

# DANA General Meeting July 2024

July 13, 2024

Attending: Captain Merlin Bush (NOPD), Lorraine Bible, Celia Turner, Hannah Ligon, Cathy Boutte, Aimee McCarron, Officer Marylou Agustin, Mindy Milam, Elise Williams, Wayne Benjamin, Courtney Moran, Anita White, 3 dial-in callers

Format: Call in for a Conversation

Mindy noted that today on 610 under St. Bernard there was a crew of volunteers cleaning up the intersection—big thanks to whoever organized that!

## Short Recap

The attendees including representatives from city and state agencies as well as neighbors from the DeSaix Area discussed various issues including sewage and water board management, short-term rental rules, and recent legislative developments in Baton Rouge. They also reviewed the significant decrease in violent and property crimes in the 3rd district of NOPD, and addressed concerns about illegal parking, homelessness, and property ownership. Lastly, they discussed the need for balance in fighting crime and addressing quality of life issues, and the importance of submitting 311 requests for catch basin cleaning.

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>Short Recap</b>                                                                    | <b>1</b> |
| <b>Councilmember Joe Giarrusso:</b>                                                   | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Courtney Moran, Legislative Assistant from Rep. Willard's office - District 97</b> | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Anne Kiefer - from Cm. Green's office in District D</b>                            | <b>5</b> |
| <b>NOPD - Captain Merlin Bush &amp; Officer Marylou Agustin</b>                       | <b>6</b> |
| <b>Elise Williams from Neighborhood Engagement Office</b>                             | <b>7</b> |
| <b>Additional business</b>                                                            | <b>8</b> |

## Councilmember Joe Giarrusso, District A:

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- Chief of Staff Amanda Rizzo [Amanda.Rizzo@nola.gov](mailto:Amanda.Rizzo@nola.gov) 504-496-8864
- Constituent Services Director LeeAnn Moss [LeeAnn.Moss@nola.gov](mailto:LeeAnn.Moss@nola.gov) 504-658-1010
- Policy Director Aimee McCarron [aimee.mccarron@nola.gov](mailto:aimee.mccarron@nola.gov) 504-658-1010
- In the midst of focusing on SWBNO. There were a number of bills that affected them.
  - The first - Senator Harris's - consolidated drainage so it's no longer split between DPW and SWBNO by pipe size. That's on track to happen after hurricane season, looking at a November-January date. SWBNO says their "cadillac" plan is \$40MM, but coming up with that is a struggle, so trying to figure out the sweet spot for funding.
    - City now has to give a significant portion of traffic camera revenue to SWBNO for drainage. But the issue is that it's unclear how much extra revenue that is. The cameras typically generate between \$7-22MM annually.
    - Will have a budget committee meeting this Thursday to discuss how much of the ARPA money that's unspent on the up-front cost that SWBNO will need this year to improve drainage. They allocated \$10MM for catch basin cleaning, but this year alone, the city has cleaned almost 2x the catch basins they did the previous year, and have cleared out 2.5MM pounds of junk/muck from the lines.
  - Rep. Hilferty had a bill to allow folks to move to level billing like Entergy. And the other thing that's being set up is arbitrators in each district to handle appeals. There will be 1 each residential and commercial in each district.
  - Cm. Morrell and Giarrusso are working on wholesale improvements in the escalation of billing disputes and preventing bad bills from going out at all.
  - Bill requiring no more estimates is supposed to go into effect on January 1.
- Entergy - 17 power failures in District A & D since the beginning of the year. Some are tree issues, some energy issues. We need either a more robust plan to trim the trees or better comms between Parks & Parkways and Entergy to make the plan each year. Entergy says they can only cut back 4 feet and in other places 8-10 feet.
- Revised the STR rules to have one license per square block and up to 2 more exemptions. The first exemptions could be had at the past council meeting. They created a guide post in addition to city planning, who have outsourced this to a consulting firm in Denver. City planning is reviewing their work, and they say if it passes 4/6 of the approvable criteria, will approve, and if not, it's a no.
  - He's worried with rising costs that we're pushing people out. Look at whether or not there have been problems or if the nearest neighbors have an issue.
  - Also if they denied every single exemption, there will be a lawsuit
- Blight question from Mindy: Has been in touch with Elise Williams and Lionel Scott. The summary about this house has a section with status information: Inspection May 10th, Inspection documentation May 10th, Inspection July 9th, Inspection documentation July 9th, Supervisor review, Title Research June 10th, Video conference with 14 violations.

