needs may dictate. Additionally, Mr. Horne advised that citizens may not always get a police officer when one is needed as there are currently not enough and probably the city will never have enough police officers to meet the perceived needs of Clearwater's citizens. Mr. Horne advised that there is criminal activity occurring all over the city; and not exclusive to one specific community.

Mr. Horne also mentioned that he has been in contact with Mr. Paul Charles and confirmed that Mr. Charles has raised the issue of litigation. Mr. Horne advised Mr. Charles that if they are involved in a dialogue that may lead to litigation, due to dissatisfaction with the city's response to concerns, then in that instance, Mr. Horne advised that the City Attorney will structure how Mr. Horne will interact with the area representatives. Mr. Horne emphatically stated that in no way will he compromise the interest of the City of Clearwater in dealing with any issue. Mr. Horne felt that there is a need to let the citizenry know how the city will react to situations where litigation is a consideration.

Mr. Horne mentioned that he has in his possession slides of properties owned by an individual who is currently challenging the city about city properties being out of code. The city has, in the last year, endeavored to comply with code; and that principal still applies.

Further, Mr. Horne advised that the city is aware of the problem areas where prostitution is a repeated problem and it is being addressed. The city will remain focused on this problem, and remains committed to eradicating the problem.

It is the city's contention that meetings of this type will enhance citizen feedback and give all concerned a realistic expectation of what the city can do. Mr. Horne stated that he understands the position of the area citizens, and he has empathy for the concerns discussed at the meeting. Additionally, Mr. Horne agreed with the safety issues and conveyed the city's sensitivity to the Hispanic community.

Mr. Horne requested a copy of the letter from the City of Clearwater that Ms. Matos referred to in her comments.

Ms. Matos shared that much of what happens in the neighborhood is not brought forward to the city as it involves the Hispanic residents. They will not look for assistance from the police department possibly because of the language barrier, fear of reprisal from immigration, etc. Ms. Matos does speak Spanish and has spoken to the non-English speaking residents. She stated that their feelings are not to come forward and possibly create problems. She conveyed that the Hispanic population incurs the same problems as other area residents on the issue of the homeless.

Mr. Horne advised that Clearwater is cognizant of what other cities are facing; he has yet to find a department in the city, especially the police department, that is not aware of the types of problems discussed today. He stated that concerns will be addressed, however, he would appreciate continuation of the dialogue between Clearwater residents and the city. Mr. Horne added that the key to solving problems is recognizing that by working together, and keeping the lines of communication open, we can only go forward toward resolving problem issues.

Mr. Lind questioned the possibility of the city donating property for relocation purposes as a workable solution. Mr. Horne advised that the city is currently entertaining many options, however, what the city will not do is to go off on its own knowing that the issue is larger than just Clearwater. Perhaps, in the final analysis, when a viable solution is reached, then what Mr. Lind is proposing may be a consideration. At present, the city will not focus all its attention on the relocation of the Clearwater Homeless Intervention Project and the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen; but will maintain its focus on the issues at hand, and work toward a countywide effort to resolve these issues.

Mr. Altner expressed concern about the traffic flow on Pierce Street, and questioned whether there is any way that the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen and CHIP's daytime clients can be encouraged or notified that it would be preferable for all concerned if they use Cleveland Street to access the facilities. Mary Lou Guthart explained that signage was recently erected prohibiting foot traffic on Pierce Street. Mr. Altner requested that the above be reinforced with respective clientele.

Mr. Lozanov brought up the day laborers who, early in the morning, remain in the area drinking and making noise. He suggested an increase in police presence. Mr. Horne advised that the city and police department will go forward with this request.

Mr. Stone concluded the meeting by stating that the Chief Klein's comments and information concerning the police department's organizational changes is good news and should be helpful for the area populace.

The next quarterly meeting is scheduled to be held during the month of December starting at 6:30 p.m. Flyers will be sent to area residents, businesses and city staff announcing the specific date and location of the meeting.

To better direct the flyers, it was requested that all attendees note their names and addresses on sign-in sheets which were provided.

The meeting concluded at 5:25 p.m.

/s/

Sid Klein, President

Clearwater Homeless Intervention Project