

MIDDLE COUNTRY ROAD TASK FORCE

Official Meeting Minutes

July 2015 Update:

More than 30 people joined us for the July 29th MCRTF meeting held at MIFD from 6-8pm. We had great attendance by town, county and state reps, as well as the Longwood School District and MI Fire District and Department. TOB Councilwoman Connie Kepert and a rep from Councilwoman Jane Bonner's office were on hand from TOB, as were Suffolk County Legislator Sarah Anker and NYS Senator Ken LaValle. MICA officers Gail Lynch-Bailey and Frank Bailey recounted the recent MCR Walking Tour, where they witnessed everything from drug deals and people sleeping off hangovers in parking lots to thriving local businesses and a great new Jamaican restaurant.

Coram Civic President Erma Gluck spoke about the new Wincoram apartment project and ongoing problems at the Stop & Shop/Home Depot parking lot. The need for Site-Specific Sub Committees to deal with each troubled location was clearly defined by Chris Reilly, whose thoughts are contained below. It was especially wonderful to meet several people who recently expressed constructive comments on the Longwood Community News Group Facebook page. Ron Leathers, a professional outreach coordinator and veterans liaison, provided important insights for dealing with the homeless — which should always and only be done by those trained for this — and will continue to be a resource for our efforts to improve EVERYONE's quality of life along the MCR corridor.

Barbara Ransome, Director of the Greater Port Jefferson Chamber of Commerce, spoke midway through our agenda. Having listened to many of the problems our group is confronting, she shared that Port Jeff is facing the same issues, too: a growing homeless population, aggressive panhandling, increased crime, prostitution and drug dealing. Barbara explained the roles of local chambers and broader coalitions of chambers. Her own chamber sponsors many amazing activities and is certainly an inspiration to all. Here in Longwood, we do have the Greater Gordon Heights Chamber of Commerce, which meets at the Mott House. There was once a larger Longwood Chamber, which is what some of us hope will be re-energized. But we'll need real interest and support from local businesses to do that. Barbara confirmed the greatest value of Chambers: speaking with a unified voice. When a successful Chamber says something, people tend to listen!

SCPD 6th Precinct Sgt. Chris DeMeo explained what the police can and cannot do regarding trespassing and panhandling. It is not illegal to panhandle, and the No Loitering laws have been stripped from the books. The police cannot intervene in matters without a complainant — a property owner — willing to file a complaint against trespassers. This is a two-step process requiring owners to ask the trespassers to leave, and then filing a complaint if they refuse or return. This makes knowing exactly WHO owns certain troubled properties and HOW to contact them so important. A MCRTF subcommittee will gather this data.

Councilwoman Kepert, who co-founded the MCRTF, spoke about recent surveys of the questionable folks lingering in the Coram Home Depot parking lot. Turns out only two people there are actually, physically homeless. Most already have some form of housing but it's substandard, unpleasant or unsafe. They choose to leave that housing during the day and congregate elsewhere. In addition, certain shelters and overnight programs require occupants to leave their premises during the daytime — but provide no alternative activities. Hence people roam and congregate elsewhere. We all know it is not illegal to be homeless or to walk around the neighborhood. And we know we cannot force people to partake of services if they do not want them. However, the push is still on for better, safer housing and programs that provide productivity for those who do participate in them at taxpayers' expense. The lack of supervision of some of these programs

and the proliferation of so-called sober homes is a source of civic and residential concern. Both Legislator Anker and Senator LaValle will be working with us on these and other issues.

Some great organizational thoughts from MCRTF Founding Member Chris Reilly:

- Determine exactly what State, County and local services are available (and how they are accessed) to the truly indigent. Work toward their full implementation specifically for the resident homeless in that shopping center.
- Determine the State, County, Town and SCPD legal boundaries (when do certain behaviors become a violation that legally can be addressed) for dealing with:
 - the 'residential' homeless in the center;
 - the panhandlers that frequent the center;
 - the drug transactions that take place in the center;
 - the solicitation for prostitution that takes place in the center;
 - the cleanliness of the storefronts and parking lot;
 - the use of the parking lot as an overnight parking lot for trailers, etc.
- If the state owns the property strip between the paved parking lot and the strip centers along MCR, how do we hold them responsible for maintaining the area in an acceptable physical condition?
- Determine the actual owners of the shopping centers and advise them on an ongoing basis that the community is vacating that center due to safety concerns and an overall feeling of being uncomfortable. This should be done by the local Civic, the Middle Country Road Task Force and via petitions.
- Visit each and every tenant and advise them of the problems the community is finding with the center and the actions that we will be taking; again, on an ongoing basis.

The efforts listed above must be approached concurrently with separate sub-groups doing the focused work on their assigned effort since all are long-term efforts that will take much persistence. We need a group to focus on assisting the homeless residing specifically in that shopping center. We need another group to focus on eliminating the panhandling in that shopping center. We need another group to go after the landlord/owner. Another group will focus on the tenants...and so on. The MCRTF will coordinate the efforts as needed and monitor the results, but the sub-groups will act independently.

June 2015 Update:

On June 26, MICA Officers Gail and Frank Bailey joined SC Legislator Rob Calarco, Councilwoman Connie Keperter and members of Legislator Sarah Anker's staff on a walk along the MCR Corridor. We started at Reliable Garden and Fence and walked westward to the Mott House. Along the way we visited many small business operators, spoke with them about their concerns and invited them to our next MCR Task Force meeting on Wednesday, July 29th at the Middle Island Fire Department. We have timed this meeting from 6-8pm so that small business owners in particular can attend.

