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Feb. 24, 2014
Greg Sundstrom
City Manager
City of Grand Rapids
Executive Office
300 Monroe – Room 660
Grand Rapids MI 49503

Mr. Sundstrom,

We write to you today with much concern about the recent reassignment of Creston's Community Police Officer Kristen Gibbons after 15 years of excellent service to our neighbors here in the North End of Grand Rapids. We have held 5 separate meetings with all of the decision makers involved in this reassignment including you as City Manager, Chief Belk and Captain McWatters. Today the leadership and staff of CNA are requesting that Officer Kristen Gibbons be reinstated as our Community Police Officer. We have also communicated this request to our 2nd Ward Commissioners whom we understand share our respect for the work and service ethic of Officer Gibbons.

On Feb. 5th, immediately after Officer Gibbons was notified, CNA staff were visited and met for an hour with Capt. Peter McWatters, Captain of the North Service Area and Lt. Maycroft, Community Policing Supervisor. We were left with many questions as to the process and rationale for this decision to reassign. Deborah Eid and Mac Brown followed up this meeting with a 3 way conference call with the Captain the following day. For the 2nd time we were told that this move was not disciplinary or performance based. However, we asked the Captain to share the criteria used by the department to evaluate the effectiveness of community policing citywide and did not receive a response.

In the same conversation, Captain McWatters alluded to issues with time management and problems with generating insufficient numbers (i.e. arrests, traffic stops, and field interrogations). These are numbers which are considered measures of effectiveness for patrol officers but are not the all important community policing measures as our neighborhood association understands them. Crime is down; economic development and investment are up. Home sales and values are up in our area, as well as citywide. "Problem" houses have been addressed using a collaborative approach between CNA, our Community Officer and the Housing Dept. of GR, and 56 evictions have occurred over the last 2 years.

Evaluating a perceived performance problem is not our goal and we agree, as stated in our meetings with you, that performance evaluations are an internal GRPD management responsibility. Our concern is the gap between what this reassignment represents and the loss of this community police officer's highly effective community policing for the Creston neighborhood.

Meeting “quotas” has never been part of the nationally accepted standards for Community Policing and Problem-Oriented Policing models and yet that is the only answer given when we asked for rationale. Through information sharing with other neighborhoods in the last year we have observed a concerning trend to return to a “reactive” model of policing.

When meeting with Chief Belk a week ago, we heard that he considers 85-90% of any Community Police Officer’s daily work load to be those things that are considered under the umbrella of community policing; prevention, problem solving and strategically collaborating with the community to address all of the issues that affect quality of life and public safety. Officer Gibbon’s attendance is exemplary when representing the department at community meetings, business association meetings, school dismissal (In Creston alone we have 6 public elementaries, 1 middle school and 1 high school) and assisting neighbors when dealing with personal or quality of life issues. Her involvement is key to the success of CNA’s public safety program in crime prevention organizing through citizen engagement and participation with the neighbors organized into block clubs. She has, even with the 2010 reorganization and reallocation of her time, continued the strong 15 year partnership with both CNA and the Heritage Hill crime prevention organizers and programs, as is noted in the 2011 and 2012 year end reports by the GRPD to the City. We consider her effectiveness in this position to be a huge asset for neighborhood public safety and building strong community.

In our Mayor’s recent *State of the City Address* it was stated that the Community Policing program was restored in its entirety as a result of the 2010 income tax increase which CNA and our Public Safety Committee highly recommended and publicly supported. Since that vote, we have noted an increase in our Community Officer’s workload and territory (assigned an additional noncontiguous neighborhood with a second active crime prevention program) and the dilution of the GRPD community policing program as she and other community officers around the city have had to respond to calls for service all over the city, not just in their assigned areas. Add to that the newer demands on the GRPD to support citywide events such as Art Prize and these officers are challenged in carrying out their community policing responsibilities.

We feel strongly that this reassignment of Officer Gibbons is in error and jeopardizes the years of relationship building as well as the trust in the overall responsiveness by GRPD in our all important community partnership. After review of all the factors, including the most recent years North Service Area Officer’s reports to the City of GR, we hope that you will agree with this community request for reevaluation of this position reassignment and will find in favor of the community.

Sincerely,

CNA Board of Directors and Staff
Larry Zeiser, President

Cc Mayor George Heartwell
Commissioner Rosalynn Bliss
Commissioner Ruth Kelly
GRPD Chief Kevin Belk
GRPD Captain Pete McWatters