They were fined in March 2023, appealed in April 2023, and since last April CE was saying it was in appeal. The last thing Elise sent was that it was in litigation. Next step is an admin hearing, but there's no date. The city is waiting for it to get out of the litigation process.

- Cm. Giarrusso would prefer they pursue 2023 issues and 2024 issues on parallel tracks, but it's typically not handled that way. The next step is to ask Code Enforcement where it is in the litigation process. There ought to be a ruling on that by now. Elise will ask if there is any other specific information when she sees Code Enforcement today.
- Moss St. - there was a water leak and now the detour is dug up on one side, for 3 weeks, narrowing it to one lane for a block. Yet another safety hazard on that block. What can we do to get that filled in?
  - Cm. Giarrusso asked Mindy to send a photo and address, and he will try to get it bumped up to SWBNO. (as of 7/22/2024 this was patched and taken care of)
- Wayne thanked Cm. Giarrusso's office for quick action cleaning the catch basin on the south side of DeSaix

## Courtney Moran, Legislative Assistant from Rep. Willard's office - District 97

- Contact: [hse097@legis.la.gov](mailto:hse097@legis.la.gov) 504.283.4261
- Their SWBNO bill was covered by Cm. Giarrusso
- Ran a bill to repeal the termination date of the fortified roof program to make it permanent. The legislature appropriated some funds to that program, and it's supposed to open up in the fall, waiting to hear from Insurance Commissioner more on the timeline and rules from that.
- Ran a bill to temporarily suspend the 10% minimum surcharge on citizens' homeowners policies. It didn't pass, but Sen. Talbot put an amendment on his bill so the 10% suspension will be in effect.
- 3 bills that give kids better access to vital documents, kids who are justice-involved or are being cared for by a family member or guardian
- Another bill passed that allows for civil investigators to conduct taped interviews with vulnerable citizens. NOPD has had some staffing issues, so this allows for rules about who can be a civil investigator and how they go about conducting interviews.
- Many consumer protections were removed on insurance front, including the 3-year rule that prevented you from being removed from an insurer's policies who had been with them for 3 years. Going forward they can remove up to 5% of their policies per year. Now if you want to sue someone with auto insurance for an auto accident, you must sue the person directly instead of the insurance company.

- Successes from house democrats - getting funding for summer EBT program. Governor refused \$70MM in federal funds to feed the kids during summer. They were able to get \$3MM from the state elsewhere in order to draw down that \$70MM from the federal government. Governor had also removed funding for domestic violence shelters, but house Dems were able to get those funds back.
- There was a lot of interest in the hemp bills that were run this session, a senator wanted to outlaw all consumable hemp products. Their office received the most input on this topic than they have on any topic since they've been in office. The bill was defeated and a house bill that regulates hemp consumable products was passed.
- There was a bill to protect IVF in Louisiana which was defeated.
- There were other bills to loosen abortion restrictions, and none of them were passed.
- Question from Cathy on insurance - did they say why the 10% wasn't passed or why the 3 year rule was removed?
  - The 10% was added on to a Senator's bill that did pass, so even though Rep. Willard's bill was defeated, it will still remain. The insurance commissioner has stated several times that he's a big business person, and his philosophy for fixing our insurance process is to remove regulations to make it more friendly for insurers so more will want to write policies, and if we have more, we'll have more competition and drive prices down. Courtney disagrees and feels that regardless of whether it works or not, it will be years before any improvement is seen.
- Several gun laws were passed to loosen restrictions on who can carry a gun and where. There are some exceptions to concealed carry, for example you cannot conceal carry a firearm into law enforcement, places of worship, schools, or within 1000 feet of school campuses. Several members of law enforcement spoke out against this as it would make their job harder and more dangerous, but it didn't stop the change.
- There was another bill to make it illegal to approach closer than 25 feet of law enforcement while they are performing official duties.
- Other laws were passed that make it harder to get out of jail and that will send more people to prison for longer.
- Question from Jake- what do you see as the likelihood of the constitutional convention in the near future?
  - Courtney feels it's going to happen - the question is whether it will be next month or not. Most of the citizens of Louisiana have been clear in their dislike of the speed in which this process would move. The last constitutional convention took more than a year, and the way the governor wants to do it would consolidate a lot of the power over how it goes with him, and it wouldn't be representative of the folks of Louisiana. The governor doesn't seem fazed by the outcry of folks in the state. Haven't heard anything about likelihood of it happening next month. Other folks in senate who aren't thrilled about how the governor is planning for it. The governor also refuses to say what it is he wants to do at the constitutional convention, he didn't mention it while he was campaigning, and none of the discussions have mentioned what he wants to change exactly. There's no doubt

