October 20, 2022
Community Meeting

7:05 pm - 8:30 pm

Due to technical difficulties, we started the meeting, then had to stop it and restart it again. Apologies to anyone who was unable to get on.

HPCC - Stephanie Walsh

- 3rd Annual Pumpkin Patch
  - We had a very successful event, and for the first time ever, covered our costs!
  - Special thank you to the Parklet Cleanup & Pumpkin Patch volunteers, with shout outs to
    - Andrea Mudd, Marybeth and Tim Van Fleet, Obama Garden Club
    - Judy Beck, Howard Degenholtz, Bob Staresinic
- Halloween Costume Parade
  - Oct 29 10:30-12 at the fountain at the park entrance
  - There will be treats and crafts for your little monsters
- Negley Run tree planting project and watershed celebration picnic
  - Nov. 12
  - If you ant to plant trees, meet at 9 am at Liberty Green
  - If you want to tour the River Roots project and join with others for a picnic lunch, meet at Liberty Green at noon

Zone 5 Report - Commander Vinansky

- Two crimes were reported in Highland Park this month.
  - Attempted burglary at an apartment on Collins Ave.
  - A vehicle break-in on 10/2 on Washington Blvd.
- Suspected catalytic converter thieves were arrested by Northside Zone police.
  - Catalytic converter thefts seem to have abated due to the arrests.
  - Residents still should stay vigilant.
    - Thieves usually travel in pairs and have a van or truck with them
    - It takes less than five minutes to remove the converters. Theives use portable cordless saws- alls
  - Best advice = keep on the lookout for your neighbors, keep a light on, and call 911 to report any thefts/attempted thefts.

PWSA - Mora McLaughlin

- Mora provided information on more limited lead line work happening in the area and an update on the pump station upgrades.
- See presentation slides.
Pgh PD Firing Range

- History & Community Impacts - Stephanie Walsh
  - Welcomed Commander Fisher from the Police Department Firing Range & Rebekkah Ranallo from the Mayor's Office and thanked them for coming. Acknowledged that we appreciate having the opportunity to share our community’s experience with the firing range noise and the city’s response to it.
  - Reminded people that both Comm Fisher and Ms. Ranallo we hired since Mayor Gainey took office, so they were not involved in the firing range’s history nor are they responsible for what happened in the past, and that the a presentation and meeting is not intended to be accusatory or adversarial; we’re hoping that this meeting can help both the the Department of PS and the Mayor’s Office better understand just how problematic this noise is for both nearby residents and park users - and begin a new dialogue about how to address the problem.
  - Firing range was built in the late 1970s early 1980s (not sure exactly when)
  - Neighborhood complaints date back to the very beginning so on the order of 40 years
  - Range is needed by PD to train its officers - - new officers, also SWAT team, officers who have been away on extended leave, those receiving a new weapon
  - Have training standards that they have to meet - and that we want them to meet
  - The problem is the impact on the neighborhood
    - Slide with aerial view
Acoustics are complicated - the noise isn’t limited to the east side of the park and neighborhood
- Have had complaints from other side of neighborhood
- Have been told that they can hear it both in Morningside and across the river

The problem is not just that the noise is disruptive to people’s enjoyment of the park and their homes (which is problematic enough to warrant intervention), but it is also traumatizing. We’re all aware of mass shootings - we had one in Pgh, our kids do active shooter drills. That type of noise is actually a public health issue.

What’s the neighborhood done historically?
- Tried multiple times to get the PD to commit to limited hours (9 am - 5 pm) and no weekends
- Agreements last for varying length of times or not at all
- For low light hours, we’ve asked that they train in fall and spring when windows are closed and it gets dark earlier; they never tried to accommodate that request

The summer of 2020 was the perfect storm:
- More people were working at home and using park b/c of Covid
- There was a class of new recruits who were split in half for training so that they could be physically spaced out b/c of Covid, so there was tons of use at the range (100+ hours)
- We created a website where people could report when they heard firing range in use and received lots of complaints and collected testimonials about people’s experiences -

While it seemed isolated, it is remarkably close and very audible – At all of these locations:

