

November 14, 2022 Southside Neighborhood Meeting

Martinsville City Council toured the Southside area on November 14, 2022 beginning at 5:00pm. Those present for the tour were Mayor Kathy Lawson and Vice-Mayor Jennifer Bowles, City Manager Leon Towarnicki, Community Development Director Mark McCaskill, Inspector Mark Price, Police Chief Eddie Cassady, Officer Coretha Gravely, Hannah Powell of Community Development, Inspector Luis Rosas, Bill Wyatt of the Martinsville Bulletin, and Charles Roark of Cable 18. Council Member Chad Martin joined the tour later.

The tour began at 5:00 from the rear of the City Municipal Building and traveled to Broad Street, Roanoke Street then to College Street. There were previous complaints on this street about properties in poor condition and vehicles on the street but the area looked better than the prior visit. The tour continued across Memorial to Park Street, then to Wingfield, Askin, Union then south on Askin Street to Dupont Road. The tour traveled back to Memorial and continued to Ivy, Ransom, Oakgrove, back to Memorial then to Starling Avenue, Cliff Street, Chalmers, Paul Street, to Highland Street, Forest, Childress, then Smith Lake Road. The tour continued back to Forest Street, Starling, then Aaron Street where attendees discussed the new Aaron Mills apartment project. The tour continued to Broad Street and Maple Street then concluded at the City Municipal Building around 5:45pm. The overall property conditions observed during this tour were considerably better than a few months ago. Some buildings were dilapidated but were either on the Inspections list, scheduled for demolition or currently out for a repair bid. Attendees observed an abundance of cats in the area and leaves in the street. They observed locations where individuals were blowing leaves into the street which is against the City code per City Manager Towarnicki. An extensive housing study was completed about a month ago; the study revealed that Southside is the worst area in the City for dilapidated structures, age of housing, and the need for upgrades and repairs. The City plans to use that study to apply for future block grant projects for the Southside area. Towarnicki encourages residents to attend or watch the Council meeting on Tuesday November 15 for more information.

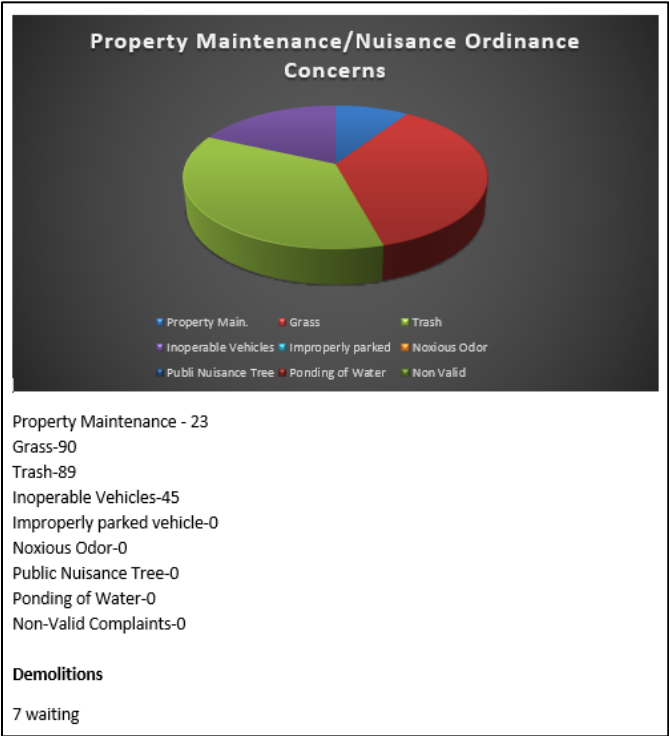
Neighborhood Meeting, Monday, 7:00 pm, Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, 824 Starling Avenue – Those who attended the neighborhood tour were present for the meeting along with Council Members Tammy Pearson, Danny Turner and Chad Martin, Clerk of Council Karen Roberts, Public Information Officer Kendall Davis, Building Inspector Kris Bridges and Public Works Director Jeff Gauldin. Approximately 15 residents from the area attended.

Mayor Lawson opened the meeting 7:00pm and welcomed attendees. Pastor Chris Bennett offered invocation.

Mayor Lawson called on City Manager Towarnicki to summarize the neighborhood tour from earlier in the evening and to also review issues brought up at the previous Southside neighborhood meeting April 25, 2022.

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Luis Rosas was introduced as the new city inspector; Rosas summarized the property maintenance report, stating that the Community Development office works diligently to address all resident concerns and shared contact information and the location of the office.

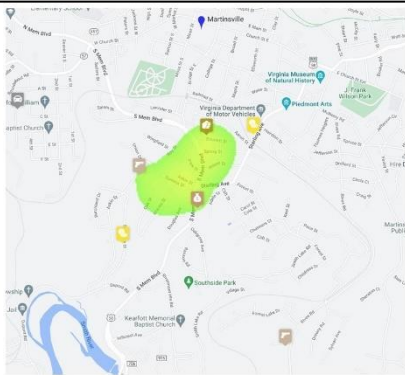
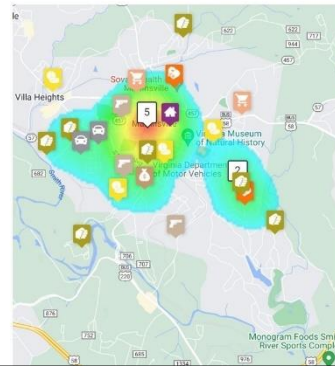


Police Chief Eddie Cassady and Deputy Chief Rob Fincher shared a PowerPoint of crime stats for the Southside area. Fincher encouraged residents to view the Community Crime Map online.



