During these particularly challenging times, your DHCA Public Safety Committee has continued to collect, analyze and report on crimes in our community each month. Despite floods of neighbors walking, running and biking along our tree-lined streets, March witnessed an increase over 2019 but as one might expect, things have tapered significantly in the first two weeks of April.

Like many of you, we are not satisfied with the level of crime that occurs across our neighborhood. However, it is worth noting that within the greater context of Dekalb County or the City of Atlanta, Druid Hills remains a safe place to live. Through our Neighborhood Watch crime reports distributed each month, we track both the quantity and severity of crimes and can feel some comfort knowing that the vast majority (80%) of our crimes are auto related. Our all-volunteer team spends countless hours tabulating the reports each month and then validating the data and descriptions with our local police departments. For Ellen Meshnick in particular, we all should be thankful!

So, while we are a safe neighborhood in relative terms, we believe we can do better, and we aim to have significant rate reductions in all types of crimes in 2020. To that end, we have focused on ensuring that we have accurate data and then analyzing the data so we can fairly quantify the problem and identify insights we can use to help solve that problem. With that data, we hope to answer questions about what solutions have an impact on those crimes that occur most frequently. Importantly, we also want to ensure all residents are aware of the expiration of the grant used to cover the first two years of our FLOCK camera system.

To help quantify the problem, our unofficial data analysis team (thanks to Gary Tapp and James Hill) has gone to great lengths to examine monthly crime data over the past 2+ years. This analysis has helped us identify the primary hot spots for our auto-related crimes - commercial and multi-family residential lots. Over the past two years, nearly 40% of all DH crime occurred in these commercial areas or apartment complexes. In March, that number jumped to 60%. Over the last few months, we have been working with the Dekalb Police and the Emory Village Alliance on several opportunities and our next area of focus will include proactive outreach to the management of several larger apartment complexes to ensure that awareness, signage, lighting and video surveillance are adequate.

**Neighborhood Watch**

Armed with a greater understanding of the size and scope of the problem, our Neighborhood Watch program has helped disseminate crime data and insights to the community each month. Critically, you have to actually know your neighbors before you can recognize unusual behavior on your street and our Neighborhood Watch street captains have brought neighbors together via this common purpose. Knowing your neighbors well is a great crime deterrent and you might make some new friends along the way! We continue to look for Watch Captains. If you’d like to be a captain or aren’t receiving the crime report each month, please reach out Ellen at [neighborhoodwatch@druidhills.org](mailto:neighborhoodwatch@druidhills.org) . And remember to keep your cars clean of valuables that are inviting to thieves!

**The Druid Hills Patrol**

On the deterrent side, our neighborhood has implemented several programs focused reduction in crime. The Druid Hills Patrol (DHP) serves as a private security patrol using off-duty police officers that augment our local police presence. The DHP currently averages 50-70 patrol hours each week covering our neighborhood end-to-end. Officers are directly connected to local police departments and are ever watchful for unusual behavior. The DHP also conducts vacation checks on members’ homes (823 checks in Q1 alone) and can be a visible deterrent. The DHP recently responded to a member’s call about a suspicious van and discovered that the vehicle in question was stolen and had been involved in a local auto break in.

While we all may benefit from the distinctive DHP vehicle as it meanders up and down our streets, currently only 20% of the households are members. The DHP encourages more of you to join so they can provide more patrol hours each week. You can join the DHP for $395 per year by visiting druidhillspatrol.org.

**FLOCK Safety**

We have also been using technology to fight crime. The DHCA has been piloting the use of the FLOCK camera system over the past 18 months (with Justin Critz leading our engagement). This motion-activated, solar powered technology works by taking pictures of the license plates of all cars that pass the cameras. The footage is stored for 30 days and can be accessed at the request of a victim of a crime who believes an automobile was involved These images can also be used by the police in solving crimes (as was done on Cornell Rd when the FLOCK camera resulted in an arrest warrant related to a residential break-in). In addition to deterring crime on our streets, FLOCK cameras can also ping the authorities if an Amber alert or a stolen vehicle passes one of the cameras.

