

Meeting Minutes for

July 12, 2016 meeting between

Briarcliff residents and Chapel Hill police

compiled by Ken Larsen

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Location of meeting: home of Ken Larsen, 807 Emory Drive

28 neighbors and 9 police officers attended. One of the neighbors was Town Council member Ed Harrison. We could have had more attendees, but many interested people were unavailable for various reasons. Also, we discouraged more from attending once the RSVPs exceeded 20.

The meeting was preceded by pizza that had been ordered from Alfredo's Pizzeria of University Place. Beverages (Italian sodas) were provided by Jodi Bilinkoff. Gourmet chocolate chips were made and provided by Myra Zollinger. Many thanks to them.

The business portion of the meeting lasted one hour and 40 minutes and was led by Officer Mark Geercken of the "Cop Shop" located at University Place. As you can read from these meeting minutes, he presented a wealth of valuable information in an extremely organized fashion. We thank him and the other attending officers for meeting with us and helping us improve our neighborhood safety and security.

Here are the key points made in the meeting:

	Introduction
1	We're here for this meeting because Briarcliff has had a rise in burglaries and traffic violations. You've had 6 break-ins this year and 3 in 2015. Over the last year you've had 50 interactions with the police where we wrote a report.
2	Chapel Hill is split up into four areas, and Briarcliff is in area 3. Downtown Franklin Street is area 1. Area 2 is the southern end (Southern Village). Area 4 is the northern end. Police officers are not assigned to any particular area. They can respond to issues in any of the four areas.
3	We're a one stop shop. A police officer may perform multiple duties: write tickets, attend meetings like this, ... In our job there could 11 hours and 50 minutes of smooth sailing followed by 10 minutes of hell. Sometimes we run call to call to call, and other times not.
4	When we get dispatched a call from Communications they send it to a computer (called the CAD) in an officer's car. This provides the officer with all the information about the call. It comes straight from the 911 call. It gives the address, the time and all the notes along with a map that shows where the incident has occurred. It's pretty cool technology. Years ago we wrote everything on carbon copy paper. Now we're paperless. All of the data gets uploaded to a computer when we come in from a shift.
5	If one of these officers gets a call now, they will leave this meeting.

6	Some stats: Briarcliff has had 50 calls over the last year where we wrote a report. One animal bite, two EMS calls, one vehicle that was broken into, 6 break-ins, some check-ins for well being, domestic disturbance, 3 fraud calls, 2 identity thefts, a “gun shot heard” call, 3 information calls, one loud party, a phone scam, two assault calls, 3 soliciting without a permit calls, 8 suspicious activities, and people running stop signs and speeding. That likely was not all that Briarcliff had, but that was all that was called in.
7	There are about 500 houses in Briarcliff. That’s a good sized neighborhood. Is 50 calls too much? I think one call is too much, but we’re going to come every time you call.
8	Five officers were killed in Dallas this past week. The job that police officers do is tough. It’s not easy doing what we do. What did people do when that Dallas shooting started? They ran <i>away</i> from the shooter. What did the police do? They ran <i>towards</i> the threat. Our job is to take care of you. We have to keep us safe first
9	These meetings are very important to us, and you can see by our showing that we think they are.
10	In North Carolina we have three levels of crime: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Felony is the most serious. If you commit a felony and are convicted, you’re looking at a minimum of 2 years in prison plus fines. 2. Misdemeanor: Up to 2 years in prison plus fines if you’re convicted. 3. Infraction: No prison time. Only fines can be issued. The actual fine for running a stop sign is \$ 50, I think, but then the court costs are \$ 190. That’s a civil penalty that you’re looking at.
Solicitors	
101	A solicitor must have a permit in Chapel Hill. The permit has an expiration date. It’s usually good for just a few days. It’ll have their name, their company, and a photo of them. It’ll also have a “report number”.
102	Before a solicitor’s permit is issue, we do a quick check of criminal history. We ask what their goals are.
103	There’s a bug company out right now that’s been soliciting. We’ve had several calls on them. We’ve given them enough warnings, so they know they’re not supposed to be here. It’s a misdemeanor in Chapel Hill to solicit without a permit. They look like decent college kids with Khaki pants. They all have iPads and look professional, but they’re not supposed to be soliciting.
104	If a suspicious person or solicitor rings your doorbell, talk to them through your door. Tell them that you’re not interested. Then, call 911. We need to know why they are in your neighborhood ... especially the tree guy. We almost never do permitting for tree services.
105	The Girl Scouts can come to your door and sell cookies. Churches and other non-profits can come to your door.
Suspicious People/behavior	
201	The largest percentage of calls we get are to report a “suspicious person”. We love to receive such calls, because that lets us know that you guys are looking out for one another. Generally when you have an uptick in a particular crime when word gets out that you guys want to know who it is or want to try to stop it, you start looking out for one another. I want to encourage you to continue doing that.
202	If something doesn’t feel right, we want to know about it. We encourage you to call 911. We don’t want you to intervene and get hurt.
203	Always listen to your stomach. Your stomach will tell you when something is not right. Call 911. We want to know who those people are.
204	If you see a weird thing, call 911 immediately. Don’t wait 3 hours.
205	Almost always, if you call 911 and then hang up, they will call you back ... to make sure that there is no incident.
206	The majority of cases where we catch someone are because someone saw something happening, and they called 911 right away.
207	A suspicious person is someone in your neighborhood who you don’t know. If you see a car you don’t know, that could be suspicious.

