

Letter to the Mayor, re: Prostitution 10/16/02

October 16, 2002

The Honorable Martin O'Malley
Mayor
City of Baltimore
City Hall Room 250
100 N. Holliday St.
Baltimore, MD 21202

Edward T. Norris
Commissioner
Baltimore City Police Department
601 E. Fayette St.
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dr. Peter Beilenson
Commissioner
Baltimore City Health Department
210 Guilford Ave., 3rd Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202

Patricia C. Jessamy
State's Attorney
Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City
Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. Courthouse
Room 208
110 N. Calvert St.
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Mayor O'Malley, Commissioner Norris, Dr. Beilenson and Ms. Jessamy,

We write to you on behalf of the residents of Bolton Hill who are angry and frustrated at the continuing prostitution problem on Eutaw Place in northern Bolton Hill. Although this part of Bolton Hill is currently undergoing a long awaited renaissance, including an influx of new homeowners in the new Spicer's Run community and in the many older houses that residents are rehabilitating, that rejuvenation of the neighborhood is threatened by the continuing presence of a great many prostitutes who use Eutaw Place as the primary locus to ply their trade. This part of Bolton Hill borders on two other neighborhoods that have their own share of urban problems – Madison Park to the West, and Reservoir Hill to the North. The presence of stable homeowners on Eutaw Place will help those neighborhoods achieve their own goals, in addition to helping the larger Bolton Hill community. The existence of such a persistent prostitution problem threatens to undermine these goals as residents become more and more frustrated and disheartened.

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The presence of prostitution harms our community in many ways. First, and perhaps most importantly, it is an unhealthy environment in which to raise children. Parents should not have to explain to young children why women are parading up down their block, often scantily clad, soliciting cars in the street. Indeed, we believe that some homeowners have moved out of this neighborhood in order to avoid exposing their children to such activity. The presence of prostitutes soliciting on the corner encourages, and makes it easier for drug dealers to use the same corners to ply their far more dangerous trade. Many of the prostitutes are alcoholics or drug users, and often work the streets while drunk or high. Many contribute to the continuing problems with drug dealing in nearby communities. The prostitutes use the alleys behind Eutaw Place to “service” their customers, as well as the parking area at the end of the 1800 block of Bolton Street, the stretch of Robert Street along Sumpter Park in front of Spicer’s Run, and the alley behind the 1700 block of Park Place. As a result, our sidewalks and alleys are filled with crack vials, and community members suffer through finding used condoms in front of and behind our houses, and in nearby Sumpter Park. We are embarrassed when the prostitutes solicit in front of our friends, families, and business clients, and even more so when those persons are the targets of the solicitation. Some prostitutes have been so brazen as to literally climb into our cars when we paused at a corner or alley. Several community members regularly attempt to chase the prostitutes off their block. Many who have done so have been threatened with retaliation, and some have been assaulted, leading others in the community to feel intimidated. Finally, the sight of prostitutes constantly parading up and down the street day and night, quite often literally IN the street, contributes to a general sense of disorder which is not conducive to a stable and healthy community. No community in Baltimore should have to put up with this.

Although the problems described above have persisted for a great many years, the Bolton Hill community has not stood idly by. A check of 911 and 311 records will reveal that Eutaw Place residents regularly call police to report prostitution activity, some on an almost daily basis, and sometimes on multiple occasions in a single day. In addition, many residents, on an individual basis, have repeatedly met with, spoken to, and written to police and elected officials to seek effective assistance in dealing with this problem, including in some cases reporting houses to be staked out for hosting prostitution activity. As noted above, many residents actively confront the prostitutes, and ask them move on, sometimes facing hostility and threats as a result. The prostitution problem is also a regular topic of discussion at MRIA meetings, and a source of significant concern. Indeed, for the last six months the issue has come up at every MRIA meeting. Working with Midtown and MRIA, Eutaw Place neighbors recently organized a well-attended neighborhood meeting devoted entirely to discussing this problem, and potential solutions. That meeting also led to a new weekly walkers patrol where a group of neighbors walk Eutaw Place on Tuesday evenings accompanied by a Midtown Safety Patrol staff member. At the suggestion of Sgt. Charles Hess of the Central District, residents have for some time been sending him the license plate numbers and descriptions of cars seen picking up prostitutes. Sgt. Hess then sends a letter to the registered owner of the car with the matching plate number informing them that they have been observed engaging in activity consistent with prostitution, and that this evidence can be used against them if they are ever arrested.

We are also aware that the police have devoted some attention to the problem, and are equally and painfully aware of the many competing and serious demands for police services. We

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periodically see police cars parked in the Eutaw Place median for fifteen minutes to an hour at a time. During this time the prostitutes avoid the corner where the police car is parked, but are often carrying on their trade two blocks up or down the street. While we are very grateful for the police presence, and while it can temporarily deter the activity in the immediate vicinity, this is hardly a long-term solution (please do not interpret this letter as a request that this tactic be abandoned). We are also aware that several police sting operations have been conducted, though we understand that those have generally involved female undercover officers, and have been aimed at arresting the prostitutes' customers. Finally, we are aware that the prostitutes themselves are occasionally arrested, though we understand that they are primarily arrested for loitering, which we understand generally is not and cannot be effectively prosecuted by the State's Attorney's Office. As a result, these arrests rarely lead to anything more than a few hours in jail for the prostitute.

