



# City of Cambridge Police Department

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**Robert C. Haas**  
*Police Commissioner*

**Richard C. Rossi**  
*City Manager*

To: Richard C. Rossi, City Manager  
From: Robert C. Haas, Police Commissioner  
Date: Tuesday, July 22, 2014  
Ref.: City Council Order #6, dated June 9, 2014

Dear Sir:

As requested, I am responding to City Council Order #6, dated June 9, 2014, requesting the City Manager to ascertain the measures being taken to improve public safety and directly address the inappropriate solicitations, public drinking, loitering, fights, drug use and drug transactions happening in Central Square.

This report will provide some context with respect to the aforementioned issues and also identify the steps that the police department has been taking in terms of responding to these issues. It will also discuss the legal restraints that officers face with respect to some of the quality of life issues identified in the City Council Order, and why some of the activities mentioned in the city Council Order are unenforceable.

The police department is keenly aware that much of the activity described in the City Council Order is linked to seasonal patterns. In fact, we typically see an increase of approximately 50%-75% in both crime activity and what could be characterized as nuisance calls. This elevated pattern of activity generally runs through the warmer weather months into the winter months, when we see the activity dramatically decline. Over the last 10 years, total reported crime in Central Square has declined by about 15%. Although there has been a steady overall drop in reported crime, when we look closer at specific types classified as lower-level street crime and disorder, it also reveals a slight increase over a three year period. In part, that increase is directly attributable to additional police resources that have been assigned to Central Square over the last two years and going into this season.

There are four types of low-level street crimes and forms of disorder accounting for 70% of the total calls for service during the summer months in recent years. These activities are described

as: (1) Unwanted Persons; (2) Intoxicated/Homeless Individuals; (3) Disturbances (including disorderly conduct, fights, arguments, etc.); and (4) Investigations of Suspicious Persons/Activities. Over the last few years (2011 – 2014), the police department has witnessed a consistent trend in what we classify as “quality-of-life” calls that typically rank the highest in Central Square during the warmer months. These call types made up the most frequent calls in Central Square every year, each representing anywhere from 10%-24% of the total calls for service. Most of these calls are frequently associated with specific “hot-spot” locations in Central Square: Carl Barron Plaza; 240 Albany Street; CVS, 624 Massachusetts Avenue; Dunkin Donuts, 616 Massachusetts Avenue; and McDonald’s, 463 Massachusetts Avenue.

The police department has continually used this data and trend-based analysis to direct police resources (putting police where the problems most frequently occur). The shift in police resources began in the 2010 season when there was a 50% increase in the number of directed patrol activities, and that level of increased scrutiny has been maintained over the last four years. In the six years prior to 2010, there was an average of 9,000 directed patrol activities in Central Square. Following the focused initiation of an effort toward systematically combating public drinking in the area in 2010, the directed patrol activities have been sustained at over 13,000 consistently every summer since that time.

In terms of the deployment strategy this year in Central Square, the department has been staffing Central Square with two walking officers consistently during the day and first half shifts. Prior to the warmer months, the second officer in Central Square was assigned as staffing allowed. The department has its sector car and route cars concentrating their enforcement efforts in Central Square.

In addition to the normal staffing, the department would pull its walking officers from the surrounding neighborhoods as was needed into Central Square. Also, the bike units were concentrating their efforts in Central Square as well. Given the recent events in the Area IV neighborhoods, this will no longer be an option for supplemental staffing. The department will have its neighborhood walking officers and the bike units concentrating their efforts in the Area IV neighborhoods for the balance of the summer months, leading into the fall.

With the more recent deployment of officers assigned to the EOD Unit, when not engaged in a call for service or training, these officers along with their trained dogs are spending a vast majority of time in both Harvard and Central Square. Although these officers have a special skill set and purpose, this affords a higher visible police presence in Central Square, and their fundamental duties as police officers are still at play, meaning they will still intervene when they observe violations of law or respond to calls for service.

The Homeless Outreach Officers are also splitting their time between Harvard and Central Square. This summer season seems to have brought an increased amount of homeless activity in both business districts, which has presented a challenge in terms of these officers devoting most of their time in one business district over the other. The Homeless Outreach Officers are focusing on those individuals who have been the most disruptive and who have accounted for a disproportionate amount of crime and disorder. To date, these officers have been successful in getting these specific individuals into long term treatment programs, or at the very least minimizing the kinds of the behaviors that have been most problematic.

