

Museum Area Municipal Association (MAMA)
Harris County Constable Patrol
Questions and Answers

Why do we need a security patrol?

- Over last several months, numerous burglaries and armed robberies in our neighborhood and surrounding areas
 - 2014 – approximately 30 MAMA incidents
 - 2015 – approximately 45 MAMA incidents
- Nearby neighborhoods have recently implemented security patrols, which presents risk of crime being pushed to unpatrolled areas like ours
- HPD lacks the resources to patrol and *prevent* crime from occurring in Houston's neighborhood

What alternatives did you consider?

We received proposals from a private security firm, the Montrose Management District and the Harris County Constable. We also investigated the possibility of being part of the adjacent Boulevard Oaks/Southampton patrol as well as hiring off-duty police officers to provide security.

Why do you think the Harris County Constable is the best available alternative?

- Significant experience in inner city neighborhoods
- Ability to leverage Constable resources in nearby neighborhoods
- Constables are certified peace officers (unlike private security personnel), and they have the right to ticket, arrest and, if necessary, use force to deter and stop crime
- Each neighborhood that has implemented a Constable Patrol has seen a significant decrease in crime

What is the patrol area?

Main Street on the east, Bissonnet Street on the south, Graustark Street on the west and U.S. Highway 59 on the north.

How many residents are within the boundary lines of this proposed patrol area?

Approximately 375 HCAD properties, which include numerous apartment buildings, nonprofits and commercial properties.

What resources would the Constable provide to our area?

Besides providing services to subscribers (see below), the Constable would provide a significant security presence in our neighborhood, which would be managed by the Museum Area Municipal Association Board of Directors. Our officer will not be just patrolling. There may be periods when the officer sits in one spot to address a specific situation. Also we may have the officer work on a specific problem e.g. in Mandell Winlow Place, their officer conducted a stakeout to catch individuals who check car doors early mornings for opportunities to steal. The officer can also ticket speeding vehicles and check license plates of suspicious vehicles. In other neighborhoods, the assigned officer has become part of the community and not just a “guard”.

Will this be a 24/7 security patrol?

No. It will be a typical Harris County Constable 40 hour/week contract (with the right of Harris County to pull our officer for 8 of those hours for sharing with other nearby neighborhoods). The Constable’s office has represented that our officer will be on site for at least 90% of the 40 hours – and importantly we will have access to officers in nearby neighborhoods when our officer is not on site. Other neighborhoods using the Constable include Mandell Winlow Place, Cherryhurst, Vermont Commons, Hyde Park, Avalon, and Royden Oaks (among the 20 neighborhoods with Precinct 1 contracts).

Did you investigate more extensive coverage?

Yes but anything more than 40 hours/week would be cost prohibitive for our neighborhood. A 24-hour service by one officer would be more than \$250,000 per year under any of the options we considered. Our contract with the Constable would be approximately \$80,000 per year and it is going to be a challenge to raise the funds.

We do feel that once our program is established, there would be opportunities with nearby neighborhoods to leverage resources - e.g. combine our service area (which is relatively small) with another neighborhood and hire an additional constable for more hourly coverage.

How would patrol hours be set?

Constable patrol hours would be set by a neighborhood security committee and would vary based on crime statistics.

What services would I receive as a subscriber?

- First-responder for your alarm system, so no going through HPD;
- Direct contact phone number for the Constable office;
- Generally faster response time to calls;
- Vacation watch patrol service;
- Home security inspections to find out vulnerabilities and improvements;
- Special programs, including classes and meetings, so that you can be proactive in enhancing your security and safety;
- Yard flag signifying that the home is patrolled by the Constable

How soon will the response time be?

If our officer is on duty in the neighborhood, the response time will be 3-5 minutes. If not, the response time will be longer but the Constable's goal is to deal with incoming calls quickly and not have to roll any calls to the Houston Police Department. If our officer is not on duty, the Constable dispatch will borrow from a nearby neighborhood or use a floating officer who covers south Houston.

Will we have officers cell phone number for emergency? Not officially. All calls need to go through Constable dispatch so that they can be recorded and tracked. Some officers provide their neighborhood with a cell number in their discretion.

If police are called (by citizen or by alarm company), will patrol hear call and be able to respond sooner than police?

If 911 is called, police will notify Constable dispatch so that dispatch knows something is going on in one of their neighborhoods but city police, fire, ambulance are legally required to respond as well. But unless it is ambulance or fire, Constable dispatch should be called (although you are free to call the police too). Security subscribers should have their alarm system set to notify the constable dispatch. If our officer is in the neighborhood, he or she will respond. Otherwise, the nearest officer would respond.

What are the different subscription levels?

- Underwriter - \$2,400/year
 - To extent underwriter funds not required to meet first year costs, up to \$1,300 would be refunded
- Sponsor – \$1,200/year
- General - \$500/year

The Constable has advised us that we should not expect much more than 30% participation in the program from our neighborhood (although we are hoping for more!). Given this reality, we were faced with how to raise the \$80,000 needed to fund and administer the program. Some neighborhoods do fundraising events while others offer different subscription levels and appeal to residents to pay as much as they can to fund

the effort. We have opted for the latter option and have already received underwriting and other commitments that have given us a good start to funding the program. But we still need much more neighborhood participation to raise the required funds. All subscription levels will receive the same level of individual service.

Can I pay in more than one installment?

For the first year, we are asking subscribers to pay their subscription fee in a lump sum although we will accept subscriptions payable in two installments (one now and the second by August 31, 2016). For future years, we will consider allowing payments in quarterly installments.