

***HERITAGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING***

March 15, 2004

Meeting started about 7:00, led by Mikal Grimes, President

Neighborhood Crime

Officer David Crowder with the Austin Police Department told neighborhood residents that there had been "...a huge spike in burglaries..." Officer Crowder speculated that the spike could be caused by a number of factors, including the transients in Hemphill Park, a possible meth lab that police busted on 38 ½ street, and gypsies. Crowder noted that there was a transient problem in the park east of the Heritage neighborhood and said he would look into reports of transients hanging out in the 29th and Rio Grande area. He noted that it was illegal to drink alcoholic beverages anywhere in a public space in Austin. Crowder thought that a potential meth lab had been found in an abandoned apartment near 38th and Lamar, but was uncertain of the address. He said police had the operator of the lab in custody. Crowder noted that crime tended to spike when gypsies, who are generally associated with traveling carnivals, come to town. He also said that there is a gang of economically disadvantaged college students from St. Edwards that have nowhere to go over spring break. Therefore, they are homelessly wandering the streets with backpacks in tow. However, it was unclear if they were responsible for the recent spike in burglaries. Nevertheless, the police are keeping an eye on them.

Officer Crowder noted that it is important to use common sense to minimize the possibility of property crimes: lock your doors, don't leave valuables in plain sight, and look out for each other's property. He also suggested that if you see someone suspicious to call 911. He said it would also be good to get license plate numbers of suspicious vehicles. Crowder said that studies have shown that a Neighborhood Watch can reduce crime by 15 to 20 percent. A resident asked if having a pawn shop in the neighborhood could cause crime. Officer Crowder said he didn't think so. APD closely monitors who and what gets pawned at pawn shops.

In other tidbits, the city has a graffiti hotline (854-4125) where they will come out and cover graffiti in a couple days.

Façade on Washington Square

Some neighborhood residents have been concerned about the status of the property on 3006 Washington Square where several years ago the house burned down and only the façade is left. The owners of the property, Rick and Jane Fish, described their ordeal in trying to rebuild after the fire. The Fishes said that they have been "...wrestling with the insurance company..." and are a considerable amount of money shy of a full recovery. Shortly before their house burned, their insurance company was bought by a larger company, which delayed discussions for six months. "Our goal is to get back in the house," Mr. Fish told attendees at the meeting. However, they didn't anticipate that three and half years later they would still be struggling to get a settlement. The Fishes desire is

to rebuild the house as it was, although with a master bedroom on the first floor. However, as the saying goes, they don't build 'em like they used to. The insurance company apparently wants to pay at a much lower level than would be required to replace a high-quality older home. The Fishes moved next door in anticipation of a quick settlement and a rebuilding of their home. However, after two years, they moved out of town for more space.

A new complication is that the city is asking the Fishes to tear down the façade or face fines and/or a city demolition. Betsy Greenberg, a neighbor across the street, noted that she had asked the city to do something about the property. Greenberg noted that she and others on the street were concerned about the appearance and safety of the property and the constant parade of filmmakers and musicians using the façade as a backdrop. The Fishes said that they were willing to make the site more secure, including renting the servants' quarters to have someone on site, breaking out the broken glass in the façade, painting the facade, and ensuring that the grounds are kept up. Betsy Greenberg and Wade Odell said that they would think about it, but were concerned about how much longer the façade would remain without a house behind it.

The steering committee will check with other concerned neighbors about the issue and the Fishes offer. If there is a general consensus to accept the Fishes offer, the Neighborhood Association would try to work with the city to put a stay on the impending demolition. The entire issue would then be revisited in a year. The Fishes said that if the façade was torn down, they would consider either building a smaller house on the lot or bundling the property with the property to the south and selling the entire package.

Meeting adjourned about 10 pm.

As noted by Robert E. Mace, Secretary, 3/18/04

Attendees that signed the sign-in sheet or were noted on the sign-in sheet:

David Crowder (APD)
Jane Fish
Rick Fish
Al Godfrey, Steering Committee
Betsy Greenberg
Mikal Grimes, President
Barbara Hunt
Frank Hunt
Jolene Kiolbassa, Steering Committee
Laurie Limbacher, Steering Committee
Robert Mace, Secretary
Naomi Marmell
Wade Odell, Steering Committee
Jeff Webster, Steering Committee