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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 1, 2017

City, MTSU meet with apartment complexes to map effective safety strategy

Complexes cooperating to forge partnership to combat crime

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. — City of Murfreesboro and Middle Tennessee State University officials met Thursday at City Hall with owners and managers of privately-owned apartment complexes to continue developing effective strategies to combat crime in areas surrounding campus.

Mayor Shane McFarland, MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee, City Manager Rob Lyons, MTSU Police Chief Buddy Peaster, Murfreesboro Police Deputy Chief Mike Bowen, Assistant Chief Eric Cook and Vice Mayor Madelyn Scales Harris were among City and university leaders who met with more than a dozen apartment complex managers.

“We are pleased with the level of cooperation and support from the apartment complex managers and owners,” said City Manager Rob Lyons. “The City, MTSU, and privately-owned apartment complexes are united in implementing strategies, sharing data and increasing shared police-apartment approaches to ensure the safety of residents and students who live in off-campus housing.”

McPhee agreed, saying the university appreciated the commitment voiced by the complex managers and owners to work with the City and MTSU to “ensure and enhance the safety of students and residents.”

Both McPhee and McFarland noted that several complexes have recently invested significant dollars for third-party security and established other measures designed to ensure resident safety.

Thursday’s meeting is the second in two weeks with apartment complex managers. City officials, including Lyons, McFarland and MPD Chief Karl Durr, met May 16 with the managers with the highest call for police service to engage the complexes in playing a significant role in improving security and reducing crime.

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Immediately prior to today's meeting with complex managers and owners, representatives of the City and MTSU met to discuss a future Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that could give MTSU Police broader enforcement authority outside the university campus. The City and MTSU police departments will work with legal representatives to craft the MOU by July.

The proposal was put forward last week to a group assembled by McPhee and McFarland to develop strategies to combat crime in off-campus apartments. Murfreesboro Police have saturated off-campus apartment sites with additional patrols on overtime shifts. Murfreesboro Police have made arrests in all three of the recent homicides at area complexes.

Other strategies discussed include the adoption of an apartment credentialing or certification program to inform the public about apartment complexes that utilize "best practices" such as third-party security, gated access, monitored parking and visitor registration. The City and MTSU are also developing a public awareness crime data webpage this summer to share law enforcement data on calls for service at apartment complexes so potential renters, students and parents can make well-informed decisions before choosing multi-family rental property.

Facilities that meet certain such criteria annually and implement the city's recommended best practices for safety would be eligible for a special emblem that could be displayed to prospective tenants. 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.

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.

The university recommends on-campus housing as the best residential option for students, especially for freshmen. 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.

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

Photo attached: *MTSU President Dr. Sidney A. McPhee, left, listens as Murfreesboro Mayor Shane McFarland address area apartment complex managers during a meeting Thursday at City Hall to discuss strategies to improve safety at those complexes. (MTSU Photo by Andrew Oppmann)*

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