<https://communitycrimemap.com/map>

Community Crime Map



Jane Martin, 1120 Oakgrove Avenue shared her concern about a “drug house” on her street. Fincher confirmed that there was an arrest at that location recently and that individual is awaiting their day in court. Fincher said unfortunately it’s up to the court if those people are released. Norman Murphy, also of 1120 Oakgrove Avenue questioned why the police department has not followed up on a previous complaint about dogs in the area and whether those dogs have had shots and tags. Murphy expressed concern about property maintenance issues and the affect the drug house would have on the resell value of their home. Murphy asked the Police Department and Property Maintenance who would be responsible for enforcing the ordinances that are in place. Martin has previously reported a puppy mill and a dog tied to a chain fulltime in her neighborhood.

Police Chief Cassady explained how the Police Department has the authority to seize property; once the person is convicted a letter is sent to the landowner notifying them if they rent to anyone dealing drugs again, their property will be seized. Cassady explained how that policy has been affected by COVID. The common nuisance law requires five residents to file a complaint. Council Member Turner encouraged the two new Council members to look into this policy and change the City Attorney’s authority on property maintenance situations. Cassady said that the Special Investigations Department has spent a lot of time in the Murphy’s neighborhood; it takes time to cement a case so he asked residents to continue to report what they see but to have patience with the system. Norman Murphy asked Council if they thought Oakgrove was in better condition than previously toured. Mayor Lawson and Vice Mayor Bowles stated that the area as a whole does appear to be in better condition. Council Member Martin

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asked the Martinsville Bulletin to not print the addresses of suspected drug houses discussed at the meeting. Reporter Bill Wyatt left the meeting.

Vice Mayor Bowles shared that there is a fence panel that is falling on the fire hydrant at the end of Graves Street which could cause damage to the hydrant or could hinder the fire department in case of a fire. Also, on Smith Lake Road, the City had patched holes in the road; Bowles asked if that is a temporary or permanent fix. Bowles also referenced a tree that looks like it is ready to fall in that area. Towarnicki said in the summer, Smith Lake Road repaving was put out for bid but none were received. There was a rebid later in the fall and a contract was awarded and work is planned for this coming spring. Temporary road patches were put in by the City but when paving is done those patches will be smoothed out. Towarnicki asked for more details about the tree from Vice-Mayor Bowles.

Jean Royal, community watch person stated that there is a problem with cars speeding along Emmett Street, Spring Street, Woodrow and Short Street and there are young children in those neighborhoods; Royal asked what could be done to slow traffic down. Police Chief Cassady recorded the concern and said that they would put the speed trailers in the area to get a better time for when that speeding is occurring so an officer can be assigned for enforcement. Royal asked what the City is doing about cats, sharing that there is an abandoned house behind her with three kittens and no one to take care of them. Cassady shared that Animal Control is not authorized to pick up cats, raccoons or groundhogs. Residents can give them up and sign over ownership to the SPCA but there is no ordinance or state law governing cats. Unfortunately, the SPCA is already overflowing. Mayor Lawson suggested that this concern be put on the legislative agenda. Those residents that live on Emmett Street are concerned about people turning off Memorial onto Broad Street and traveling fast around the curve. Royal asked if there was something that could be done in that area to make it safer.

Officer Coretha Gravely encouraged residents to keep calling and reporting concerns. Callers may refuse to give dispatch their name but officers would not reveal caller names to protect them.

Norman Murphy complimented the City refuse crew, stating that they go beyond what they need to, they are good people, they don't cuss or carry on, they pick up loose trash and they need to be commended and recognized for doing such a good job. Murphy stated that snow removal is a big concern since Oakgrove is a steep street. He expressed concern about the driver pushing all the snow to one side of the street last year and residents having to dig themselves out.

Claudia Spencer, 1047 Oak Street expressed concern about people not tending to cats. She said a neighbor feeds them to keep them from going hungry but there is another resident on Pine Street that will not feed her own cats.

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Jane Martin expressed concern about Southside Park and ongoing drug deals, alcohol consumption and condoms discarded. Martin said part of the problem is that the park is not getting locked regularly. She said people taking money for game admission have tried to charge her to enter the park when she is walking and that they are rude to people who are there to walk and who are not attending the game. Martin stated that she has witnessed drug deals in the park and has called the police.

Mayor Lawson thanked residents for coming out and encouraged them to reach out to inspections, animal control, the police department, and property maintenance as well as the neighborhood watch members and council members.

Pastor Bennett offered a closing prayer. The meeting adjourned at 8:00pm.

Karen Roberts
Clerk of Council

Kathy Lawson
Mayor