In short, despite the past efforts of community members, police, and prosecutors, the strategies to date have not succeeded in eliminating this significant problem. We therefore request your presence at a community meeting tentatively scheduled for November 12, 2002 to discuss alternative ways of addressing this issue. We believe that it is critically important to get all of the major decision-makers in one room in order to come up with effective solutions: community members, police officials, prosecutors, and municipal officials. All have a role to play. The residents of Bolton Hill are fully prepared to work with the City, the police, and the prosecutors to address this problem, but we cannot be effective without your help.

At our recent neighborhood meeting on this topic, community members had several questions regarding past efforts at addressing this problem. We believe that having answers to these questions will help make our meeting and discussion more productive and informed, and hope that you will come to the meeting with the answers. Alternatively, if possible, we hope that you can provide the answers in advance so that they can be posted on the Bolton Hill web site (www.boltonhill.org) and distributed to the community prior to the meeting. The questions are as follows:

- How many 911 and 311 calls have police received regarding prostitutes on Eutaw Place in Bolton Hill, each month for the last 6 months, as well as for the intersecting blocks and the north end of Bolton and Park Streets?
- What is the temporal and geographic distribution of these calls? (This will help us understand when and where the problem is most concentrated, at least by this imperfect measure).
- How many people have been arrested for prostitution in the same time period, as opposed to loitering offenses?
- How many people have actually been prosecuted for prostitution in the same time period, and what is the typical or average sentence received for such cases?

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- How many vice officers are assigned to the Central District? How many undercover officers, other than those in the vice unit, are realistically available to handle prostitution related calls or operations?
- How many and what type of sting operations aimed at prostitution offenses have been mounted in the last six months in Bolton Hill (i.e., how many have been aimed at the prostitutes, and how many at the Johns)? How many arrests resulted from those operations, for what offenses, and with what results in terms of prosecution and conviction?
- What resources are available or could be made available to provide more outreach and case management services to women involved in prostitution to aid them with their addictions and mental health concerns? What resources are available or could be made available to implement a “John School” as a means of educating Johns about the exploitation and risks involved in prostitution?

Our community meeting also led to several suggestions as to ways in which the City, police, and prosecutors could be helpful in addressing the prostitution problem, and we hope that you will come to the meeting prepared to discuss whether and when these solutions can be implemented. If they cannot be implemented in a timely manner, we would like to understand why not, and what, if anything can be done to remove the obstacles to implementation. The following strategies were proposed:

- Make arrests for prostitution, not loitering. We understand that this will require plainclothes police in unmarked cars.
- Prosecutors should seek court orders requiring convicted prostitutes, as a condition of probation or parole, to refrain from being present, for any reason, on the specified blocks of Eutaw Place where solicitation most often occurs (we believe this is the 1600 – 2000 blocks). Prosecutors should also seek lengthy terms of probation or parole so that these orders will be in effect for a meaningful period of time. With such conditions, these sentences might make for a useful alternative to incarceration. Prostitutes caught on Eutaw Place while subject to one of these orders could be immediately arrested for violating their probation or parole conditions, without the need to catch them in the act of prostitution. Prosecutors could distribute photographs of the prostitutes subject to such orders, along with the terms and effective dates of the orders, to patrol officers who work in Bolton Hill, to further enhance enforcement efforts.
- Use regular foot patrols of uniformed officers on Eutaw Place to deter prostitution. Such patrols could also be combined with efforts to control the open air drug market on the 1700 block of Madison Street, and could be based out of the new police break room donated by neighbors on Madison Street, which has received considerable support from the Bolton Hill community.

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- Implement changes to the traffic pattern on Eutaw Place to deter prostitution. For example, many “customers” pull over westbound onto Presstman, Roberts, or Laurens, just off of Eutaw Pl., to pick up prostitutes. These streets could be made one way eastbound to deter such behavior. Some neighbors have noticed a decrease in prostitution on Mondays, when parking is prohibited on the southbound side of Eutaw Place for street cleaning. If police statistics bear out this observation, consider whether parking should be permanently banned on that side of the street (further community discussion of this tactic would be required, and steps would need to be taken to further slow traffic on Eutaw Place, which is already far too fast even with parked cars).
- Consider eliminating some of the bus stops along the southbound side of Eutaw Place. The prostitutes often use them as a convenient place to “hide” as they can claim that they are waiting for a bus. The prostitutes most often loiter at the bus stop at Presstman and the stop at Laurens.

The community meeting to discuss the above questions and proposals has been tentatively scheduled for **Tuesday, November 12 at 7:00 p.m.** at Strawbridge United Methodist Church, 1624 Park Ave. Please let Michele Pankow of the Midtown Community Benefits District know as soon as possible whether you will be able to attend. Michele can be reached at 410-528-1512. We realize that each of you is extremely busy, with many competing demands for your time. We also believe that this meeting cannot be effective or meaningful unless officials with decision-making authority are present. If you cannot attend on that day, please let us know whether alternative days would be possible. If you are unable to attend at all, we hope that you will send an appropriate designee who has the authority to make and discuss the discretionary decisions regarding policy and resource allocation necessary to make this a productive meeting.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our concerns, and address our questions. We look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Dan Gilbert
Mount Royal Improvement Association, President

David Rocah
Mount Royal Improvement Association, Crime Committee Chair

Col. Stanley Smith
Midtown Community Benefits District, Chairman

cc: Councilman Keiffer J. Mitchell, Jr.