

Robin Wilkinson, PPD, presented totals per year on alarm calls from 2001 to date (filed). In 2001 there was a total of 2,165. In 2002 there was an 8% increase with a total of 2,879. So far this year, there have been a total of 1,576 false alarms calls. If things continue unchecked, they project 2,739 false alarms by the end of the year. Mayor Flagg asked if there is a differentiation between fire and panic alarms, and if there is a difference of response. Lt. Harper said there are different codes that let them know if it is fire or panic, and that decides who will be sent. Panic alarm indicates there is a robbery or home invasion and 2 officers are sent.

Mayor Flagg opened the floor to the public for input.

Abe Alexander, P.O. Box 224, Palatka, Florida, said at the first meeting of the focus group, he wanted to focus on the educational process. He does not believe these statistics would be so high if there had been an effective educational process. They claim to have started their program in January 2002, but he has never seen any paperwork on this, nor has he been called about support for this. He supports alarm reduction, but feels that the process that was initiated was very ineffective. If he had to initiate a process on alarm education, communication to all alarm providers would have been his first step. Documentation to alarm providers would be another step. Had he received documentation regarding alarm reduction, he could have addressed this in his monthly statements. As they design new systems, this could have been a part of the package up front, to ensure that customers comply, and to answer questions about the design. If this approach had been used, the statistics would have been different. Also, he has not been able to digest the 100,000 figure vs. Putnam County's 60,000 figure, when the geographical areas of Palatka vs. Putnam County are so different. There are far more residents in the County with alarm systems than in the City. He would like to know why this gap is so large. Mayor Flagg said he questioned that figure, and was told that this number was based on a single officer's response, and did not take into account whether another officer was dispatched. Sometimes two or three officers are dispatched. Mr. Alexander said he was not aware that 71 companies design and sell alarms systems in Palatka. Mayor Flagg said that is the number of different alarm monitoring companies monitoring alarms that have been installed in homes and businesses in Palatka. People can purchase an alarm at Radio Shack or many other places and install it themselves. That is why they need a central focus on who to hold accountable for all the false alarms. There are too many central stations to identify. That is how they measure the entities that are providing. If one person sells, another installs and another monitors, that's three people. Someone needs to be held accountable. Mr. Alexander asked if the Commission has documentation that the alarm reduction program was begun in January 2002. Mayor Flagg said departmental initiatives do not necessarily come through City Hall, or the Commission, as long as the Department Head initiates it and the City Manager is aware of it. Per the question, he cannot answer whether or not it would have been more effective if they had gone through the providers first, but that was the focus of the committee that put this together. He supports the initiative; they are now going to fine-tune the ordinance to make this a comprehensive educational approach. Mr. Alexander said he identifies education with the dollars attached to it. Mayor Flagg said if he supports an alarm reduction plan, then they are all in agreement, but now is the time that they are going to decide how to handle it. Without an ordinance in place, no one has to do anything, and everyone still acts independently. It would be wrong for the City to impose restrictions upon certain companies and not others. Companies come and go. He hopes they can accomplish compliance through education and voluntary compliance. If someone is borderline getting ready to trigger a fine, they need a personal visit, along with the alarm company. This is not meant to be punitive, but it has to be effective.

Commissioner Brown said she worries how they are going to educate people. Mr. Alexander said he is willing to put educational material in their monthly bills. If the other companies also agree to this, they would reach a broader market. Mayor Flagg said the registration process is not punitive. It will give everyone a chance to know who is putting in alarm systems where. It is fully educational. Commissioner Brown said she hopes that everyone comes together in a team effort to address this problem -- alarm owners, dealers and PD. Mayor Flagg said just the registration will be very time consuming. This will come into effect after everyone is registered and informed of the ordinance. Commissioner Norwood said it is up to the vendor to educate its customers. This will also

educate the City on who has what equipment. Mayor Flagg said an ordinance will allow the Commission as a legislative body to participate in the educational process. There is no mad rush to get this ordinance in place and start fining people. They fully intend to push the educational aspects of this ordinance. It will go through two public hearings and then the ordinance won't be fully implemented until everyone is fully informed. They also need to address the fees and discounts for seniors. Commissioner Sanders asked if they can get the lists of alarm users from alarm vendors; as alarms go off, they will be identified, if a local dealer does not monitor them. It will take a huge effort to get people to come in one-by-one to register their alarms, and will a lot of time and personnel. Mayor Flagg said this is all about accountability; they are just now getting into the dynamics of implementation. Education is a priority. The ordinance is fully educational, and the checks and balances will be in place. Mr. Alexander is looking heavily to education, and that is fine. Commissioner Sanders said he is certain that alarm dealers such as Mr. Alexander can spend time with their customers, and should be the ones doing the education. Mayor Flagg said someone can go to Home Depot tomorrow and purchase a home alarm, and there is no one there to educate them. They should not hold an alarm dealer to a higher standard than they would the alarm user. Commissioner Sanders said from the amount of his signs, Mr. Alexander probably has more alarm systems in Palatka than anyone else.

