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# ORANGE HOSTS CRIME SUMMIT

**BY WALTER ELLIOTT**

**ORANGE** : Increased targeted joint task forces and the promotion of youth-oriented community groups highlighted the immediate and longer term measures the Orange Police Department presented to the public here at Bethany Baptist Church Oct. 11.

OPD Capt. Kevin Sooy briefed the estimated 54 meeting attendees in Bethel Baptist's sanctuary. The acting police director - along with mayor Eldridge Hawkins, Jr., Essex County Acting Prosecutor Carolyn Murray and Essex County Sheriff Armando Fontoura - explained how they are working to bring down a violent crime spike this city had experienced during August.

Sooy, Murray and Hawkins, as a law and order guest panel moderated by Essex County Freeholder Carol Clark, fielded questions from seven audience members for about half of the two hour meeting.

"The department first set up a homicide task force with the county," said Sooy. "29 of our best officers and detectives are working alongside sheriff's officers and detectives in investigating and solving crimes. We then turn over the case to the Essex County Prosecutors Office, who pursues the cases in (state superior) court."

Clark, who moderated the initial Orange crime

community summit in May, provided some takeaway impressions before Orange Municipal Judge Sybil Elias provided a benediction.

"My pastor put a different view on the (U.S.) Department of Homeland Security's 'If you see something, say something' phrase," said Clark. "If you see something positive about this meeting, say something about it to your neighbors."

Councilman-at-Large Elroy Corbitt seemed pleased with the turnout in the second crime-oriented town hall meeting he has organized in six months.

"I thank everyone who made it a point to come out here," said Corbitt. "I know that there is another meeting that the Mayor had attended and there's also an Orange Board of Education meeting. I made crime prevention and enforcement a priority from the day you've elected me to office."

Corbitt was referring to both the Mayor's Housing Opportunity Program and Education Forums, whose first session was held at the Oakwood Avenue School Multipurpose Room about 30 minutes before the crime meeting. While the date conflict could not be corrected in time for Oct. 11, a second HOPE Forum is set for Oct. 25.

The Tuesday night date conflicts among the three

events made for tough choices for some residents. Corbitt's first summit was held at St. Matthew Baptist Church around a lunchtime Saturday in May.

Hawkins, indeed, appeared just before the meeting at Bethel started at 7 p.m. Council President Tency Eason and Councilwoman Donna K. Williams appeared later; Councilman Edward Marable, Jr. stayed throughout.

Some of Corbitt's invited guests were also fitting his meeting around their schedules. Murray stayed as long as she could before excusing herself to relieve her babysitting mother.

Fontoura excused himself before the question session for an event in Livingston. County detective bureau director Anthony Ambrose, who was receiving an award elsewhere, was unable to appear.

The meeting developed into "Here's What We're Doing," "Here's What We Plan to Do" and "How Can You Help."

Sooy, standing in for on-leave Police Director John Rappaport, further described the various internal and joint task forces he has formed.

"We've also developed a burglary task force for areas where there has been a high rate of auto break-ins," said Sooy. "We get a rented or surplus car, park it in the area, place a wallet or valuable on a seat and leave

the window part-open," said Sooy. "We watch for someone to enter and take the wallet or valuable. We either arrest that suspect in minutes or put out an arrest warrant."

Sooy added that Operation "John," where a male or female OPD member poses as a prostitute or prospective client on city streets, is continuing. That Oct. 6 patrol, said the acting director, yielded eight arrests under the charge of wandering and/or remaining in an area with purpose to engage in prostitution.

Sooy said that six of the Oct. 6 suspects were from outside Orange. Those towns, as he provided in a handout Oct. 11, are East Orange, West Orange and Blairstown.

Both Sooy and Hawkins said that they are pursuing public and private grant money to help rebuild OPD's ranks and for additional equipment.

"We're getting grant money to purchase Crime Aided Database software," said Sooy. "The CAD program will allow us to enter crime data into our own and the county and state databases in real time. The county and state can tell us quickly if a found handgun was involved in another crime and the officer would save time by entering the information on his mobile data terminal."

Sooy added that he is looking to purchase around 12 mobile cameras to be

installed at key traffic points for monitoring. The captain/acting director is also arranging council members to visit Newark's Comstat headquarters to show how the surveillance cameras operate.

"Thanks to the grant money, we've been able to rehire five or six of the officers we had to lay off earlier in the year," said Hawkins. "Two or three were hired by other agencies before we could get them back. We're also going to get new hires from the state's 'RICE' list of all ready trained officers; we can have them on the beat in a couple of weeks' training instead of waiting eight months for recruits to go through the county police academy."

Of the seven public speakers asking 10 questions in the last hour, two expressed the need for continued or increased police presence at Central and Oakwood places. The pair said that there are people persistently hanging out at those corners.

A third questioner said that she would stop going to the town hall crime meetings, "until I see a comprehensive plan - including education and the community - put up."

Two of the questioners - one the owner-operator of a youth boxing gym, the other seeking to mentor youth in business - made mini-presentations of their current or proposed programs.