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Police chief updates city council on police services in the city

By Sora O'Doherty

In response to public comments about the level of crime being experienced by residents of the Ivy Drive neighborhood, Orinda Police Chief Ryan Sullivan addressed the Orinda City Council on Feb. 1 on the state of law enforcement in the city. Chief Sullivan stressed that Orinda continues to be an extremely safe city, and that recent residential burglaries are currently being investigated. "Due to the active investigation," he said, "nothing can be announced regarding leads and suspects."

As far as the number of crimes reported in the Ivy Drive neighborhood, Sullivan wanted to clarify that, although reported by residents at an earlier council meeting, there have not been any home invasion crimes in the area, but there have been burglaries. The difference is that the term "home invasion" is normally used when the residents are at home and the crime connotes an element of fear or force. None of the Ivy Drive neighborhood residents were at home when their homes were entered.

The chief did take the time to review how the OPD operates and current staffing issues.

Updating the community on OPD initiatives, Sullivan said they are working on a safer community, with more transparency and enhanced use of technology, as well as more robust resources, most of which come from the county.

The chief spoke about the use of automatic license plate reader cameras (ALPR). One of the two sets of ALPRs are Vigilant stationary cameras, two of which are mounted on a vehicle to capture actions in front of and behind the vehicle. The city also owns several Flock cameras while others are owned by homeowners' associations, which agree to give the police access to the cameras. Sullivan asked that any neighborhood interested in obtaining Flock cameras contact OPD as well as the company.

A new OPD officer has recently been trained to work with Neighborhood Watch groups in the city. Sullivan clarified that these groups are not vigilantes, but citizens trained to recognize and report suspicious activity. Neighborhood Watch groups also implement crime prevention techniques, such as home security and Operation Identification, which engraves driver's license numbers or other ID numbers onto valuable items. Additionally, residents should make sure their vehicles are locked and should let a neighbor know if they are going to be out of town. Sullivan said that the new officer is extremely passionate about the program.

Interested persons should contact either the administrative assistant or dispatch, and say they are interested in Neighborhood Watch.

Sullivan also addressed an issue that has been a cause of community concern: the interface between police officers and people with mental health issues. The city and the county have been working on better pairing of mental health services with policing. Efforts include pairing the Mental Health Evaluation Team with law enforcement departments and with the County Behavioral Health Services to address critical mental health needs of community members. Goals include reducing law enforcement repeat calls for service with individuals with mental illness; reducing violent encounters between law enforcement and citizens with mental illness; reducing visits to Psychiatric Emergency Services; increasing safety for police, community, consumers, and family; increased utilization of outpatient mental health services; and providing education to families and the community.

Currently a mobile crisis response team consisting of a deputy sheriff and a mental health evaluation team works Mondays through Thursdays from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. to provide same-day intervention for adults who are experiencing a mental health crisis. This unit will visit clients and their families to prevent acute psychiatric crises from becoming emergencies that required law enforcement involvement or involuntary hospitalization. The goal is to de-escalate the crises and safely connect clients with care and mental health resources. When necessary, law enforcement will be requested to respond for assistance.

A new county initiative, the A3 Community Crisis Initiative for Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime, is intended to facilitate a better, safer way to respond to individuals experiencing behavioral health crises and reduce need for police intervention. The county will hire and train staff for regional crisis response teams and a call center hub to provide scalable, 24/7 service to meet the needs of community members, from non-urgent wellness responses to people experiencing acute mental health crises. This initiative includes the launch of the Miles Hall Crisis Call Center. The county has allocated Measure X funds - \$5 million in one-time funds dedicated to infrastructure and \$20 million in ongoing funds to support the overall staff.

In conclusion on crime prevention, Sullivan noted that officers cannot be everywhere at once.

"If you see something suspicious, call law enforcement," he said. Either call 911 or call non-emergency dispatch, (925) 646-2441.

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