208	When you call 911 to report a suspicious person, they're going to ask you to give the best description that you can. Describe the person in simple terms. For example, say "height = 5' 10", weight=190, color of clothing=tan, accent= southern". Don't use exotic terms like color=fuchsia or champagne.
Alarm Systems	
301	[audience question] Do you recommend that we have home alarm systems? Police response: We like them, because they let us know if there's something going on at your house. We are not allowed to endorse a specific brand, but the interior/guts of all of them are almost identical. It's a difference of how much you want to pay for it. You guys are lucky to have Mark Apple. He has a local service. He's not a national brand. We had a meeting at University Mall several years ago, and Mark explained how alarms worked. He offered to sell the components by the piece ... versus renting those pieces over a long period of time as you would do with ADT or CPI ... which might be cheaper up front. I was very impressed with Mark.
302	Alarm registration: If you have a home alarm, you should register it with the Town. You can register online at https://www.crywolfservices.com/chapelhillnc/ or call toll-free 855-725-7107 to register by phone. It doesn't cost you anything to register your alarm, but there is a penalty of \$ 100 for alarms that are unregistered or that activate more than three times per year. You may be surprised to learn that about 95% of all alarm dispatches are false alarms ... due to malfunctioning equipment, human error, or environmental conditions. Many hours and cost are spent investigating accidental alarm reports.
303	If you have an alarm system, put people on notice that you have an alarm system. Put a sign in the front, a sign in the back, and put stickers on some windows. A "beware of the dog" sign is good, as well. You can go on eBay and buy an alarm sign even if you don't own an alarm. We know that the sign works, because we've asked burglars (when we book them) why they picked one house over another, and often it's because one house had an alarm sign.
304	Houses with alarms do get broken into, but almost always it's because the alarm wasn't set, and the front door is not locked. Don't leave house doors and car doors unlocked. Also, don't leave garage doors wide open ... especially once the sun goes down. All my doors are locked even if I'm home. It's all about making yourself a harder target than the next person.
305	If you don't have an alarm system, but you have a panic button on your car key, take that key to bed with you at night or keep it with you. If you're out and you see something threatening, hit the panic button. Bad guys aren't going to stick around if attention is drawn to them.
306	If your alarm goes off in the middle of the night, call us. Tell us that you will be ... like in the upstairs bedroom's bathroom, move there, lock the door, and put as many barriers between you and the intrusion. 911 will stay with you on the phone the whole time. This is all about calling right away. Don't wait.
Break-ins	
401	A neighborhood which talks is a neighborhood which doesn't get broken into as much. When you are out walking your dog, say hi to one another. Get to know each other.
402	We want you guys talking. You're well established in this neighborhood and know what's normal and what is not.
403	Call 911 for both emergency and non-emergency issues. Years ago we had a separate non-emergency number. A couple of years ago we came up with a strategic plan to provide the citizens of Chapel Hill with the best customer service that we can at any given time. That led to the decision to have all calls go through 911. It's a recorded line. There's a record of it. We're in the business of customer service; we want to provide you with the best customer service possible. Whether you're calling about a current problem or one that occurred two weeks ago, we want you to call 911. You won't get into trouble for calling 911.

