

Frostwood Participation in the Fonn Villas Constable Contract: How It Works and Why it is Good for Frostwood.

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Authored by Bruce Nichols, Frostwood security coordinator, after extensive consultation and research.

Big picture:

Frostwood is currently part of the Fonn Villas Precinct 5 Constable Contract Patrol program. As part of this program, we share a team of deputies with adjacent communities and receive day and nighttime coverage seven days a week. Crime in Frostwood is and historically has been low. However, being part of this program provides added peace of mind. And it affords Frostwood rapid law enforcement response, regardless of circumstances, and day-to-day law enforcement familiarity with traffic patterns and neighborhood goings-on. Our contract Constables have substantially more awareness of our area than we could hope to enjoy if we relied solely on the Houston Police Department for security.

Please note that if we did not participate in a Constable Contract, Frostwood residents' calls would be answered by the Houston Police Department, not the Constable's dispatch desk. And HPD's response to calls/reports would be significantly slower (often days rather than minutes), for such reports as traffic safety concerns or reports of suspicious persons/activities -- which the Constable DOES respond to and responds quickly.

The deputies regularly drive the 11 neighborhoods in the contract area (see map below). They may not always be visible, but they are never far away in case of need. And, as part of Precinct 5 and well-connected to HPD, can rapidly call for, and receive, backup. In addition to driving around, deputies often park at a central location in our area so they can use computers in their cars to do reports, answer emails, etc.

Frostwood's participation in the Fonn Villas Precinct 5 Constable Contracted Patrol program has provided the community a cost-efficient and effective means of providing added security. Increasing patrol presence is always an option but needs to be considered in light of effectiveness and cost.

Here's what we paid in 2022:

Frostwood's share for this program was \$11,452.56 quarterly for a total of \$45,810.24 in 2022. Each neighborhood's share of the cost is based on the number of homes in that neighborhood.

Here's a breakdown of the shared cost:

neighborhood	quarterly	yearly
Fonn Villas	\$ 10,858.03	\$ 43,432.12
Memorial Forest	\$ 10,670.28	\$ 42,681.12
Tealwood	\$ 5,382.08	\$ 21,528.32
Memorial Hollow	\$ 7,259.55	\$ 29,038.20
Sandalwood	\$ 5,632.41	\$ 22,529.64
Lakeview	\$ 3,442.03	\$ 13,768.12
**Memorial Meadows	\$ 5,632.41	\$ 22,529.64
Frostwood	\$ 11,452.56	\$ 45,810.24
Memorial Pines	\$ 2,065.22	\$ 8,260.88
Tallowood Townhomes	\$ 2,002.63	\$ 8,010.52
Woodstone II		\$ 3,504.61
Woodland Hollow I		\$ 2,753.62
Woodland Hollow II		\$ 2,252.96
TOTAL		\$266,099.99

***Memorial Meadows has withdrawn from the Fonn Villas contract as of 2023.*

Unsurprisingly, the rate per contract deputy -- set by Harris County Commissioners Court - is going up. For 2023, it will be \$93,123 per deputy, which will raise the Fonn Villas contract cost per deputy from \$88,699.99. Also, withdrawal of Memorial Meadows from the contract as of 2023 will raise each remaining neighborhood's share of the cost.

Here's what we get: The neighborhood payments together support 3 deputies devoted to the contract we participate in, which is run by Fonn Villas. NOTE: Because there are more than 100 Constable patrol contracts in Precinct 5, the precinct as a whole has twice the number of licensed peace officers it would have without neighborhood contracts. Currently, there are over 400 total deputies in Precinct 5, more than 200 of them funded by neighborhood patrol contracts. And we benefit from having more total Constables in Precinct 5 available for backup.

The three deputies assigned to our contract are on duty as shown in the chart below. The day deputy works five 8-hour shifts. And the evening-night deputies work four 10-hour shifts. The chart below shows the schedule.

	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
Day Depy	7a-3p	7a-3p	7a-3p	7a-3p	7a-3p		
Night Depy 1	3p-1a	3p-1a				3p-1a	3p-1a
Night Depy 2			3p-1a	3p-1a	3p-1a	3p-1a	

These contract patrol deputies are fully licensed law enforcement officers, empowered to act accordingly, including using force and making arrests. They are equipped, trained and led professionally, and they are hired selectively. And law enforcement agencies in our area collaborate, communicating seamlessly and coordinating their activities.