Beginning in late 2017, the DHCA contracted with FLOCK to run a 2-year trial of their system, using money that had been given to the Association by outgoing Atlanta City Councilman, Alex Wan. This trial period provided for the installation and monitoring of eleven FLOCK cameras on Fairview, Lullwater, Oakdale and Springdale. Since then, several individual streets (or segments of streets) including Oxford, Cornell and Cameron Court have contracted directly with FLOCK to have cameras installed on their streets.

Moving forward, we are approaching a crossroads regarding our FLOCK cameras as the two-year license ends in February of 2021. As our contract expires, those living on Fairview, Lullwater, Oakdale and Springdale will need to pick up the contracting and payment process directly with FLOCK in order to maintain coverage. The current rate is $2,000 per camera or $4,000 to cover both ends of a street segment per year with organizers of private FLOCK contracts on Cornell and Oxford telling us that the annual cost per resident varies from $88-$120 per year.

To help you make your street by street decision, we have analyzed the available data sources to see if we can determine how well the FLOCK cameras “work”. In the absence of any objective studies, we have looked at our own crime data to evaluate efficacy based on what we perceive to be the most pressing, crime-based issues facing our community. As I stated earlier, 80% of crime in Druid Hills is auto related and a great many of those occur in apartment complexes and commercial lots where video surveillance in those lots may be lacking.

Crimes on Druid Hills streets that have installed FLOCK cameras have varied widely in their results. Three streets saw modest declines after camera installation, while two streets saw modest increases. We did see a larger decline on Springdale; however, that decline coincided with direct mailings from this committee to encourage residents on Springdale to remove belongings from their cars. Taken as a group, the streets with FLOCK cameras have seen a reduction of about 1/10 of a crime per month from pre-FLOCK levels but I think it’s important to note that these results are not statistically significant but merely directional. This would suggest that the presence of FLOCK cameras on a street may prevent 1.2 crimes per year on that street. Choose the amount of damage done per auto break in and multiply by 1.2 will give you an estimated cost avoidance to each participating street per year (e.g., at $1,000 per crime, a street could save $1,200). In this scenario, you spend $4,000 per year to save $1,200 with the additional softer benefits noted above.

**Cost Benefit Analysis**

The on-going cost of Neighborhood Watch is the time invested by our volunteers who aggregate and validate and our Watch Captains who disseminate that information each month. Membership in the Druid Hills Patrol is $395 per year and residents on streets with FLOCK cameras could pay $120 per year. Additionally, many of us invest in alarms, home video surveillance systems and other subscriptions.

The number of crimes avoided due to the Druid Hills Patrol is difficult to prove but many residents do see value in having off-duty police officers on streets each day. Others feel comfort in seeing FLOCK cameras on each end of their street. Is FLOCK camera coverage worth more or less than membership in the DHP?

In a world of limited resources, I suggest we look at investing those resources in the fewest solutions that have the greatest impact. Each of these solutions likely has some benefit – some we can attempt to prove while others are less obvious. We have tried to use available data to demonstrate the impact of FLOCK cameras to the crimes we experience. The data so far is inconclusive and suggests there may be some benefit, but the benefit in dollar terms is likely less than what the cameras cost.

Your Public Safety committee cannot tell you how to spend your money, but hopefully our monthly reporting and this analysis can help you be more aware of the crime that occurs, the potential value of FLOCK in deterring some of those crimes as well as the need going forward for volunteers to manage any FLOCK contracts. Each street will need to take accountability for managing their FLOCK contract and the collection of monies from the residents. We’re happy to direct you to neighbors on streets like Oxford, Cornell and Cameron Court who have organized their neighbors, collected monies and engaged directly with FLOCK for coverage. And of course, we will continue to work tirelessly to make Druid Hills as safe as it can be.