

Damascus Emergency Preparedness Team Meeting of 16 August

The first order of business was to resolve the organizational issue... whether or not the Damascus Emergency Preparedness Team (DEPT) should constitute itself as a stand-alone entity or under the auspices of the Damascus Community Alliance (DCA). Randy Scritchfield, Chairman of the Alliance, made a short presentation and fielded questions regarding the structure, by-laws, membership, Board composition, and mission of the Alliance. Because Damascus is unincorporated, DCA presently serves as the umbrella organization through which citizens, businesses, and civic organizations can have the best interests of Damascus represented and given voice in lieu of a city government. DCA has offered DEPT its legal and tax status as a not for profit organization, an established reputation with County officials as the semi-official voice of Damascus, a functioning bank account ready to use, organizational liability protection for actions taken in its name, Board members already active in DEPT, and, in short, everything DEPT would have to take time and energy to replicate independently already in place. Accordingly, the meeting resolved to constitute DEPT as a committee of DCA with the proviso that the decision need not be permanent if compelling reasons to the contrary should arise.

Reports and communications were given. It was reported that Board of the Rotary Club of Damascus had voted a \$100 matching contribution to DEPT as a gesture to get the ball rolling, and that more might be available at such time a budget and needs could be justified.

Easterday Well & Pump has offered to participate in any meetings or inspections involving the city water tank and system or an evaluation of the old city well system.

A Communications Committee report was postponed for a week pending resolution of on-going issues.

As of meeting time there was still no resolution of possible dates for CERT training in Damascus.

A large number of RSVP meeting regrets was reported as was the fact that several committee chairpersons had conflicting meetings on Monday nights. For instance, it was noted that both the American Legion and the Damascus Volunteer fire department had Monday meetings and it was suggested that meeting nights might be moved to accommodate these conflicts. However, it was pointed out that this decision could best be taken after the CERT training dates were known.

Attending the meeting to make presentations were Cathy Matthews, Director of the Montgomery County Upcounty Regional services Center and Captain Evelyn Cahalen, Commander of the Montgomery County Police 5th District.

Ms. Matthews congratulated DEPT on what it had managed to accomplish in such a short time and reported that she had convened a meeting of County management staff to identify additional ways that communities can help at which several items were identified, and she was sure that the Damascus community can help identify others. For instance, her suggestions of what the community can do included:

- Reviewing the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) for comments;
- Providing an updated list of community contacts;
- Help to establish a “Language Bank” of translators of languages other than English;
- Identify drivers of 4-wheel vehicles who might become volunteers in certain situations;
- Work to identify neighbors at risk in a disaster such as a power grid failure;
- Urge local businesses to have a disaster emergency plan;
- Coordinate with the Red Cross community plans for food and shelter in an emergency;
- Establish in the community a small inventory of cots and blankets.

Ms. Matthews, accompanied by Luis Martinez, noted that the American Red Cross had recently established an Upcounty office in Gaithersburg and suggested that the County would provide support and assistance to DEPT to help us develop a local Damascus fire district plan that will complement and support at the community level the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) at the County level. Specifically, she volunteered to be the point of contact and to use her offices to seek to provide answers to any written questions we might submit. She stated that this should be viewed as an opportunity to strengthen the partnership between the County and our community, and that the County will probably use this experience as a model in working with other communities.

Captain Cahalen affirmed her commitment to work with the community in areas of concern we might identify and noted that she had made her cell phone available in a recent Gazette article. She introduced community officer George Boyce, a resident of Damascus. Both spoke to the issue of the strong ties the police have with the community by virtue of the fact that such a high percentage of Montgomery County police live in Damascus and pointed out that there is an active organization of retired officers living in our community. Questions were raised regarding the TV images of the destruction of Hurricane Charley in Florida and the ongoing efforts of officials there to restore services and order... and how order would be maintained in the event of an emergency affecting both Damascus and the County at large without a specifically assigned law enforcement presence in Damascus. Captain Cahalen explained that at no time would all police resources be withdrawn from Upcounty, as contingencies existed to pull in coverage from other surrounding jurisdictions. She offered to work with the community to develop specific protocols to address any community concern in this regard. Further, Captain

Cahalen asked to be informed as to when the Damascus CERT training might be held as if her schedule permitted she would take it with us... prompting officer Boyce to agree and Ms. Matthews to comment that she would urge her staff to take the training with us.

The next meeting of the Damascus Emergency Preparedness Team will be held in the large meeting room at the Damascus library at 7:30, Monday, August 23.