

Minutes for the July 06, 2016 LGA Meeting (Approved)

The meeting began at 9:35 AM. The President, Bill Heflin, called the meeting to order and led the assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. He then called for a moment of silence. In attendance were Directors Al Potter, Don Carson, John Cataldo, Carol Warfel, Wally Sayko and Jack Saunders, and VP Mozine Lowe, Nominating Chair Clarence Drumgoole, and Exec. Dir. Moira Underwood. The thirty-six persons in the audience introduced themselves.

Mozine Lowe introduced the five County Sheriffs and explained that each would give a short overview of what current issues each faces and then at the conclusion all would be available for questions from the audience.

Wes Tripp of Halifax County led off and explained that much of the challenge for his department is associated with drug trafficking and the petty crimes and theft associated with drug addiction. He is trying to increase law enforcement visibility in all areas including the lake district of his county and is working proactively to improve relationships with children and youth so that they are seen as allies and not threats.

Mecklenburg's Bobby Hawkins addressed the rise of drug use in his jurisdiction, particularly heroin. Crime associated with the drug trade and use is on the increase including theft, assault and murder. His department performs twelve to fifteen hundred property checks per month (residential and business) and works with Homeowners Associations providing pointers on steps to take to prevent crime.

The longest serving Sherriff, Johnny Williams of Warren County discussed the call volumes they support in each of the county districts and provided a heads up regarding extended traffic issues associated with construction on I-85 from the Virginia border to Henderson. He identified the top 10 subjects of calls for assistance within the nearly 5,000 calls. (Wes Tripp commented that Halifax had 41,000 calls.) Sheriff Williams made specific comment regarding three incidents on Lake Gaston including the unfortunate drowning of a fisherman in early May.

Bryan Roberts of Brunswick County addressed drug related crime, both use and abuse of prescription drugs (opioid overdoses) and the growing heroin problem. He indicated that there is relatively low call volume from the lake area. In his tenure there has been an increase in incarcerations and a drop in the murder rate to zero. He points out that there are limited officers for the 600 square mile jurisdiction and there is a lot of work accomplished with mutual aid between departments.

Northampton County Sheriff Jack Smith finished the overviews explaining that they all are challenged to accomplish more with less, all have recruitment issues and that they work hard to recruit the best traits to work in the community. In his county as well there are critical challenges from drug trafficking and related crime resulting in a strain on manpower due to the size of the geographical area and the limited personnel.

Members of the audience were recognized to ask questions, the first of which addressed the value of video or trail cameras. Several of the Sheriffs responded that the video and trail

cameras are very useful methods for identifying one time and repeat criminals in a neighborhood. Placement of the video devices at an entry/exit point focused on views of vehicles which show vehicle license plates and/or allow view of vehicle occupants are very useful. It was recommended that IR cameras are among the best and setups with motion sensor to extend camera memory by operating only when triggered. It was suggested that positioning one device to record any activity around the main video device can even be used to identify someone trying to defeat a surveillance system. It was suggested that even signs indicating an area is under camera monitoring or that guard dogs are employed can be useful. Several of the sheriffs indicated their department would help with setup of monitoring equipment.

Several comments were made about the importance of programs to watch out for each other in neighborhoods and to keep an eye on workmen in an area that may move from a work project to check out properties for criminal purposes. Some instances have been found where visitors or workers have been involved in a neighborhood in multiple crimes in multiple counties and across state lines. It was pointed out the departments are manned at a level for full time residents and during the recreation season the resources are further stretched as the visiting Lake Gaston and Kerr Lake population swells to 1,500,000 to 2,000,000.

It was recommended that property owners create and maintain accurate inventories of their property to include serial numbers for expensive items and photographic or video records of the property. Without identifying information from property, recovery and proof of theft is difficult. All departments are willing to help Homeowners Associations in establishing watch programs and some will perform vacation checks for residents when they are away.

Several recommended that if residents/voters want to have more or better policing in their neighborhoods, or better EMS service then they need to participate in County meetings and bring the needs to the attention of Commissioners/Supervisors and County Managers/Administrators. However, more services will result in adjustments to taxes in most instances.

There was also a response to questions that there is good communication and cooperation between Sheriff Departments and Virginia State Patrol and NC Highway Police, their roles are different though complementary, and all organization have limited budgets and manning.

Bill thanked the speakers and led the group to a long round of applause; he gave each an LGA hat and key float and reminded the Sheriffs that we had setup lunch for them at Subway, if they chose to take advantage of the opportunity to extend their interface.

The minutes from the last regular meeting (May) and the Treasurers reports were approved. There was discussion from the floor regarding the difficulty in sending or receiving calls and texts during the busy weekend period. There was a short review of the steps taken to communicate with Verizon about improvements to local coverage. One recommendation is that customers need to use the lake address for billing in order to get increased tower population. The meeting was adjourned at about 11:30.

Reported by Jack D. Saunders