



Old Astoria Neighborhood Association (OANA)
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OANA Minutes
October 11, 2016

Richard Kuzhami thanked Todd Dufresne from Astoria Craft Bar and Kitchen for kindly providing the food. Officers from the 114th Precinct introduced themselves and Richard thanked for coming to talk with OANA about the new community policing and other developments in the neighborhood.

Deputy Inspector Peter Fortune from the 114th Precinct then gave the meeting a recap of the recent arrests for gun possession and drugs at the Astoria Houses. Several individuals were being processed by the Queens DA at the time of the meeting. Inspector Fortune explained that the 114 is using what is known as "precision policing," focusing on the individuals whom they believe to be responsible for most of the crimes committed and targeting those individuals.

Last summer there were some firearms incidents and the 114 is working with PSA9 (the Housing Authority Jurisdiction Police), the Bronx Narcotics Unit and the Mayor's Office to combat this. Gun buyback programs, community events and anti-domestic violence will be brought into play in what he described as a complicated situation.

Inspector Fortune then went on to describe new developments and programs. As of October 1, the new Neighborhood Community Officers (NCOs) program has been in operation in the 114. Banding lines in the precinct have been drawn for patrolling: the area encompassed by OANA is known as Sector David and those sectors will remain as "steady sectors." One-third of patrol time will now be "off patrol time" to allow the officers to attend community events and introduce themselves to the neighbors. The same NCOs will stay in the same sectors, and will be trained to engage the community by talking and listening. They will patrol on bikes and on foot as well in cars. There will be increased use of video technology, in cooperation with the community, to help cut down on petty crime.

Inspector Fortune clarified that the NCO program is separate from the Community Affairs office, which will continue to operate separately. The NCO program will cut down on average response time. The NCO program will work on specific problems reported by the community, such as graffiti and car break-ins and will coordinate to deal with homeless individuals experiencing difficulties.



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Regarding the situation in public housing, Inspector Fortune reported that there had been zero shootings in public housing in the year to date, for the first time in many years. Shootings, murders, and burglary statistics are down. Grand larcenies (car break-in, ID thefts, etc.) are what is driving stats up. The meeting was reminded not to leave valuables in cars! Regarding ID theft, the most recent scam occurring in our neighborhood is the mail box "check fishing" scheme. This is a multi-faceted, well-organized crew who is fishing mail out of boxes on certain streets, stealing credit cards to set up phony accounts, and "washing" checks with acetone. The crew then changes the payee on the check and sometimes the amount and presents the check at a bank to get it cashed. Inspector Fortune's opinion is that the best defense against check fishing is to raise awareness. A certain brand of pen, the Uniball 207 gel-based pen, is recommended for writing checks since it is resistant to washing by acetone. The 114 is working on getting a large number of these pens for distribution to the community.

The meeting was then opened to questions. Richard asked whether a map showing the new "steady sectors" is available. Yes, it has been posted on the 114th Precinct Twitter account, at <https://twitter.com/NYPD114Pct/status/781173675668144128> Diane Kantzoglou mentioned that fires had been set on the Alma property behind Shore Towers, close to the waterfront. She has also seen people coming and going on the lot late at night. Deputy Inspector Fortune advised Diane to liaise with the Community Officers to address the problem. Kathleen Springer asked what the precise borders of Sector David were. We were told that Sector David extends from 21st Avenue to 21st Street, and from 21st St to the waterfront. Kathleen also asked if stealing mail is a Federal crime? It is, and the 114 is liaising with the FBI as well as the Post Office. Tex Cruikshank asked if mail fishing happens more at night? Inspector Fortune said that it does, and the best time to drop off mail is just before the mail is cleared for collection--don't put in the box once the last collection of the day has been made.

