

NEWS RELEASE

COLUMBUS COMPACT CORPORATION AND OLDE TOWNE EAST BLOCK WATCH RELEASE NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY SURVEY AND PUBLIC SAFETY STRATEGY FOR NEAR EAST AND NEAR SOUTH COLUMBUS

October 19, 2011

(Columbus, OH) Columbus Compact Corporation and Olde Towne East Block Watch today hosted a press conference to discuss longstanding public safety issues in the Near East and Near South neighborhoods of Columbus. Both organizations were overwhelmed by the response, with 56 people attending this event during the middle of the work day, and we appreciate the interest our residents have taken in this initiative.

One of the overarching messages of this event was the concern of the neighborhoods about current City Council's lack of participation in this issue. Both organizations were strongly dismayed by the dismissal of this press conference as "a political stunt," by Council Chair Andrew Ginther in an October 18, 2011 Dispatch article, at: <http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2011/10/18/neighborhood-groups-say-council-ignores-anti-crime-plan.html> .

In response, the group prepared, and showed, a video rebuttal of Mr. Ginther's charge, providing videotape of multiple drive-by shootings and a murder on Columbus streets. All who saw the video were impressed that these are serious issues, deserving of a serious response from Mr. Ginther and City Council. The video rebuttal is posted on-line at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5j2YS6u3SY> so that citizens can view for themselves if this issue has relevance.

The group also passed out a press packet with over a year's worth of emails and letters to council pertaining to this issue, as well as minutes of three meetings the neighborhood groups organized last year with various institutional stakeholders (Police, Courts, City Attorney, Safety Department, neighborhood groups, etc.), the Final Report on Public Disorder published by the Old National Road Business Association in 2007, and a copy of testimony provided to City Council's Public Safety Committee in July 2011. The group impressed that this has been a longstanding issue that has been arduously studied and for which we have sought resolution for quite some time, with no feedback, input, or engagement by Columbus City Council.

The group roundly congratulated and thanked the Public Safety Department and Columbus Police officers for their effectiveness in conducting crime crackdowns, and indicated we needed to support the Division of Police and the 12th Precinct officers by providing the laws and resources needed to sustain the gains made during each of the two crackdowns over the past year.

Jonathan Beard, President and CEO of Columbus Compact Corporation opened the meeting with a welcome to the facilities, expressing disappointment over Mr. Ginther's pompous dismissal of our longstanding and serious issues, saying "it was a cheap shot, and it was wrong. We have been working

hard on these issues in good-faith for years, with little to no recognition from council that this is was an issue of importance. We strongly disagree and resent the flippant treatment of our neighborhood concerns.” Beard then remarked that at least 12 other neighborhoods were signing onto a letter now being circulated by the Franklin Park Area Association urging immediate consideration of these issues.

Pastor Bob Ward, of First English Lutheran Church on E. Main Street, led a prayer for safety and the families of those impacted by violence.

Then, citing seven shootings in the past 45 days in the Near East/South neighborhoods (with over 30 in a year), Kathy Webb, of the Olde Towne East (Ohio-Parsons) Block Watch, began the discussion with an overview illustrating the escalation of drug and gun violence in the neighborhoods particularly over the past several months. Ms. Webb talked about the link we are finding between drugs, violence, and criminal gangs operating in the neighborhoods, and the importance of addressing this not just as street crime, but as criminal gang activity.

Michael Moore, with the Olde Towne East Block Watch and immediate Past President of the Olde Towne East Neighborhood Association, then provided a timeline of our neighborhood’s involvement in this issue, detailing the meetings held in 2010, the commitment by Council to move forward going into 2011, and then the utter lack of responsiveness from council evidenced to the present. Mr. Moore contrasted Safety Committee Chair Michelle Mill’s recent press conferences and initiatives on graffiti and adult gaming parlors as being low in importance compared to the issue of drug and gun violence on our streets. Mr. Moore remarked on the absence of any Council incumbents at this event as being indicative of the lack of interest shown in this issue.

