

Safety Committee Minutes

Honorable Council
City of Newark, Ohio
November 14, 2017

The Safety Committee met in Council Chambers on Monday, November 13, 2017 at 5:30 P.M. with these members present:

Mark Fraizer, Chair	Jonathan Lang
Jeremy Blake	Carol Floyd
Jeff Rath	

We wish to report:

1. The walking bridge by St. Francis was discussed regarding safety issues.

Mr. Marmie- I was approached by Father Sizemore and James Knocks regarding safety concerns pertaining to the school at St. Francis. What has resulted in some research on their part is that there are occurrences that are happening that are of a safety concern due to pedestrian walking across that bridge during school hours and other times when there are functions down there in particular when children are in attendance. Therefore the first reaction is to take care of the bridge that is the problem but what we want to do is make sure that we can find a viable solution to secure the safety of those students in that area particularly at St. Francis. There are other schools that we have addressed safety concerns, the safe routes to schools, the grants that we have obtained or different schools have obtained in order to assist with that but what Father Sizemore and Mr. Knocks are asking is that the city helps them with the safety of the students in that area and what is occurring with the foot traffic coming across that bridge. There have been different incidents that they have documented. I asked them when they approached me about three weeks ago to really start documenting and contacting our safety forces to make sure that there is documentation of these occurrences happening and they have done so. There have been two incidents in my opinion have caused me to really say we need to help with this in some way shape or form. One was there was a gunman in the area who wasn't particularly targeting St. Francis but he had a firearm and was right there by the school. The bridge was the main area where he was walking. Second, another individual while school was in session had a knife and was pounding on one of the school doors. There are also other occurrences that are happening that some would say are undesirable type of activities. We know that there are individuals in that neighborhood on the other side that need access to the downtown area; we are not denying that fact. We also know that hopefully in a short period of time we are going to have a very nice bridge that is 100 yards down from that walk bridge that is going to be open. We don't know if that is going to change the dynamics. I know we did do a study of the number of pedestrians who walked across but that was when the bridge was closed therefore that is a more viable way for them to get to the downtown area. We are trying to see if there is

something we can do to make sure to assist with the safety of the children in that school. I believe that we need to ask the Police Department what their thoughts are. The road back there that is sometimes considered an escape route because our Police can't go that route if somebody is on foot and they go across there they may have to go all the way around and any other concerns they may have regarding that particular bridge.

Father Sizemore- thank you for allowing us to present tonight, thank you Doug. I am pretty new to the area; I have been the Pastor for four months. The major reason we are here is exactly what Doug was saying which is we want to work out a situation with the city for the safety of our kids. I would also add to that the safety of our faculty that is in the school and our staff that is in the parish during the day time and our parishioners in the evening. The area that the foot bridge dumps into is called Pearl Street. It is a dead end there is one house there it is the rectory on one side and on the other side is our preschool; our parking lot which is our playground area and then our parish and our school is connected to that. In the evening we have our parishioners do one hour prayer slots where they come in via Pearl Street, park in our parking lot then go in through a side door through the church and they spend an hour in prayer. They are there all week long. Pretty regularly we get emails, phone calls or people stopping to see me stating they have been approached by a person in the evening that is asking for money. We are deeply involved with and support of St. Vincent De Paul and St. Vincent Haven and we always refer them to those facilities but in the evenings they are closed down. So our concern is in the evening when they are knocking on the door they want money and most likely wanting money for drugs or other things. When we speak to them through the door and offer to give them the contact information for St. Vincent De Paul or St. Vincent Haven for food or clothes they are not usually receptive. One time a parishioner said this to man on the other side of the door and they did not like that and tried to pry the door open. Lighting is an issue and our business manager Jim Knocks is looking into to increase it for our small and large parking lot. There was one day that we had four incidents and we followed the advice of Mr. Marmie and called the police. St. Francis School is growing again and our congregation is growing, thanks be to God, I would hate to see these types of incidents which our parishioners are aware of would affect their choice for schools. We are ultimately looking for a solution that will address the safety of our children and our parishioners. The new bridge that is coming open on Mt. Vernon Road is going to be open, well lit, it can be monitored by the Police more easily and there isn't an easy access for them to run away on foot. It would then divert that traffic from a dead end street that is not well lit and allows people to hide from police if this was a viable solution. We are open to proposals and other options.

Director Baum- the Mayor and members of the administration met with staff of St. Francis to discuss how to keep the kids safe. We discussed the foot bridge specifically and health hazards that were found at the end of the foot bridge. We discussed vandalism, we discussed an individual that likes to walk across the foot bridge with a machete on his hip and we discussed people having intercourse in the grass next to the church in full view of the parishioners. The result of that was to put a camera up to see how many people are actually using it. The Engineer's office installed a camera it recorded from 1800 hours to 2400 hours on Thursday, 9/7, 0000 hours to 0800 hours on Friday, 9/8 and 0800 to 1800 hours on Wednesday, 9/13. On the handout you will find exactly how many crossings there were north bound and south bound, how many were on foot and how many were on a bicycle. That total number of crossings for that 24 hour period was 403. Obviously I think that number is inflated due to the lack of the ability to cross at Mt. Vernon Road. I can't guarantee that but I think that it is a reasonable assumption that we could make. I discussed with the Police Chief and the Fire Chief restricting access to the foot bridge either part of the day or all of the day. The Fire Chief was fine as long

as we installed a lockbox that they could have access to it if they needed to. The Police Chief would prefer that the crossing be closed because it is a high speed avenue of escape. I discourage officer from leaving a cruiser with weapons, personal gear and police radios inside unattended. We have had two people climb the fence on top of the foot bridge threatening to jump down onto 16 we had to talk down. About the trips they are one way, we talked about State Route 13; we also talked about doing another count in the spring. Let the bridge open by Thanksgiving, let foot traffic resume its normal avenues. In the spring State Route 13, Hudson Avenue and Central Avenue are all closest alternatives to using the foot bridge. We advised the school and parish people to make contact with their Council people to express their concerns about the safety. On October 12th at about 1400 hours Troy Barton fired a shot from a sawed off shotgun in the area of 59 Chestnut Street which is two streets north of 16 and runs parallel to Granville Road or parallel to 16. The occupants of that address advised police the defendant showed up intoxicated and pointed and fired a weapon and left the area. The defendant was located at Pearl Street with a sawed off shotgun and shells in his possession. Unfortunately the take down happened right in front of St. Francis and parents were there to pick up their kids. The defendant went out the back door of the residence on Chestnut Street as officers went in the front door and he used the foot bridge to cross over Pearl Street and was apprehended in front of St. Francis. Is that problem? Absolutely. If we had restricted access could it have been avoided? Probably. If we are going to inconvenience people children are a good reason to do that. Restricting access to the bridge for school hours only is confusing for pedestrians using the bridge and would not necessarily relieve the after dark concerns not to mention there are many after school activities putting children in the area after hours. The other side of it, balancing inconveniencing citizens which is why I am not comfortable pulling the trigger on this with 403 crossings per day. There is no real mechanism to identify how inconvenienced people are. The Police Department is certainly willing to work with anybody as well as my office to elevate problems at any time that is not the issue here but I wanted to lay out what some of the concerns are and what has happened up until now. Do I think that closing the walk bridge would help? Yes I do. Do I think that it would inconvenience a lot of people? Yes I do. I think that it would take a measure of Council to restrict access to that bridge I am not comfortable making that decision alone.

Mr. Marmie- stated that he welcomes any suggestions or criticism and hoped that we are communicating with either himself or Father Sizemore.

Mark Fraizer, Chair