

Windham/Eastern Community Action Network
October 13, 2005
Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Kim Silcox. Dr. Eric Martin of the Business Administration Department at Eastern was introduced by Kim Silcox. Dr. Martin informed the group of the efforts of many Spring Street residents to address ongoing problems in their neighborhood. By teaming together, the residents were able to make a difference – they were able to get stop signs, got Weed & Seed grant money, and things have started turning around. Their group has common issues with W/E Can:

- Safety and civility
- Police presence
- Absentee landlords

Dr. Martin stated that he feels that students are the solution to their problem; they want more students to move into the neighborhood. They would also like to work together with W/E Can on common issues. Spring Street is a vital part of the Willimantic redevelopment effort. They meet the first Wednesday of each month with the Chief of Police and neighbors. They meet at the police station. They have had a good response from the town. Blight is a continuing issue, and asked Michael Paulhus, First Selectman, if they could get a street sweeper. Mr. Paulhus stated that 2 people were starting to work on blight issues on Oct. 24.

The next guest was Patricia Froehlich, State's Attorney for the Windham Judicial District. Ms. Froehlich is responsible for all investigations in the district. Her office processes 3,000 cases a month. Students for the most part are not kids, they are 18 – they can vote, go to war. They need to be held responsible – the question is how. We need to separate the criminal from someone who does something out of character and is away from home for the first time. The state has a variety of alternatives to incarceration. Convictions stay with a person forever – so they do a risk benefit analysis. For young people, some of the alternatives include:

- Youthful offender status for 16-17 year olds – special hearing
- Alcohol education program for first time offenders
- Accelerated rehabilitation for low level misdemeanors – used for breach of peace, low level assault, etc.

If a person is given AR, the victim has the right to know what the outcome is and give input in court. They can contact the State's Attorney's office if they are involved in a situation that involves an arrest – if you know that the defendant has been involved in these types of situations before, you have the right to object to AR.

Parties with alcohol - If a person over 21 provides alcohol to a minor and the intoxicated minor injures someone while driving, the adult may be responsible in a civil lawsuit.

In one community out west, owners have the option to put a sticker on their car which gives the police permission to stop the car if they see it operating between certain hours. [Note: This is being enacted in West Hartford, CT.]

If people have a concern about the way a case is handled, they should send her a letter.

Ms. Froelich discussed the bond process. She explained why courts do not incarcerate defendants on a Failure to Appear complaint; a prison overcrowding study indicated that the state needs to look at rehabilitation and prevention strategies. She talked about the philosophy of criminal justice and giving people the opportunity to rehabilitate themselves. With Accelerated Rehabilitation, it can last up to 2 years, they have to do all the things the judge orders and then will have the case dismissed. The Judicial Branch has a record of prior use of AR and they would not be able to use it again. She has charged people with perjury for indicating they have no prior record when in fact they had used AR in the past.

Only the prosecutor has the ability to make the decision to press charges or not – not the victim – so even if a victim decides not to pursue a complaint, it is not up to them at that point. Victims sometimes get frustrated because they can have incidents with many first time offenders and they all get a slap on the hand.

We need to start at an early age, with children, to teach them that the police are our friends; that there is far greater honor in being a respectful citizen. Willimantic should run a citizen's police academy – it takes some money but she would come and present; University of Connecticut runs one [note: Eastern also hosts a Police Explorers program every summer for youth from Connecticut.] Ms. Froelich said that in Danbury they did this and recruited the most hostile residents - you would be amazed at how much they changed after learning what the police go through.

The group then discussed prevention and outreach efforts by University Police with the Elm Package Store as well as efforts on and off campus, as well as the housing regulations from Narragansett, Rhode Island.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.