

**COMMUNITY RELATIONS ADVISORY BOARD (CRAB)
PUBLIC SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PSAC)**

Joint Report on Public Safety in the Vicinity of Spellman Overpass

November 19, 2007

BACKGROUND:

At the Regular Meeting on July 9, 2007, the City Council referred this issue to CRAB & PSAC. This referral came about after several public safety incidents had occurred in the vicinity of the Spellman Overpass. The referral specifically included a suggestion that the two advisory groups hold a joint public forum.

This referral was later extended to include the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC). YAC was involved in the planning of the forums, but their participation during and after the forums was limited due to college attendance by a number of retiring YAC members.

Public Forums were held on Tuesday, August 28 at the Greenbriar Terrace Room and on Saturday, September 15 at the Municipal Building. Both forums were open to all. The forums accepted public comments on the issue but neither advisory group members, nor City officials, responded to the comments made. Each forum had approximately 50 attendees. Attached are notes taken by City staff during the two forums, as well as written comments and emails that were submitted.

CRAB & PSAC held a joint meeting on October 2 to consider the input received at both forums. Both advisory groups believed the forums had provided a good opportunity for community input. The comments received at both forums were carefully reviewed and assessed. Crime statistics provided by the Police Department were also considered. At the conclusion of the October 2 meeting, there was general consensus on a set of recommendations and it was decided to submit a joint report to the City Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

CRAB and PSAC recommend the following. These recommendations are not in any particular order.

- ... Continued police presence at Spellman Overpass and the surrounding neighborhoods (including bike & foot patrol). There were many favorable comments about the increased police presence in the vicinity of the overpass. There was also discussion of using motorcycles or Segways to patrol the overpass and connecting pathways.

- ... Proper Maintenance of the Spellman Overpass and surrounding areas. It was noted that there were holes in fencing near the overpass. Certain areas (like the area near the Gladys Spellman plaque) appeared neglected.
- ... Better Environmental Design of the area surrounding Spellman Overpass. It was suggested that straightening the path, particularly on the Gardenway side would provide better visibility. Also, certain types of landscaping along the path on both sides of the overpass may inhibit escape or hiding in the woods.
- ... Education/Outreach to the communities surrounding the overpass. (It was noted that actual crime statistics did not indicate a significant increase in crime or a high rate of crime when compared to other City neighborhoods.) Community outreach by the Police Department via a door-to-door information campaign or community meetings was recommended. The fear and concern of residents who live near the overpass is real and this education/outreach may help address it. Outreach to youth who use the overpass is also suggested.
- ... Security Cameras similar to those recently installed in Roosevelt Center.
- ... Emergency Call Box installation.
- ... Improved Lighting along the paths connecting to the overpass.
- ... Private Security similar to that used by the Greenbriar Community Association. (While clearly not a matter for the City to decide, it is suggested that Greenbelt Homes Incorporated consider hiring a private security firm to supplement City police coverage.)

A number of forum participants suggested some form of overpass closure, restricted or controlled access and/or gating, particularly late at night. However, other participants indicated reasons to use the overpass during late evening hours including: shift work at NASA, early morning use of the ERHS track, evening performances at the Greenbelt Theater, Greenbelt Arts Center or New Deal Café, etc.

CRAB & PSAC do not recommend any closure or gating of the Spellman Overpass. Upon analysis, there did not seem to be an effective time or means to close the bridge. A number of residents requested closing of the bridge at night. However, there is legitimate use at night. Moreover, most of the crime incidents cited occurred during the day or early evening, when a late night closing would have no effect.

There was also concern about the negative “message” that closure or gating of the overpass would send. The overpass was built to unite sections of the city that were divided by the construction of the Parkway. That need still remains. While the fears and concerns of Gardenway residents are real and legitimate, the use of the bridge by residents at various times of the day and night is also real and legitimate. It is the belief and hope of CRAB & PSAC that the

recommendations enumerated above will serve to make the Spellman Overpass corridor a safer and more pleasant artery for pedestrians and cyclists traveling within the city, as well as for residents living in its vicinity.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Community Relations Advisory Board

Silke Pope, Chair
Public Safety Advisory Committee