404	Make sure you have your house number on your house and on your mailbox. That can help us immensely, because some streets have strange numbering. Long Leaf is one of them, but there are many other examples across Chapel Hill where you'll have 807 and then 1200. I kid the fire fighters, because they have it easier than the police. They just look for the house with the flames. We don't always get that lucky. In case you need us, we want to be able to find you.
405	A lot of break-ins happen when someone knocks on your front door and hears nothing. Then they go around to your back door and knock on that door and hear nothing. Then, they kick in the back door.
406	We don't catch everybody. Sometimes it might be years before something breaks loose on a case. Right now we have some unsolved homicide cases. They're not closed, but we've exhausted every lead that we've been given. The break-ins are the same way. They'll go dormant for a while.
407	Almost all break-ins occur between 8 AM and 3 PM. That's when you guys are at work. They don't want to encounter you guys. They just want to break down a door, grab what they can, and then leave.
408	Earlier this year we had some break-ins at night. Then went unsolved until Cary arrested a group of guys breaking in at night. That stopped the Chapel Hill nighttime break-ins.
409	After some recent break-ins, suspicious person calls from you went up, and then break-ins ceased. When you are looking out for one another, you are helping to prevent crime. When you're chatting with each other, talking to us, and holding meetings like this, things change, and it's always for the better. When you stop talking to each other, then crime goes up. It's sort of a cycle. It might be calm for a year or two, and then all of a sudden 2 or 3 houses will get broken into. A few months ago on Eden Lane you had three houses that got broken into.
410	Postmen and UPS workers have called in to report suspicious issues.
411	It's all about barriers. One deterrent by itself may not stop a crook, but once you build them up and add them all together, then your overall security rises.
412	Don't place valuables near a window. A thief can see the valuable, and steal it by breaking the window and reaching in to get it.
413	Ladies: Take your purse inside your house. Don't just bring in your wallet. A thief doesn't know that the wallet has been removed. He'll steal the purse.
414	A car window once got smashed for 87 cents in the cup holder. My car, when I park it, looks like a rental vehicle – nothing is in it.
415	My house looks as lived in when I'm gone as when I am there. I keep the TV on and a light on.
416	You can now fill out a house check form (on the Town web site at http://www.townofchapelhill.org/home/showdocument?id=7046) and give it to the police. They'll check your house while you're gone. We get out and walk around your house to make sure it hasn't been broken into.
417	Sometimes a bowl of water and a dog chain can deter a would-be crook.
418	I haven't seen a bad guy arrested by us who wasn't fearful of our K-9 dogs. They will whimper and yell "Please don't let that dog bite me."
419	You are our partners. You are our eyes and ears until we can get here and take over. We want you to do so safely, and if you can't, hang up the phone. We don't ever want you to take up an enforcement act where you might get hurt. If you can help someone, do it. If not, step back and be a good witness.
420	An average person can walk a mile in 20 minutes, so if you wait 20 minutes to call 911, that person is a minimum of a mile away if they're walking. If they're running, they could be 2 or 3 miles away. From here, 3 miles could be deep into Durham. If they're driving a car, they could be almost to Raleigh in 20 minutes.
421	What happens if you call 911, and you hang up? Answer: They will call you back. Whether you answer or not, someone will come to your house to check on you. That's what we do.