Richard asked about whether the Community Officers can respond if there is an issue in the parks? Inspector Fortune said that they can, and that the 114 is working with Norman Chan on issues reported. He said that Athens Square Park is presently being considered a trouble spot because of homeless individuals who were staking out and occupying benches. Clare Doyle said that there were reports of individuals who were clearly drunk harassing middle school children in Athens Square Park in the afternoon when school let out. Richard mentioned that it had taken a lot of effort to get the Sean's Place playground locked at night, and Norman has said that he doesn't have the personnel to lock up all playgrounds, parks and open spaces at night. Inspector Fortune said that the 114 has reached to the Department of Homeless Services to try to get outreach and placement programs into effect, especially at night. "Loitering" is no longer illegal, aggressive panhandling is. Police could issue a summons for



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sleeping on parks benches, but Inspector Fortune's opinion was that there is no point arresting homeless individuals when there are drugs involved, it won't do anything to get to the heart of the problem. He added that the trouble spots at 41st St and Broadway, at 31st St and Ditmars, and at the triangle near Burger King have been remediated to a large extent.

Richard asked what the biggest parking problem in Sector David is. We were told that derelict or abandoned vehicles are a big problem, but that appointing a traffic sergeant has made a big difference. 91 derelict and/or abandoned vehicles have been logged since September, and this has freed up parking spaces. The increasing popularity of Astoria has led to an increased demand for parking, but Inspector Fortune observed that alternate-side-of-the-street parking is observed fairly well in the neighborhood.

Tex brought up the issue of illegal soccer playing in Astoria Park; he believes that after it's been raining, this is detrimental to the grass. The possibility of having an artificial-grass soccer field vs. a natural-grass pitch was briefly discussed.

Inspector Fortune reminded the meeting that the 114th Precinct Community meeting is held at Riccardo's every fourth Tuesday, and he encouraged everyone to attend. Richard thanked the Inspector and the other officers from the 114 for attending the meeting and giving us much useful information.

Richard then introduced our new Partnerships for Parks Outreach Coordinator Grethe Suarez. Grethe explained how Partnerships for Parks operates and how it coordinates with local organizations and groups such as Astoria Park Alliance to promote programming and service projects in local parks and to encourage volunteerism in parks. She shared her contact information with the meeting.

Richard then introduced Jack Schmidt from DOT. Jack reported on the July 20 OANA/DOT field trip in Astoria looking for "quick fixes" to traffic problems. The field trip looked at 6 locations that might be suitable candidates for angle parking. Two locations were judged to be suitable to add parking: they were Hoyt Avenue South from 21st Street eastbound, and 14th Street between 30th Avenue and Broadway. OANA's proposal would add 60-degree angled parking to each stretch of road. It would add about 45 spaces to Hoyt Avenue, and about 47 spaces to 14th Street, eliminating parallel parking on



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those stretches of road. These new spaces would be reverse parking, meaning cars would back in to the spaces, making it easier to pull out in to traffic safely upon leaving the space.

Jack briefly explained why some streets that were examined were then rejected. Claudia and Richard discussed whether 27th Avenue would be suitable or too narrow for reverse-angle parking; Jack suggested that the street could be reexamined. Claudia mentioned that we should consider whether parking spots were being lost as the neighborhood developed. Kathleen Springer asked if there was an increase in traffic problems on streets with angle-parking; Jack said that there is no increase in accidents when angle-parking is introduced. Teresa Lisson said that on streets that aren't suitable for angle parking, it would be helpful to have striping of parking spots. Jack clarified that the DOT is striping lanes but not parking spots.

Richard said that the plan presented by OANA would need to be well defined. Community Board One had suggested bringing the plan to DOT first before bringing it to CB1. With the introduction of CitiBike to Astoria, the neighborhood may lose additional parking spots. Teresa asked about parking overnight in Astoria Park and whether it's legal. Richard said no, but it's not always strictly enforced, and if people take their cars out early enough in the morning they may get away with it. Kathleen asked whether underground parking had ever been considered. Richard said that it had been discussed but never concretely. Jack informed us that Astoria had a lot of "spaghetti" (utilities, etc) underground which would make below-ground parking tougher to develop.

Richard mentioned that OANA had been successful in getting speed bumps added on 11th Street and on 27th Avenue. In order to facilitate business on Astoria Blvd., OANA has requested DOT to consider metered parking that would free up parking spots.

Richard thanked the presenters and the attendees and adjourned the meeting.