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'Town hall' meeting on violence planned

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

At Large City Councilman Elroy Corbitt has scheduled a town hall meeting at Bethel Baptist Church on Wallace Street from 7 to 9 p.m. on Oct. 11.

The meeting will be Corbitt's second foray into the public arena as an organizer, moderator and participant in a communitywide discussion. In May, Corbitt organized the "Summit On Violence" at St. Matthew AME Church. That event was put forth as an opportunity to discuss an issue relevant not only to Orange, but to other urban communities in New Jersey, and in the rest of the country.

Many of the same law-enforcement officials, emergency-service providers and elected officials who participated in Corbitt's May summit have agreed to take part in the Oct. 11 event.

The list of expected participants includes acting Orange Police Director Kevin Soohy; Chief of Detectives for the Essex County Prosecutor's Office Anthony Ambrose; Acting Essex County Prosecutor Carolyn Murray; Essex County Sheriff Armando Fontoura; Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr., and Essex County Freeholder Carol Clark.

Corbitt said he hopes to get as many concerned, conscientious and committed Orange citizens as possible to come out for the Oct. 11 town hall meeting. He added that the public servants and elected officials who have committed to coming to the event are filled with useful information.

"People should come to this meeting because it's time out for talk," Corbitt said. "We're tired of all the talk and all the summits; we want plans. We want to know exactly what the Orange Police Department is doing, and is plan-

ning on doing, to combat the rising tide of crime and violence in the city."

Corbitt said he believes the Oct. 11 meeting will be a good opportunity for city residents, property owners, business people and taxpayers to get answers to questions that are on everyone's minds.

"It's time out for talk; it's time now for action," Corbitt said. "The question is, what are we really doing? Do we have any undercover sting operations in place to catch drug dealers? Do we have undercover officers actually purchasing drugs as part of their effort to get all illicit substances off the streets? Do we have state-of-the-art, modern technology in place to help officers apprehend suspects in robberies, carjackings, killings and other crimes that are happening?"

Corbitt said that he is particularly concerned about the use of technology in fighting crime in Orange, or the lack thereof. He said any weakness in that area is particularly pronounced, especially since East Orange, Orange's sister city, seems to have become nationally known as a leader and trendsetter for this.

"Surveillance cameras, computers in patrol cars, and better communications and coordination systems are known as 'force multipliers' in law-enforcement circles," Corbitt said. "That means that, by properly and efficiently using new and existing technology, police can become more effective in fighting crime. It makes existing officers more efficient and it helps make up for the lack of manpower that many departments — including briefly here in Orange — have experienced due to the economic recession and layoffs."

For more information about the upcoming town hall meeting at Bethel Baptist Church, call 962-252-3092.

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