Jonathan Beard then discussed all the positives happening in the neighborhood and the current growth and development taking place. He reminded all that this is a great and strong neighborhood – strong enough to talk about the blemishes including these issues. Mr. Beard talked about the level of neighborhood initiative – the fact that E. Main Street had the first safety camera system and the only community-based security camera system with 30 residents and business owners with ability to Pan-Tilt-Zoom the cameras, and to record, save, and playback images. He talked about the residents organizing around the deleterious impact of some of the carry out beer and wine stores, and voting the area dry by 3:1 margins last fall, with another vote coming up November 8th.

Beard then provided an overview of our proposed solution, a Demonstration Project called “Columbus Safe Neighborhoods Target Zone.” This project, designed by the community and supported by community feedback to a recent safety issues survey (the results of which were released at the press conference), is designed to reduce illegal drug activity and gun violence, proposed for an area roughly bounded by Broad Street, Frebis Avenue, Parsons Avenue, and Alum Creek.

The core of the strategies calls for a working group consisting of Franklin County Municipal Court, Franklin County Common Pleas Court, City of Columbus Department of Public Safety and Division of Police, U.S. District Attorney, Columbus City Attorney, Franklin County Prosecutor, Columbus City Council, and a coalition of neighborhoods.

The components of the Demonstration Project would be:

- 1) Disrupting open air drug markets through enhancement of Columbus's currently-unconstitutional Loitering in Aid of Drug Offenses law.
- 2) Disrupting drug and gang activities in private residences and commercial establishments by investigations and raids by police narcotics, vice, and gang units, and by scheduling problem establishments for inspections by the inter-agency Nuisance Abatement Group.
- 3) Working with State Senator Jim Hughes to toughen the penalties for gun crimes at the state level.
- 4) Coordinating arrest, prosecution, conviction and sentencing strategies for repeat and hardcore drug and violent criminals, including upgrade or enhancement of the current NetRMS crime reporting system used by the Division of Police which appears to be an unstable platform that does not return usable information to officers on the street or people seeking information on police encounters with offenders. This information would facilitate a program to contact property owners of people arrested in our neighborhood for drug and gun crimes.
- 5) In addition, we envision a different strategy to engage first-time, nonviolent offenders – particularly young adults – and provide them opportunities to work to improve their neighborhoods, and real pathways to jobs – starting with reserving a number of slots in the summer youth employment programs funded each year by the City of Columbus.
- 6) Finally, the project would seek to fund a community-based project coordinator to work along the Ohio-Champion spine, from Broad to Whittier, as funding for such critical neighborhood-based positions has been eliminated over the years by City government in the Main Street and Livingston Avenue corridors, though such City funding exists in other neighborhoods and/or through contracts with Community Crime Patrol.

The proposed implementation timeline called for Council to agree to pursue a project like this Demonstration Project within weeks, and then work with the administration and other stakeholders to allocate funding in the 2012 city budget as it is presented in late November. We believe that all parties, working together, could arrive at a strategy within three months, with implementation beginning March 15, 2012. We believe most of the funding for this Demonstration Project would come from existing agency budgets, and would merely be a reallocation of work time and effort into a coordinated effort, and that supplemental funding would also be required, which should come from the City's General Fund and could be carried forward over a 3-5 year period with new tax revenues generated by the Columbus Casino beginning in the fall.

With the presentation of the Demonstration Project complete, Mr. Moore invited the political candidates in attendance to comment on the effort. Candidate for Mayor Earl Smith, and candidates for Council Matt Ferris, Robert Bridges, and Daryl Hennessey provided brief remarks about their perceptions and approaches toward public safety and support for neighborhoods.

While no incumbent council members attended the Press Conference, copies of the summary of the "Columbus Safe Neighborhoods Target Zone" demonstration project concepts will be presented to

Columbus City Council by Thursday this week, with a request for immediate consideration and commitment to funding and planning this project – or one similar – with dispatch.

Copies of the proposed Demonstration Project, Neighborhood Safety Survey (raw data), and Community Goals for the September 29th meeting with council on drugs and gun violence will be posted to www.colscompact.com, and through various webpages and chat groups.

For more information, contact Jonathan Beard, Columbus Compact Corporation, at 614-251-0926 ext. 201; Michael Moore, Olde Towne East Block Watch, at 614-208-5707, or Kathy Webb, Olde Towne East Block Watch, at 614-257-7444.