Another advantage: **Neighborhoods that contract for Constable patrol are not liable** legally for actions of the deputies. The deputies are Harris County employees, not neighborhood contractors. Conversely, neighborhoods that hire private security are liable for the (mistaken or improper) actions of contractors they hire, including both off-duty police or security guards from private companies. And private security guards may not be as carefully vetted as licensed law enforcement officers. Precinct 5 Constable Capt. Mitch Hutter, who oversees the contract deputy program, noted one nearby neighborhood had private security for a while, but they gave it up due to the high cost of liability insurance. They are now part of the contract Constable program

Private security does NOT have licensed law enforcement legal authority. A private security guard has no more authority to enforce state law than the average citizen. They cannot make arrests, hand out tickets, or use force as a licensed law enforcement officer is empowered to do.

If a crime occurs, we are not solely dependent on our contract deputies for response. If our deputies need backup, they will call for and receive backup from district-wide Constable deputies or contract deputies working nearby neighborhoods as well as the Houston Police Department. One of the largest concentrations of contract deputies in our area serves Memorial City Mall, City Centre and Town & Country Village. But other neighborhoods, Whispering Oaks and Memorial Bend, for example, have separate contracts. So does the Harris County Toll Road Authority, for patrol of Beltway 8 and I-10 HOV lanes. They can all be pulled in as needed.

It is also important to be aware that we are in the City of Houston and served by the Houston Police Department as well as Harris County Constable Precinct 5. HPD and the Constable have a good relationship and back each other up when necessary. But, due to HPD's wide area of coverage and limited staffing, Constable Precinct 5 is closer to us and able to respond more quickly.

No matter where Constable deputies are working at any given time, they, as licensed peace officers, have a "duty to respond" when a major incident, defined as life-threatening, occurs. Reinforcements will cascade into an area of need. Precinct 5 is large in area but has considerable resources in west Houston that can provide backup as needed.

In addition to contract patrols, Precinct 5 maintains District Units or "floaters" available to respond quickly to an incident. There are about 10 floaters at any given time in our west Houston part of Precinct 5.

Precinct 5 maintains 12 substations in addition to its central office at I-10 and Barker Cypress. All patrol units work out of the substations. That's where deputies report for work and collect their Constable vehicles at the start of a shift. And it's where they finish their shift. Our contract deputies work out of the substation at Ashford Village Center at Dairy Ashford and Whittington. The closest substation to us is at I-10 and Memorial City Way, in the Memorial City Mall complex.

Frostwood also benefits from Flock Safety cameras installed around us. These solar-powered cameras capture license plates on all vehicles passing within their view. Flock Safety's system instantaneously runs each license plate through state and national criminal data bases. If that vehicle is identified as stolen or potentially involved in a crime, an alert goes out immediately to the nearest law enforcement agencies. These cameras have been widely adopted and will continue to increase in number. There are cameras in the nearby commercial areas, and the Memorial Villages Police Department (MVPD) has them in Bunker Hill, Piney Point and Hunters Creek. Frostwood's security coordinator sees MVPD reports, and they regularly mention arrests of suspects and recovery of stolen vehicles due to Flock Safety camera coverage.

There is relatively little crime in Frostwood. Precinct 5 data specific to Frostwood support this point. We update this data regularly, and we have a spreadsheet available for viewing on request.

Data for the larger law enforcement jurisdictions that include us (see Constable and HPD maps below) can be misleading because we are near a hospital where assaults tend to be reported no matter where they happened. And criminal activity in nearby commercial areas also inflates totals. Despite the higher incidence of crime in the surrounding geographical area, our deputies say they only rarely experience conflicting demands inside the Fonn Villas contract area.

Homeowners MUST be part of the equation as repeatedly stated by Capt. Hutter. Crime-fighting is a team effort and homeowners are essential for providing additional eyes and ears for police. The motto "if you see something, say something" requires Frostwood homeowners to call the Constable to report any suspicions. Constables cannot respond if they don't know response is needed. More deputies and higher frequency of patrols might add deterrence but at a cost – and it is not clear, given the size of Frostwood and the Fonn Villas contract area, that an additional deputy would make any significant difference.

To conclude, our program is cost-efficient to Frostwood homeowners and effective. We have relatively low crime as supported by data and can count on a rapid response to calls, regardless of circumstances. Key features of our Constable contract patrol can be summed up as follows:

- Our constables can call for backup, and there's plenty available.
- They can use force, make arrests, issue tickets.
- They can liaise easily with HPD and other neighboring agencies.
- They are linked into license-plate readers from Flock cameras.

- They are professionally selected, trained, and equipped.
- Harris County is liable for any misconduct, not the neighborhood.

Map of Fonn Villas contract Constable patrol area



