

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, January 27, 2021, to discuss Apartment Electronic Security Ordinance and Improved Medicare for All.

Mayor Byrd started the meeting at 8:00 p.m. The meeting was held virtually via Zoom.

Present were: Councilmembers Judith F. Davis, Emmett V. Jordan, Silke I. Pope, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Colin A. Byrd. Councilmember Leta M. Mach was attending a Maryland Municipal League (MML) Committee Meeting and was absent.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Nicole Ard, City Manager; Chief Richard Bowers, Greenbelt Police; Terri Hruby, Director of Planning and Community Development; Dale Worley, Director of Information Technology; and Shaniya Lashley-Mullen, Assistant to the City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Kap Kapastin; Ric Gordon; Ben Fischler; Bill Orleans; and others.

APARTMENT ELECTRONIC SECURITY ORDINANCE

Mayor Byrd explained that he had received complaints/suggestions from several constituents in higher crime communities, that he brought the idea before Council. He noted that some parts of the City are uninhabitable from feeling safe.

Ms. Davis advised that she had reviewed the police reports and understands where Mayor Byrd was coming from regarding a certain section of Greenbelt West. She noted that crime is everywhere in the City but not high as it used to be and it is increasing in Greenbelt West.

Ms. Davis advised that Greenbriar discussed installing security cameras. The cost was astronomical and the condo fees would have increased. She explained Greenbriar decided not to install security cameras because Greenbriar couldn't monitor the monitors.

Ms. Davis stated the problem with security cameras is that they gave a false sense of security. She advised security cameras don't solve the problem. She noted that other things need to be done.

Ric Gordon, a Greenbelt resident, advised that the police are doing all they can to make sure the residents of Greenbelt West are safe and crime is being deterred. He noted that his apartment complex, Franklin Park, should help the City to offset some of the cost of installing security cameras in the hotspots. Mr. Gordon understands that security doors and electronic keypads come with a cost. He stated that rent would be raised and some residents are already struggling to pay their rent due to the pandemic. Mr. Gordon explained that he is advocating for the apartment complex to offset some of the cost of installing security cameras in hotspots.

Ms. Pope advised that she is a big supporter of security cameras and doesn't have a problem with Franklin Park installing their security cameras. She stated that the City shouldn't install security cameras on private property. Ms. Pope advised that Greenbelt is a small municipality and the City budget won't allow for the City to install security cameras for all the private parcels within the City.

She agreed that future apartment complexes should have security cameras. Ms. Pope explained that the City needs to be a little mindful that 46% of renters in Franklin Park are unable to pay their rent due to the pandemic and it costs a lot of money to run the complex. The cost of the

installation of the security cameras would be placed on the tenants. She advised that security cameras are not the answer for everything, but security cameras are a deterrent.

Mr. Roberts advised security cameras would be treating the problem, not the symptom. He suggested the City needs to rethink changing the make-up of the community by having the ownership sell half of the units and turning them into for-sale units. He also suggested fixing up the community and adding a park. Mr. Roberts stated that there should be limited security cameras in certain areas.

Mr. Jordan advised that he was worried that management would pass along the cost of installing security cameras to the tenants. He stated that the lighting needs to be upgraded. Mr. Jordan noted that the City had to be responsive to the owners also. He inquired how the City would single out apartment complexes and not multifamily buildings because the structures of the apartments are the same as the condominiums. Mr. Jordan noted that the ordinance should be for all multifamily dwelling units regardless if dwellings are apartments or condominiums.

Mr. Putens stated the City has been researching citywide camera systems in Greenbelt including the parks. He advised he wasn't opposed to installing security cameras and using them as a deterrent or to catch suspects. Mr. Putens agreed with other Councilmembers to find different ways to deal with the issues and the individuals that are causing the issues. He explained that a camera program helps the community and the City.

In response to a question asked by Mr. Putens, Mr. Roberts answered that there were only apartments in that area before Greenbelt Station Community was built. He noted that there is a proposal for an additional 2,500 apartments in the back-parking lot of Beltway Plaza and there would be more problems due to the density. He stated that the resources are limited for the residents in the community. Mr. Roberts explained there are fewer crimes in areas that have a mixture of housing.

Ms. Davis pointed out that if the ordinance was to pass that it would affect all apartments and condominiums not just Franklin Park. She noted that there has been crime in Greenbriar and Hunting Ridge. Ms. Davis stated that the City needs to deal with the hotspots. Ms. Davis suggested better recreation, better lighting, and secure doors in the community. She advised that there are six major apartment complexes, including the condominiums, plus the apartments in Central Greenbelt. Ms. Davis explained that the ordinance is a huge financial burden for a couple of hotspots.

Mayor Byrd advised he was being responsive to suggestions/requests from residents that reside in that particular area. He wanted to inform complexes that this is a particular issue of interest to Council and that Council is willing to put subsidies in place or provide grants to assist some of the complexes with the cost so that the complexes wouldn't raise rents.

