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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 17, 2017

City, MTSU taking significant measures to combat campus-area crime

Saturation patrols, officer overtime, apartment complex accountability among measures

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. — Privately owned apartments near the Middle Tennessee State University campus will be the focus of a strategy announced Wednesday by Murfreesboro leaders that will step up patrols and increase landlord accountability.

City Manager Rob Lyons said Murfreesboro Mayor Shane McFarland and other City officials met Tuesday “with the apartment complex managers with the highest call for police service to advise them that the situation must improve and they need to play a significant role.”

Lyons shared several options the City would like complex owners to implement. “One successful technique is implementing a lease provision that requires immediate termination of a lease if a resident or guest at an apartment complex is arrested on a drug or violence-related offense.” Another tactic, Lyons added, would be aggressive and timely towing of vehicles without proper resident or visitor identification.

The increased saturation patrols and additional investigations comes amidst a disturbing uptick in gun-related incidents in off-campus complexes since mid-2016. Many lower-cost units in those complexes are rented by the bedroom, not as a full apartment, and are available to students and non-students.

The City also revealed it will create an inspection and awareness program. Scheduled to be launched this summer, the program will give potential renters and citizens more tools to identify multi-family properties that are actively working with Murfreesboro Police to deter criminal activity.

Murfreesboro and MTSU police officers will be made available to inspect security measures and practices in place at apartment complexes. Facilities that meet certain such criteria and implement the city’s recommended best practices for safety would be eligible for a special emblem that could be displayed to prospective tenants.

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The City will maintain an online site of complexes who earn recognition in this program. The site will include other information, including crime data and links to digital maps, now already available through CrimeMapping.com, that show reported incidents by area.

“Maintaining a safe, family-friendly community is perhaps the major asset of our growing community,” said McFarland. “I want to assure our residents, parents and students of MTSU that we are working diligently to address the problem so Murfreesboro citizens and visitors feel safe and the community’s positive image is protected.”

Meanwhile, MTSU administration said it will remind and reinforce to students that the Code of Conduct can apply to off-campus behavior. Local law enforcement will have the option to refer cases to the university’s Office of Judicial Affairs and Mediation Services for review. The University will also share the city’s proposed apartment crime data website as part of its new student orientation and will encourage newcomers to look for the soon-to-be developed city safety emblem before deciding on an off-campus residence.

“Our university appreciates and shares the priority placed by Mayor McFarland and his administration for the safety of our entire community,” said MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee. “We have worked closely with the city on this issue, as well as this recent strategy, and we will continue to partner with them in implementation.”

Following the May 4 shooting death at Student Quarters Apartments on Greenland Drive, Murfreesboro Police has saturated off-campus apartment sites with additional patrols on overtime shifts. As a result, about 200 charges were issued for offenses that include intoxication, assault and gunfire.

MPD’s Violent Crime Unit identified a suspect in the homicide of Jessie Buford, 23, and an arrest was made with the Tennessee Highway Patrol on May 6 and he was charged with first-degree murder.

MPD Chief Karl Durr said his department is leveraging resources from state and federal agencies to intelligence gathering by the city’s Vice, Narcotics, Gang and Violent Crime units. Durr said those efforts, combined with ongoing work, will help the City demand greater responsibility and engagement by apartment complex owners and managers.

“We are working tirelessly to apprehend those who bring violence and gunfire to our City,” said MPD Chief Karl Durr. “The collaborative enforcement includes working with our partners at MTSU Police, TBI, FBI, ATF, DEA and both the District and U.S. Attorney’s Office to share information pertinent to effectively combating crime.”

Lyons said the City has already taken several steps to address the problem through ordinance. In November 2016, the City Council adopted an unruly gathering ordinance to combat shootings and the high level of service calls as apartment complexes.

Under the ordinance (16-05-56), amended City Code, Chapter 21, by creating Section 21-6), the City can levy civil penalties of \$250 for a first violation, and \$500 for a second and

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subsequent violation, for “a party or gathering where alcohol is served or consumed,” and “where there is a sufficient number of attendees that an officer reasonably believes the host cannot directly control behavior of attendees.”

If a minor is cited, the owner of the property is subject to the penalty. The appeals process also provides the City Manager with administrative authority to consider whether the property owner has taken “measures to prevent or discourage” unruly gatherings, including “hiring on-site security” and “imposing strict behavior standards in the rental agreement.”

The University recommends on-campus housing as the best residential option for students, especially for freshmen, said MTSU Police Chief Buddy Peaster. The latest campus crime statistics from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) show drops in most major categories.

However, when considering an off-campus housing option, the University urges students and parents to see and inspect such units in person before making a commitment, he said.

“Be advised that some complexes put forward marketing that use works like ‘campus’ and ‘university,’ but the University does not have any role in the operation or management of those off-campus facilities,” he said.

MTSU’s Police Department employs 44 full-time police officers, five full-time dispatchers and about 20 part-time student workers. It operates around the clock to protect the 500-plus-acre University campus.

For City News online, visit www.Murfreesborotn.gov.

Photos attached: Murfreesboro City Leaders met with Apartment Managers at City Hall, Tuesday, May 16.

1. *Mayor Shane McFarland, center, addressed apartment complex managers. City Manager Rob Lyons, left, and Assistant MPD Chief Eric Cook, right, listen.jpg*

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