

ODU and Norfolk police discuss safety

New plans and strategy discussed in secret meeting

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NORFOLK, Va. (WAVY) - A meeting of the minds took place Monday on how to make ODU safer.

It came on the heels of a death investigation. Someone shot ODU student, Christopher Cummings, early Friday morning on 42nd Street where he died. Another student was also hurt.

A green rock peace sign sits at 867 W. 42nd Street - the house with the yellow crime scene tape where Cummings lived, was shot, and killed.

Cummings' family grieves. His uncle is U.S. Congressman Elijah Cummings. "He was a good kid. I wish I had him for a son," said the Congressman.

The Police Chiefs of ODU and Norfolk met Monday to make the ODU community safer.

"Those are going to be some of the things they look at...brainstorm with some ideas and data to see what we can do as police departments to do a better job to protect people in these communities...we are increasing our patrols in the area, we are on bikes, walking, those types of things," said Norfolk police spokesman Chris Amos.

ODU has hired additional officers, installed more lighting in garages, installed more blue light emergency phones, and increased video surveillance.

"This meeting won't have the silver bullet that comes out of it. This is information and strategy. Plans will come out of this that will be implemented," Amos said of the meeting which was closed to the media, and details have been kept secret. Critics wonder whether this is the right strategy at a time when an alarmed community wants reassurances that something must be done.

Here is the reality check for Norfolk and ODU police that shows they have a long way to go: ODU junior Stephen Swartz from Chesapeake has moved far away from the ODU campus. "I feel safer living five miles away....it isn't safe here...when you know people who are getting broken into, it affects you. You wonder, am I next?" said Swartz.

ODU has hired Security Consultant Delores Stafford. She was the Chief of Police at The George Washington University from 1992 until her retirement in 2010.

"We are assisting the ODU police department to become more visible, and focusing on embracing a community policing philosophy," said Stafford.

Swartz says the police are failing to properly secure surrounding neighborhoods where students live. He says that's the problem, and sure enough that is where Cummings was killed, in off-campus housing two blocks off the campus.

"When you are driving by, and there are ODU cops out on Hampton Boulevard, and not on the back roads where they need to be. If they patrol the roads back here you might feel a little safer," Swartz said.

Stafford says ODU students have a responsibility too. The investigation will examine whether the victims knew the suspects. Why were the suspects at the house? What was going on in those early morning hours at 867 W. 42nd Street? Did police get any video from the surveillance camera at the door of the home? Why was there a surveillance camera at the front door of the home?

"Students have a responsibility of not walking alone late at night...it takes a village to make sure students stay safe," Stafford said.

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