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HYDE PARK

The Boston Globe

Banding together against violence Forum draws residents in search of answers

By Richard Thompson, Globe Correspondent | February 11, 2007

After a turbulent year in which their district's homicide rate jumped dramatically, city officials, community leaders and more than 100 residents gathered in Hyde Park last week to open the lines of communication.

The forum, called "Gun Violence: Seek Justice, Break the Silence," held in conjunction with Boston police, addressed the recent issues facing the Hyde Park police district, which includes sections of Jamaica Plain and Roslindale, as well as the city as a whole.

Eight people were killed in the area last year, compared with one in 2005, the majority from gun violence, Suffolk County District Attorney Daniel F. Conley said at the forum, adding that half of the cases have resulted in arrests. Conley said the city's increase in teenagers is fueling the district's homicide rate.

Conley praised the creation of a gun court in Suffolk County, which he said has helped prosecute more than 100 people on gun-related charges since it was created last year. Nearly 95 percent of defendants are incarcerated for at least 12 months, he said.

Echoing a similar sentiment, City Councilor Rob Consalvo, who represents a portion of the district as well as Readville and Mattapan, addressed a more recent move by city officials to curb street violence: The council's unanimous approval of the \$1.5 billion budget request from Mayor Thomas M. Menino last month to fund an acoustic gunshot detection system that he said would help police pinpoint the sites of gunshots.

Kathleen Coffey, the first woman chief justice of the West Roxbury District Court, said she attributes the homicide rate increase to young people "risking too much in the quest for popularity and status." She also emphasized that the judicial process isn't over once a defendant reaches her bench.

"Justice can only be achieved when those who witness come forward to testify," she said. "We need to work together" to make more people who dial 911 willing to show up in court to testify.

Anti-crime activist and Hyde Park resident Virginia Allen, who helped organize the event, said it was "definitely gratifying" to see such high turnout from the community, adding that she hopes more people from areas bordering the district will attend the forums in the future.

With the first meeting now behind her, Allen said she plans to turn her attention toward working with city officials to develop a program that will "specifically talk about youth violence" with city teens, and explore the possibility of opening a Boys and Girls Club facility in the area.

The next forum is scheduled for March 21 at the Hyde Park Municipal Building at 7 p.m. ■

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