In addition to the police deployments in Central Square, members of the department have been actively participating in bi-weekly meetings with the Central Square Business Association to identify ways of improving a collaborative approach between the City resources (Police, DPW, License Commission and Community Development principally) in addressing issues and concerns within Central Square. This was a very similar approach that we engaged in with the Harvard Square Business Association and the Homeless Services, which has proven to be very effective. In addition to several large-scale events that have been held in Central Square this season alone, the city departments have conducted a door-to-door campaign to all of the businesses along the Massachusetts Avenue corridor in providing them with information and the available resources, and to begin the dialogue of identifying ways business owners can play a significant role of improving those conditions and situations that give rise to concerns/perceptions of public safety. The franchise businesses, with a few exceptions, have proven to be the most challenging.

With the assistance of the Central Square Business Association and the urging of the License Commission, an agreement has been reached with the two largest entertainment venues, whereby both venue owners are pooling their resources for detail officers so that they now provide additional staffing in the corridor between these two venues, supplementing the overall staffing in Central Square (the number of officers hired beyond the two officers on these nights will fluctuate with the type of entertainment and anticipated crowd size). This arrangement is in place on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights and hopefully this will prove to quell issues that have been encountered in the past due to the large crowds that typically come to these venues. Also, the License Commission has played a critical role in working with these venues as to the promoters who are being hired for entertainment, with an eye to avoiding those promoters who have had a checked past with respect to the types of crowds being attracted, often leading to large-scale fights and other disorderly issues.

Detectives assigned to the Special Investigations Unit have been conducting a number of surveillance operations in Central Square, along with control buy activities. These detectives have already made a number of drug-related arrests, and will continue their efforts throughout the summer. In addition to the work by the SIU detectives, members of the Investigation Section have been doing early morning sweeps through both Harvard Square and Central Square looking to identify people within each of the respective business centers, especially those who might have warrants issued against them.

In terms of the number of homeless and/or seemingly intoxicated individuals who frequent Central Square, albeit a much higher number of individuals than what we have witnessed in the past, the mere presence of these individuals does not serve as a basis alone for officers to encounter them. In recent years, the courts have been very clear with respect to issues around the unenforceability of loitering and panhandling ordinances. Given the circumstances under which the homeless find themselves, they are viewed as a protected class of people who shouldn't be penalized because of the circumstances in which they find themselves. Merely being intoxicated or under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs is not considered a violation of the law, and therefore the police cannot take any action unless they are deemed to be incapacitated, requiring medical attention. For an officer to take enforcement action with respect to an individual consuming alcohol or ingesting/injecting him/herself with a drug/narcotic, the officer must personally witness them in the act.

Because of these distinctions, the police need to be extremely careful in enforcing quality of life issues so as not to infringe on the constitutionally protected civil rights and liberties that have been afforded to the homeless population. The notion of sanctions and consequences in and among themselves will not alter behavior among a group of people who don't have the same prospects of a future simply don't apply to a person who is more concerned about surviving from one moment to the next.

Although this might suggest little or nothing can be done, the department has been extremely effective in finding alternative ways of providing an environment where a diverse grouping of people can peaceably co-exist. Acknowledging the limitations of conventional enforcement alone of statutes and ordinances that don't apply to a "protected class" of people, it suggests more creative approaches in creating a sense of public order and safety. What has proven to be very successful is the close working collaboration between the general public, the business community, service providers, and city services. The department has been successful in cultivating that type of relationship in other business districts (e.g., Harvard Square), and has continually worked with the Central Square Business Association in trying to achieve similar partnerships to alter the public safety perceptions addressed in this City Council Order.

More recently, this collaboration has proven to be effective as has been evident in a series of large scale events that have already been held in Central Square (e.g., River Festival, Central Square Dance Party, Soccer Playoffs, etc.). There still needs to be more work done in this area, but our greatest challenge is now to build upon the business association's active participation.

It is my hope that this response adequately describes the various measures that the police department has taken in responding to the concerns expressed over public safety, and at the same time describe some of the challenges that require much greater participation among those who have an interest in changing perceptions. As indicated earlier in this response, the actual crime problems in Central Square are at historical lows. What comes into question is how best to work in a fashion that will address some of the behaviors or conditions which create the impression of disorder. One of the key objectives is having a better understanding of what can be achieved by the police or city services, and why certain social conditions albeit distressing to some, and create the perception for safety concerns, doesn't alter the fact that Central Square is a safe environment.

Please let me know if you have any questions or additional concerns. I can assure you that the police department is working on a variety of fronts in keeping and maintaining public order within Central Square and work hard to build a stronger working collaboration with the business community, service providers, and the neighboring resident communities.

Respectfully submitted,



Robert C. Haas  
Police Commissioner