our constitution is kind of mess, many things enshrined in constitution that don't need to be there, but with no transparency about what would be addressed in a constitutional convention, the people of Louisiana have a lot of questions, and there's no response from governor's office.

- If you have any questions, please reach out to Courtney and Rep. Willard.

## Anne Kiefer - from Cm. Green's office - District D

- Contact: [anne.kiefer@nola.gov](mailto:anne.kiefer@nola.gov) 504-658-1041 (o), 504-931-4293 (c)
- Crime is down over 40% from 2024 to 2023 in 4 categories. Especially in NOPD's 3rd district. There has been only one violent crime in 3rd district in past 2 months.
- DeSaix bridge could possibly push it to February but hoping it will be done by end of year.
- 4,900 catch basins and drain lines have been inspected and cleaned. Please have grass cleaners pick up and bag leaves instead of blowing them into basins. Please try your best to remove debris from the top of the grate
- Cooling centers are open in extreme heat [nola.gov/cooling](http://nola.gov/cooling) [nola.gov/cooling](http://nola.gov/cooling) has locations.
- If you don't know how to swim, there's a free program to learn on 2-4pm on July 27th, August 10th, August 24th, September 7th at Loyola pool, 6328 Freret St. on 5th floor. This is for adults and older teens.
- Sign up for newsletter
- Question from Cathy - Can Cm. Green's office help to get the fire hydrant that's covered by weeds addressed by SWBNO?
  - Send her an address and information to [anne.kiefer@nola.gov](mailto:anne.kiefer@nola.gov) and she will investigate
- Also working closely with code enforcement
- Pan Am stadium is getting a \$3MM renovation
- Question from Wayne - Is there an update on the catch basin on DeSaix Blvd? The south side was fixed two weeks ago. The north side in District D hasn't been addressed. Wayne will send her an email to follow up.
  - She will keep following up
- On a good note, response time to calls is much lower, they're staffing up
- Question from Rachel - issue with a transformer that blew, a very loud explosion and everyone in the neighborhood knew, happened on March 19th. A large piece of steel came through her steel glass storm door, damaged the wooden door inside, and another piece came through the roof and busted the seal on the porch, there was glass all over, but it happened on the opposite side of the street. It blew across from her, would have killed someone if there were there. Got in touch with Entergy, emailed them several times, finally gave it to adjuster, saying it may have been a squirrel or something, it's not their problem. Entergy also claims that night that the neighbors opposite them lost power and theirs didn't. The neighbors called, they did some repair on the transformer and

turned it back on, but Entergy is saying nothing happened that night. Two weeks after, someone called her and she was told it was the transformer, but a rat went in there, and when a rat does the damage, they're not responsible for it.