422	Before you go out of town, arrange for a neighbor to check your mailbox for mail and the front of your property for newspapers. Your neighbor should do this daily even though you may have put a stop on your mail and newspaper deliveries. The newspaper "Southern Neighbor" won't cancel delivery. They'll continue to deliver even if you sell your house. We have residents who travel for a month at a time. Having a month of newspapers piled up in your driveway is not good.
423	Ten years ago we had a case where it was a paper delivery guy who broke into a house. He knew that the owners were gone, because they had submitted a delivery hold notice.
424	Don't announce on the listserv that you are going to be out of town.
425	[from an audience member] A career criminal once told me that he always broke in via the kitchen door, because no one ever sleeps in the kitchen. If they own a dog, the bowl is right there. The lesson here is that your back door must be very secure. Make sure that it is a really solid door with a good dead bolt.
426	Rear kitchen windows and sliding glass doors are other ways the bad guys enter a house.
427	Don't leave your key in your car overnight. An intruder used such a key to enter a house while the lady was asleep on her couch.
428	Rear and side doors are out of the way. They can't be seen from the street. That's why the bad guys prefer them for entry.
429	We're available to conduct a security survey of your house. We can tell you what you're doing well and what things need improvement. What we usually recommend won't break the bank. We might tell you is instead of using a 3/4" screw in the front door, use a 4" screw, so that it makes it harder to kick these doors in. There are tons of things we can talk about. We can tell you about "crime prevention bushes".
430	Unfortunately in Chapel Hill, we have a lot of right-of-ways for OWASA and the phone company, so we've seen guys and girls break in houses using those right-of-ways as a means of getting to your house. They're not walking down the street and coming to your front door. They might park on Pinehurst and walk through a short trail to Tinkerbell.
431	When in doubt and something does not look right/feel right, call 911 immediately. A few minutes of hesitation while wondering whether to call will most likely help the cause of concern to put several hundred yards or even miles between the bad guys and arriving police.
432	Implement as many deterrents as possible to prevent break-ins. Every potential perpetrator has his or her weak spot, and one or the other implemented measure might hit that weak spot and deter the perpetrator.
433	Lock all your windows ... even your upstairs windows as someone may gain access to them with a ladder.
434	Be wary of letting someone into house as they may unlock a window while in your house.
435	If cars are involved, do try to get the full license plate. A partial license plate doesn't do us any good. With a full license plate number, an officer can use his CAD to pull up the registration, the owner's name, picture, their criminal history, and their driving history.
	Traffic issues (stop sign violations and speeding)
501	[audience comment] The worst intersections in Briarcliff (most stop sign and/or speeding violations) are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Churchill and Longleaf 2. Willow (between Spruce and Longleaf) "Tickets could be written all day long if police patrolled these spots regularly."
502	Regarding Ken Larsen's June 30th dashcam video of a stop sign runner: According to NC Law, it cannot be used to write the offender a ticket. It can't even be used to give the owner a warning ... if the owner does not wish to speak to the officer. The only way a ticket can legally be written is if a police officer witnesses an infraction in person. However, Ken's dash cam video prompted officers to patrol that intersection (Spruce and Willow) last week and several tickets were written.
503	We can't retroactively write a ticket to someone. Police have to see it themselves. When we put our name on that ticket it says "I swear that I saw this." We could lose our job if we're lying. It's a constitutional thing. We have to play within the confines of the rules, and the bad guys don't. I can't shake down a guy who I believe has drugs on him as much as I want to. I have to develop reasonable suspicion to even talk to him.