Please join elected officials, law enforcement reps, local business owners, civic members and community leaders and stakeholders in a discussion about how we can work together to improve the Middle Country Road Corridor. It is our belief that by this joint effort — and not blaming any one group, official, department or party — we can improve things. We very much need a community business organization, such as a Longwood Chamber of Commerce, to address quality of life issues that impact local businesses. Gordon Heights has a successful chamber and we hope to draw on their experience. In addition, Barbara Ransom, the Chair of the Brookhaven Coalition of Chambers, will very likely be in attendance on July 29th to discuss the formation and the value of Chambers of Commerce. Representatives of the SC 6th Police Precinct will also be

with us, just as they have for our previous MCR Task Force meetings and our regular monthly civic meetings in Middle Island, Coram and Gordon Heights.

February 2015 Update:

Many thanks go to the 22 attendees at our February 25th MCR Task Force meeting held at the MIFD HQ. A good turnout for a good cause: ending many of the problems along our Main Street. Although the extreme winter weather has helped curb crime, it has also delayed installation of the new LED street lights along Middle Country Road from Rte. 112 to William Floyd Parkway. Also postponed was the planned “walk” of the corridor by elected officials and community leaders. Our hope is to visit business operators on Rte. 25, listen to their concerns and invite them to our next Task Force meeting, which we’d like to hold in the evening to allow more business people to attend. The Coram FD will host this meeting, with date and time to be determined. An important initiative will be the development of an inter-connected video surveillance system that can be viewed by affected business establishments and the SC Police whenever a problem occurs. According to 6th Precinct officials, high definition systems are in place in the villages of Port Jefferson, Huntington and Patchogue, thanks to a pooling of resources and the formation of a Business Improvement District in each area. These systems make apprehension of criminals far easier and greatly reduce occurrences while improving safety. Some good news announced by Councilwoman Keperat at our meeting and confirmed by Supervisor Romaine the following week: the long abandoned and graffiti-covered old Island Squire restaurant is slated for demolition later this year.

November 2014 Update:

TOB Street Lighting Director Bruce Schroeder informed us that work is scheduled to begin on the broken lights along MCR the week of November 24th. In an email to the 4th Council District Office, Bruce explained, “We are not just fixing the lights but replacing them with the new LED energy efficient light fixtures. This is why it is taking a little longer than normal.” This is great news which MICA thanks Bruce for!

October 2014 Update:

The Town of Brookhaven cleaned out the mattresses, debris and litter left over from a mini-tent city on the parcel east of the Mott House. With trees losing their leaves, this spot will be easier to monitor in the coming months. At various Meet-the-Candidates nights, current NY state officials and office seekers were advised of the chronic problems afflicting the MCR corridor and each promised to help.

The SCPD 6th Precinct stepped up enforcement of many quality of life violations, especially prostitution and drug peddling. MICA and Coram Civic presidents Gail Lynch-Bailey and Erma Gluck attended the precinct’s community meeting for updates on crime and arrest statistics, and COPE officers began attending our local monthly civic meetings as well, giving attendees the opportunity to speak confidentially with officers should the need arise.

Thanks to the wonderful invitation of Gordon Heights Civic President James Freeman, we also attended the GH Clerical Council meeting on October 24th; this forum covered a wide range of problems and solutions for all of our hamlets and featured many public officials from the Congressional level to the town level.

MICA completed an inventory of non-functioning street lights and broken fixtures along MCR, starting just east of the Coram Stop & Shop center out to Wading River Hollow Road. A total of 35 lights were out! These locations were forwarded to the Town of Brookhaven, which is responsible for maintaining the lights even though RT 25 is a NYS road.

Two huge new graffiti tags appeared in Middle Island (deliberately not pictured here so as to deny the vandals' desires for further recognition): one on the old Island Squire restaurant and the other on the residential fence just east of the King Kullen shopping center. These were photographed and forwarded to the Town of Brookhaven, whose law investigators will contact the property owners and advise them of their need to paint over the messes— again!

September 2014 Update:

Many thanks to all the invitees who attended our September 29th initial MCR Task Force meeting. Representatives from the SCPD's 6th precinct were on hand to listen and respond to concerns from members of the Coram, Middle Island, Gordon Heights and Ridge Civic Associations, the Longwood CSD BOE & PTA Council, MIFD and local merchants. TOB Councilwomen Jane Bonner and Connie Kepert, SC Legislators Rob Calarco, Sarah Anker, Kate Browning's assistant, and NYS Senator Ken "Red Cap" LaValle were also present.

As with all first meetings of this type, a good deal of "venting" occurred, but so did some emerging priorities and steps to be taken. Our concerns for the safety of our firefighters and ambulance crews remain as they continue to respond to the epidemic of drug addiction affecting far too many here and elsewhere.

Police will focus on quality of life issues, especially prostitution and drug dealing, and ask that observations and concerns be funneled to them via civic heads and community leaders (naturally, everyone is always welcome and urged to contact the police any time they witness something.) If you want someone to report something for you, you can email Gailybaily@aol.com

The problematic property between the Mott House and the small strip mall, thought by some to be owned wholly by the TOB, is actually split between the town and a commercial owner. So we'll be working on a joint clean-up and possible partial fencing of that parcel.

Kudos to James Freeman who already has some excellent and successful models at work in the Gordon Heights community. Instituting a series of Neighborhood Watch programs for Longwood communities will begin soon. This will require far more volunteers than were present yesterday. And that's where many from our civic group can best lend a hand. Future meeting dates will be posted here.

A Community Walk of MCR is also planned, wherein we will inventory problem parcels, address business owners' concerns, seek out potential areas for beautification, and identify places most in need of traffic calming measures to promote pedestrian safety and driver security. The Coram Civic will be undertaking a similar outreach in the Stop & Shop Shopping Center, too.

Lots to do! Thank you for your continued interest and support.