

WALK TALL AND CARRY A BIG STICK

‘Walk tall and carry a big stick’ Vs. ‘Wait till your father gets home’. Both correct unsavory behavior but differ somewhat in their emphasis of prevention vs. the promise of punishment.

Fairfield has a new “party ordinance”. Prior city code states that hosts are liable to reimburse the city for costs incurred if the police have to come out more than once in 24 hours. The new ordinance extends that time to 48 hours and adds that any response by the police to a gathering in which there has been violence or the threat of violence can now result in the city seeking reimbursement for all associated costs. Hazzah!

Such ordinances are smart. Certainly, nuisance and noise calls occupy valuable officer time, can escalate into serious problems and incur costs. However, the real power of noise and party ordinances may lie in crime prevention as well as educational tools teaching civic responsibility.

After personally researching and communicating with over thirty authors and enforcers of other municipalities ordinances, a clear consensus regarding the potential power of such ordinances was revealed. In non university and college towns, there is scarce evidence that supports the notion that the mere existence of such reimbursement ordinances effectively diminishes frequency, severity or costs of total crimes in a community. Also, the horse is already out of the barn when violence (or other crimes) occurs in such settings. Fines and reimbursement of city costs are valid and important, but after the fact.

As echoed consistently by the capable and committed crime fighting Fairfield city council, with John Mraz and Frank Kardos at the vanguard, prevention is one of the three pivotal legs supporting a safer community. Patrol and punishment are the others. The boys and girls club initiative is just such an example of smart pre emptive actions.

So can we squeeze more juice out of this ordinance? I think so. Remove the time limit. Change the ordinance so that the city can bill fair dollar for reimbursement of costs for any visit after documented first warning and citation given to the responsible parties. Why set a time limit of when daddy gets home? Daddy is in the house and in your face if after fair, documented and clear warning, he has to tell you a second time to straighten up and fly right; period.

Second, levy substantial tiered fines for any visit (discretionary of course).

Third, responding officers should have the authority to turn off electrical power at such gatherings, (rare medical exceptions withstanding). Some communities use this as standard operating procedures. It appears promising.

Tap the ordinances’ power through public education and advice readily and repeatedly available to all as to how to hold a law abiding event or gathering, how to know you need help, how to get help and

finally exactly what the police can and will do. This will garner support in the community and may modify behavior.

Specifically, collaborate creatively and publicly with the media. Direct the public to city web sites and have easy to follow links to clearly stated frequently asked questions (FAQ's) regarding the ordinance everywhere. Put links on school and school district web sites, use the PTA and have at least one mass mailer to all residences. Ask churches to put the FAQ's in church bulletins. Ask Brenden and Edwards's theatre to project the FAQ's and ask local grocery chains to hand out flyers at high risk times. A copy of the ordinance and a sample of points for FAQ's to address are available at www.tonydeaf.org.

After a year, invite all eyes on Fairfield; a community of education, civic partnership and crime prevention- a community of zero tolerance for civil disobedience.

Share the results of this ordinance in every relevant public forum and credit the people of Fairfield. Walk tall and wisely parade that big stick.

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