- Anne said there is a lawyer in the office named Monique Green, talk to her as an attorney, tell her what happened, and ask her for advice on what to do. She may not have a solution, but at least as an attorney it won't cost you anything to determine if what Entergy is saying has any legal basis. 504-658-1040
- Rachel requests that we please also mention it to Cm. Green

## NOPD - Captain Merlin Bush & Officer Marylou Agustin

- Contact: [mabush@nola.gov](mailto:mabush@nola.gov) and [mcagustin@nola.gov](mailto:mcagustin@nola.gov) (504) 658-6030 (station), (504) 658-6172 (office), (504) 330-6757 (work cell)
- Commander of Third District - overall in 3rd district, seeing a tremendous decrease in all violent crime. Murder is down 8 murders (67%) for the year. Shootings down 7 shootings but did take in a double shooting by Shamrock last night. 37% decrease in assaults. 88% decrease in carjackings, only 2 in Third District this year compared to 18 last year.
- Priority calls response at about 10 minutes
- Code 1 calls are nonpriority with response at about 11 minutes
- Hope we're starting to see cars being pulled over
- Have made 1400 traffic stops in 3rd district compared to 200 last year
  - Lowers amount of traffic accidents due to traffic enforcement
  - Lets criminals know there's a threat of being stopped
- Property crimes - over past couple years have had issues with auto burglaries (down 40%) and thefts (down 48%) over the city
- For businesses, they were having issues with shoplifting but have been able to lower that
- Essence took a large amount of staff, next major event is Decadence from Aug 30th-Sep 2nd, that impacts response times of course
- Had their hurricane meeting a couple weeks ago
  - If for some reason their station closes, they will be at UNO Lakefront Arena if have to move from their station location, come there
- Night Out Against Crime is October 8th - if we have parties in the neighborhood they will come out and attend
- Question from Mindy -
  - decision to start looking at traffic enforcement - was that from the district or superintendent?
    - When he came to the district, saw how low the numbers were the prior year and flagged it
    - But also the superintendent saw these numbers were low across the city

- If we see someone flagrantly violating is it helpful to do anything with that info or just keep moving on?
  - If you see someone committing any type of crime, give them a call. Sometimes it's too late to catch them but can share that info with another district. Let them decipher if they can do something or not.
  - If they're really speeding flagrantly or if someone is hit, please do call them
- Question from Cathy Boutte -
  - Heard the Dollar General and Family Dollar stores are closing, that's where issues with shoplifting
    - Yes, he heard the Dollar Generals are closing in New Orleans East. Those crimes are nuisance crimes, but they lose folks jobs in the city
- Illegal parking on Gentilly and Castiglione has been reported for this neighborhood
  - Will be sending officers out to address those issues in the evenings
- Issue with people coming from Bonnie-Frances Lingerie Company abandoned white building

## Elise Williams - Neighborhood Engagement Office

- Contact: [elise.williams@nola.gov](mailto:elise.williams@nola.gov) 504.658.4980 (office) | 504.658.4933 (mobile)
- She saw the catch basin issue that Wayne emailed about and is looking to follow up
- August 8th have a Coffee on your Corner at the Robert Smith library on quality of life, community engagement and 1st-3rd district community liaison officers and code enforcement will be there to talk about blight. 10:30am. Short presentation, then Q&A and supporting specific concerns.
- For September meeting if we'd like any departments to attend and specific topics from them, just need 2 weeks advance notice
- When you call 311 they don't automatically give the service request #, but if you request to have it so you can follow up, they will give it to you. But it's best to make the report online so you can get the email and follow up.

## Additional business

- At September meeting, a representative from City Park Conservancy will be attending to answer questions about park planning and development. If you have thoughts, come ready with questions.
- Masonic Lodge - will reach out to get someone to join for September meeting
- Question - the individuals that walk around with pants low bother a neighbor, and she considers it borderline sexual harassment. She reached out to councilmembers.

- Wayne has been taking photos of the bridge. See attached photos of where the progress is. He takes photos each week, and we will work on a way to get those published when the project is over.