Mr. Alexander said first he looks at the statistics he was given. If education did not change these statistics, the next step is to go to the vendors. If there is a mission other than false alarm reduction, he would like to know it. If they can reduce false alarms through education, they should do it. They need an effective tool in reference to time to develop simple, effective information for their customers. If the companies can't reduce the false alarms, the next step would be to register alarm systems. Mayor Flagg said this ordinance will give them the ability to know who has what system. They will not know who the players are unless there is a registration system in place. Those numbers are extremely important to in order to quantify the problem. Mr. Alexander said an effective educational approach will reduce those numbers. The next step would be an effective tool to measure the numbers, i.e. a measuring tool to measure the effectiveness of the educational system. This is all a numbers game. There was no balanced tool to measure its effectiveness. Mayor Flagg said when all alarm-owning citizens are registered, they can compare registered users with issues to those who do not have issues. There are many benefits to the registration process, which is not a penalty. They need to have a target population to target. Commissioner Norwood said without an alarm registration process in place, they don't know if the numbers pertain to those who are ignoring the education versus new system owners. Mr. Alexander said at the last meeting he passed out a flyer from Putnam County addressing educational steps for false alarms. The first suggestion is for the user to contact the alarm companies. Mayor Flagg said an ordinance has more clout than a flyer. Mr. Alexander said the City should focus on education first; that is effective. There are many reasons for false alarms. Mayor Flagg said his company is probably telling its customers what causes false alarms, so that process is already in place. Just because the PD or Sheriff is telling them to do the same things the technician has told them doesn't make it any more effective. Mr. Alexander said verbal instructions aren't as effective as written instructions. Mayor Flagg said when they mentioning a specific ordinance will get their attention. That carries more weight than "this is a good idea." The Commission believes that the ordinance should be incorporated as part of the education process, while Mr. Alexander believes the ordinance should be a last resort. That is a philosophical difference.

Allegra Kitchens, 1027 S. 12th Street, said she is a member of the PPD Partnership, and they have been talking about this alarm problem for more than a year. They have had public meetings at Price Martin to talk about these issues, and maybe five people show up, maybe 25 show up. Education is always effective, but an Ordinance will be more effective. Fines are never pleasant, but this will force people to address their alarm problems. The police officers need to be freed up in order to address other crime issues. Yesterday in her neighborhood a police officer spent 30 minutes looking for an address for an alarm that was going off.

Mayor Flagg asked if they respond to audible alarms also; Lt. Harper said they get calls on audibles and they are hard to locate due to sounds bouncing off buildings. Per

Commissioner Norwood's question, Lt. Harper said there are some houses still not in compliance with 911 addressing requirements. Unless you know where an alarm is going off, it is very hard to tell where it is coming from. Some can be heard 10 blocks away.

Commissioner Brown said she saw a new system on TV where an alarm company calls the house when someone is breaking into it. Mr. Alexander said this is a two-way voice activated system, and is the only one they sell. Operators can hear any noise inside the home when the system is activated. This does depend upon a working phone line. There are several options. Commissioner Brown asked when they will be addressing fees, and if they can start putting notices in billings for their customers. Mayor Flagg said that is an alarm company management call. The PD can find out who is willing to do it. Commissioner Brown said they need to do something to get people's attention before this ordinance gets passed. Mayor Flagg said they can get a sample ordinance out prior to passage. They will take a recommendation to set a time for a first reading. Commissioner Brown said there has been a lot of job loss due to downsizing, and they don't need to lose any more. She asked what impact this will have on alarm company employees. Mayor Flagg said the alarm company can be totally removed from the process; the individual homeowner will be held responsible for this. Commissioner Sanders said the alarm companies could volunteer a list of their customers, which would facilitate everything. Many elderly people can't pay these fines. He works with a group that looks at financial abilities for people who are having problems with their budgets, and is amazed at some people's priorities. Some people pay more than \$100 per month for cable TV or phone bills. There is only one alarm company represented tonight, but there are maybe 50 other companies. He asked if they have been sent notices. Mayor Flagg said if they are going to do business in Putnam County they need to educate themselves. The City has exceeded public notice requirements on this issue. He expects a first reading to come up soon; possibly November or December.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m. upon a motion by Commissioner Brown, which was seconded by Commissioner Norwood.

CITY CLERK

MAYOR