Swimming Pool: 1200 ft
Picnic & Exercise Stations, Reservoir Drive: 1500 ft
HP Houses: 1800 ft
Stanton Tennis courts: 2000 ft

shooting hours often unlimited, day, night, weekend, religious holidays, Mothers’ day..
Shared testimonials (see end of meeting minutes)

- I’ve talked to many people about this over the years, people who’ve been involved much longer than I have, and the impression has always been that neither the mayor’s office nor the Dept of PS takes this issue seriously.
- The 2nd testimonial was not documented and the person didn’t note who at the PD they were speaking with, but the attitude conveyed by the PD was consistent with what we’d always experienced - Just Deal With It.
- The Department’s response was to do nothing.
  - We’d be told they wouldn’t start until 8 am, but I’m a regular morning walker and I would hear them every day starting at 7 am.
  - We’ve been told to call 911 if we hear shooting after 8 pm because we’re told it wouldn’t be the PD, but we know it’s the police department because we hear 20 - 30 rounds going off and no sirens, and it wouldn’t be in the news.

- At the time, we created a Firing Range Task Force.
  - Met with reps from Dept of PS under the Peduto Admin.
  - The long term, the plan (under Mayor Peduto) was to create a Public Safety Campus for the city at the top of the hill above the firing range on former Veterans Administration land that the city had acquired. However, at best, if that’s something the city continues to pursue, it’s a solution that’s at least 15 years away.
  - There have been discussions of short term sound mitigation methods, like installing sound absorbing materials.
  - There was also a city-sponsored sound study that included proposals to reorient the range, but we had concerns about it and they never provided a copy of the study and essentially stopped communicating with us.

- Operations & Scheduling - Rebekkah Ranallo from the Mayor's Office & Commander Fisher from the Police Department.
  - Ms. Ranallo validated the neighborhood concerns and thanked us for providing background. She introduced Commander Fisher.
  - Commander Fisher has been with the Pittsburgh PD for approximately 35 and actually trained on that site. He most recently was Commander in the South Side.
    - He said that training classes are done for the year and all that we’d hear now is occasional single person use at the site. He explained that some alternatives to the site had been investigated (firing ranges in North Park and Monroeville) but that those sites are not available. He said that remediation of the site, including addressing water issues, would cost on the order of $3 million.
  - Ms. Ranallo said that the city is still committed to creating the Public Safety Campus and believes the timeline is more like 5 years. Because of that alternative and the cost of remediation being several million dollars, the city couldn’t do anything at the current site. She also noted, and the Commander confirmed, that some outdoor firearms training is also required.
Stephanie and other meeting attendees pointed out:
  - The 5 year time frame for relocating the firing range is unrealistic.
  - Sound mitigation measures have not been investigated.
  - The sound study paid for by the city has not been released.
  - Any outdoor training on the hill will result in sound traveling to the neighborhood and park.

- We agreed that the HPCC would meet with them to discuss the issue again in early 2023.

**Firing Range Testimonials shared during meeting:**

**Testimonial #1**

As a resident of East Liberty and a frequent visitor to Highland Park, the noise from the firing range continues to have a negative impact on my quality of life. The noise pollution from the firing range often ruins the experience of going to Highland Park, as I go to the park to enjoy fresh air and nature, not to feel like I've entered a warzone.

For people like myself who also have an aversion to gunshots (I lost a family member to gun violence) the noise can be triggering. What's more, the sound of weapons discharging is particularly unwelcome during a time where the police have more than demonstrated their ability to kill the civilians (especially minorities) that they've sworn to protect and serve.

**Testimonial 2- Sept 2020 email:**

It is now 12:25 pm and there is very loud gunfire coming from the police practice range on Washington Boulevard just below our residential neighborhood of Highland Park. This is a constant disturbance and happens as early as 5:00 in the morning and as late as 2:00 am. We have contacted the police department numerous times and have been told that they only practice after 8am and before 6pm which is completely false. My daughter has PTSD and has suffered severe sleep disturbance due to the constant disturbance. After one complaint, the police recommended she ask her doctor to “give you more powerful drugs” because they were not going to stop shooting. We have had to send her to a hotel a number of times after 5-6 nights of lost sleep due to the noise. Her mental and physical health is deteriorating as a result of the constant noise of gunfire. Also, her PTSD is triggered.

Note: The person who submitted the second testimonial sold their home and moved from the neighborhood because of the gun noise.