



News & Notes from Downtown Norfolk

It is certainly no secret that this past week was a difficult one in downtown Norfolk. Any time there's a loss of life, we all suffer, and our thoughts go to the families involved. Headlines about shootings are certainly not what any city or any downtown organization wants to see. As I've stated publicly, in spite of what are clearly unfortunate circumstances, I am impressed with the swift action of our police department. I am also pleased that our City Manager, Regina V.K. Williams, has authorized the expenditure needed to put additional police on the street. She has also authorized the expenditure for surveillance cameras in our garages. We give credit to Kevin Murphy and the Downtown Civic League for their advocacy on the need for cameras and we appreciate their 24-hour vigilance.

Escorts just a call away

The week's events have understandably resulted in uneasiness on the part of some downtown workers. A reminder, if you ever feel any level of discomfort, we encourage you to call 478-SAFE and a uniformed Public Safety Ambassador will appear to escort you wherever you want to go in the downtown area. I might add that this service is a strong selling point for our hotels who are encouraging convention groups to come into the City.

Stellar safety record

Statistics tell us that downtown's safety record is stellar, even with these two recent incidents. Statistics aside, what is most important is the perception. This week's headlines and challenging behavioral issues do not help the perception, of course. Strong support from the police and renewed responsibility from our business owners in helping us uphold a community code of conduct are important in preserving downtown's reputation as a special place.

Night moves

There was a time when the streets rolled up at 5:00pm and a favorite saying was "we need a "24/7" downtown." Well, with the number of new residents and a significant number of late-night entertainment establishments, 24/7 is here. We now have a night-time component to our economy. An important, yet sometimes challenging, result of this is the number of establishments serving alcohol into the early morning hours. The mixture of alcohol and young people strains the resources of both our police and our establishment owners. A partnership between the two is a definite must if this environment is to be managed properly.

For the past several months, we have been working in partnership with staff from the City of Norfolk and ABC agents to create a training curriculum designed to help entertainment venue owners and their security staff become stronger partners in managing the late-night environment. This week, we held our first all-day training session and all who participated were enthusiastic. We received excellent feedback and input, and we feel good that the City Attorney's office, the Police Department, the Fire Department, ABC agents and our night-time establishment owners are all committed to a quarterly training schedule and a safer downtown experience.

Cathy Coleman
President & C.E.O.