504	Retroactively, we can issue a person a warning if we know who it is, but we have to be able to prove that they were driving that car. However, if they don't want to talk to us, then we have to go. That's a constitution issue. [Ken: They didn't have video cameras when the constitution was written.] Fines issued by stop light camera are not criminal fines. There are no points that assessed against your license. It's solely a civil issue, because the person who is being charged has the right to confront his accuser and question them. There are no citizen arrests permitted in North Carolina.
505	We're 911-driven. We can't devote a significant amount of time to sitting at an intersection day after day writing tickets.
506	If there's a wreck, that's property damage and injury. That's something we can investigate retroactively.
507	Pinehurst and Meadowmont have lots of speed tables. Lake Forest had some, but they were taken out. There are pluses and minuses to speed tables. [See appendix D.]

Appendix: Supplemental information and comments

Appendix A: Post-meeting comments by Ken Larsen

A.1 My July 14th Facebook post

My latest conversation starter: "I had 9 police officers at my house." That did indeed happen. On Tuesday, at the request of the Chapel Hill police, I hosted a community outreach meeting at my house. It was attended by 28 neighbors (including a Town council member) and 9 police. There's been an uptick in crime in my neighborhood: more break-ins and lots of traffic violations. On June 30th my dashcam caught a stop sign violator. I forwarded the video to the police, and they in-turn, asked if I'd host the aforementioned neighborhood meeting. I agreed. It went extremely well. The police gave us lots of tips on how we can improve security and also to help the police do their job. That's what more communities need to do. Recent events have created a very toxic and adversarial relationship between citizens and police. That needs to change ASAP. We need to work with the police to help us and the police attain better security and peace of mind ... for all concerned. I was glad to be able to contribute something (hosting the meeting) to help move us in that direction.

A.2 Dashcams

If I were a police officer, I would want all citizens to own and use a dashcam and also be on their neighborhood listserv. My dashcam happened to record one instance of a stop sign violation. That's only an infraction, and it's the only one I've knowingly recorded in seven months of use. However, if everyone used a dashcam, then the probability of recording something significant ... like a hit-and-run or a burglary goes way up. If everyone is on their neighborhood listserv, they could receive immediate notification of break-ins, suspicious people, etc. They could review their dashcam videos to see if they could provide evidence. If I were a criminal, I would prefer to avoid such neighborhoods.

It should also be noted that dashcam use motivates their owners to be safe drivers, because the dashcam video records everything about the driver's behavior. Some even record the speed that the driver is driving.

A.3 Home Security

1. I lock the two gates to my fenced-in backyard.
2. I have motion-sensitive lights around my house.

3. The front and sides of my house are completely visible from the road. I did this to permit my Emerald Zoysia lawn to thrive, but as a side benefit, I claim it discourages break-ins.
4. I always lock the doors of my house and my car ... even if I'm nearby or inside my house.
5. I don't own anything of any significant value. I once owned a coin collection, but I gave it to my son who promptly sold it. If a burglar broke into my house, he would be very disappointed. He might be inclined to leave me a note that reads, "Hey, Bub. Here's \$ 100. Go buy yourself something."

Appendix B: Briarcliff Listserv

Our Briarcliff listserv is the Yahoo group ridgefieldparkbriarcliff@yahoogroups.com

Rob Smith sets people up on it. His email is rfs@nc.rr.com

If you're on your neighborhood listserv, please don't clutter it up with banal and contentious posts. Such behavior drives people away from wanting to be on a listsserv.

Appendix C: Kristie Thompson's petition for a traffic calming study to be launched in Briarcliff

See <http://kenlarsennc.com/BriarcliffTrafficPetition.htm>

Unanswered question: What would be the cost of such a study and who would pay for it? On July 15th I emailed that question to Chapel Hill Traffic Engineering Manager Kumar Neppalli, but I haven't yet heard from him. Briarcliff resident Stephan Gathy thinks it would be expensive ("many tens of thousands of dollars"), because outside contractors would have to be brought in.

Appendix D: Briarcliff traffic data and opinions of resident Stephen Gathy

See <http://kenlarsennc.com/BriarcliffGathy.pdf>

Based on Stephen's data, he doesn't believe that an official calming traffic study (see Appendix C) is needed.