In response to a question asked by Mr. Jordan, Mayor Byrd answered that the legislation that he proposed was there should be criteria for which the security ordinance should be tailored for complexes that have a certain amount of crime. He explained he reviewed where the most crime was on an annual basis and the security ordinance doesn't apply to all the complexes.

Chief Bowers advised there has been a surge in violent crimes in Franklin Park. Outside of the shooting and homicide, the crime rate had held up year to year. He noted that there has been an

uptick in theft from autos. Chief Bowers explained that there has been a decrease in crime in 2021, due to the heavier police presence and the trailer cameras that have been placed in obvious locations.

Chief Bowers advised that just installing cameras wouldn't change residents' behavior dramatically. He stated an approach to an apartment complex that is having a crime problem is crime prevention through environmental design, which includes lighting, shrubbery, vegetation, parking lot layout design, and cameras. Chief Bowers noted that Franklin Park would have to agree with and be involved in the conversations and decisions that are being made about their property.

Chief Bowers stated the City is currently working on a citywide camera program. The rollout is slow due to the project being expensive. There are currently some City-owned cameras on the four City-owned streets in Franklin Park. He explained that cameras are just another tool that is used to help prevent crime.

There was discussion regarding Chief Bowers's suggestion of crime reduction by environmental design. Mr. Roberts stated that crime reduction by environmental design is horrible. He noted that all the bushes and trees would be cut down-everything that makes it a decent place to live. Mr. Jordan stated the lighting in Franklin Park in the parking lots and different areas is a problem.

Ms. Davis noted that installing security cameras doesn't mean that criminals would be caught. Security cameras are not a deterrent. She stated if installing security cameras in the hotspots would help the residents to feel secure that would be fine. Ms. Davis advised that trust is very important and is part of community policing. She noted that crime prevention and crime prevention education hasn't been discussed.

Mr. Gordon explained that after his ride along with Captain White, he had made a video and posted it regarding "If you see something, say something."

Mayor Byrd reiterated Council's suggestions regarding apartment security. He explained there was consensus among Council regarding the lighting issues in Franklin Park. Mayor Byrd would like to drill down the next steps on the environmental design concept that Chief Bowers and Ms. Hruby had suggested. He hasn't given up on the installation of security cameras.

In response to Mayor Byrd, Ms. Davis explained that the City installing security cameras on City's streets in hotspots was her idea for a City subsidy. She noted that there were several ideas, crime reduction by environmental design, police action, community policing, and working with the apartment complexes before the installation of security cameras.

Mr. Roberts suggested the City compile a package of information for the complexes that could help the situation and have a meeting with the owners of Franklin Park. He doesn't agree with the City assisting Franklin Park in installing security cameras.

Mayor Byrd advised that he wants the City to focus on some of the issues that are being said in the zoom chat, the lighting issues, and the maintenance issues. He noted he agrees with Mr. Jordan that the City needs to work collaboratively with Franklin Park management.

Mr. Orleans, a Greenbelt resident, advised he doesn't think the City needs more cameras. He feels the City needs fewer cameras. He stated that prevention of crime would need more conversation than the subject of cameras in Franklin Park.

IMPROVED MEDICARE FOR ALL

Mayor Byrd noted that he wasn't prepared to bring this item back on the agenda and other organizers around improved Medicare for All aren't ready to have those conversations.

Mr. Orleans suggested an additional conversation on healthcare for all or Medicare for All universal coverage for the residents of the City of Greenbelt. He advised that the resolution would be submitted to the County Council. Mr. Orleans explained the resolution will be for the County Council to resolve its support for Medicare for All in Maryland. He noted that this should be up for discussion at a Council regular meeting.

Ms. Davis explained that she would like Council to review the County Council resolution language before Council decides.

Mr. Jordan seconded the motion to send the letter in support because everyone should have healthcare and a choice.

There was discussion regarding if this item would be on the upcoming Council regular meeting agenda. Mr. Orleans noted that he would contact the mobilizers of this effort and invite them to the meeting and make a presentation. Ms. Davis suggested inviting the mobilizers to a work session, not at the regular meeting. Mr. Ben Fischler, a Greenbelt resident, advised the County Council resolution would be proposed once the new legislation passes the US Congress. He explained he hoped the County Council would support the federal legislation. He suggested a work session in late February or March to have a lengthy discussion and presentation.

Informational Item

Ms. Davis gave a brief report from the Legislative Committee from the Maryland Municipal League (MML) meeting she attended today. She noted that there was positive discussion among the MML President, the chair of the Legislative Committee, MML staff, the Speaker, and the President of the Senate regarding their partnerships with municipalities. She stated that both leaders stated that municipal government is important.

The meeting ended at 9:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Shaniya Lashley-Mullen
Assistant to the City Clerk*