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Trail improvements considered

Recent muggings in Elm Street Park prompt discussion

by Andrew Ujifusa | Staff Writer



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Town of Chevy Chase officials have expressed interest in funding security upgrades to Elm Street Park and the Capital Crescent Trail after recent robberies in the area.

Council members at their Oct. 14 meeting said the improvements could include police call boxes on the trail and security cameras mounted on nearby buildings to monitor both the trail and the park.

Other ideas laid out at the council meeting included trimming bushes in the park, which is between 45th Street, 46th Street, Elm Street and Willow Lane, and stepping up patrols by police officers.

The suggestions about park safety came after two strong-arm robberies occurred on Sept. 25 and 26 on the Capital Crescent Trail, north of Elm Street Park. Montgomery County Police are still investigating the incidents and continuing increased patrols in the area, according to police spokeswoman Officer Melanie Brenner.

The park is within the corporate boundaries of the town but is operated by the Montgomery County Parks Department.

At the meeting last week, Mayor Kathy Strom suggested that the police call boxes could be similar to the ones used on college campuses and on the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal along the Potomac River. Cameras, meanwhile, could be installed on buildings surrounding the park and monitored by security guards already working in those buildings, she said.

"It's so important to the town to make it as safe as possible," Strom said.

Strom said a few days prior to the meeting, she heard about a person walking along trail near Elm Street Park who noticed a youth hiding behind the bushes between the trail and the park. This prompted her proposal to cut down the height of the bushes to conform to general police guidelines.

County police suggest that homeowners keep bushes below the height of windows to improve visibility and make hiding in them more difficult.

Councilman Rob Enelow suggested the town could pay to increase patrols in the park conducted by off-duty county police officers, "rather than depending on the good will



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and largesse of the county." Currently, off-duty county police officers patrol the Elm Street Park area for the town.

"For far too long we've been hearing about safety incidents in the park and along the trail," he said.

Town Manager Todd Hoffman said the town had to make sure that any increased security patrols did not conflict with current county police operations. He said he was investigating how much security the town was providing to the area already with its use of off-duty officers. The town does not have its own police department.

Hoffman said a supplemental appropriation out of the general fund balance would probably be needed to pay for security upgrades. The town's current fiscal year budget for security patrols by police officers is \$200,000.

Brenner and Parks Department spokeswoman Kelli Holsendolph said the town would need to coordinate the design and implementation of call boxes and cameras with park and county police as well as county government.

"I think it's very positive," Brenner said. "It's really great how the community members have come together in helping with solutions to various crimes."

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