

Editorial

Hope from tragedy

After the tragic murder of a gay man, community members are making their voices heard about police, crime and safety.

Center City resident Anthony "Alphy" McCullough's fatal shooting last month on South 12th Street has motivated members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities to schedule public meetings, request information from the police liaison to the sexual- and gender-minority communities, as well as the liaison's advisory committee, and determine what is needed to increase safety in a neighborhood where threats turned deadly.

Residents are taking a proactive stance, as evidenced at a Nov. 10 town meeting sponsored by Washington Square West Civic Association. Washington Square West is the neighborhood where McCullough was shot.

The neighborhood group invited several politicians and police officials to meet with residents and business owners. Problems and potential solutions were discussed; advice was offered. More importantly, officials are now on record with promises to act if residents meet them halfway.

For example, District Attorney Lynne Abraham and City Council member Frank DiCicco explained that formal complaints about irresponsible bar owners must first be made before any action can be taken against the offending watering hole. Until and unless residents are willing to take that first step, no change will happen.

This is an important step to keep in mind. Often, people wait for someone else to notify officials about the street light that's out, or the trash that's been strewn along the block or the abandoned car. But "someone else" may not make that call.

Powelton Village residents are showing "someone else" needs to be all of us.

The gay and non-gay residents of Powelton Village recently took a public stance against anti-gay vandalism and harassment by agreeing to fly rainbow flags to bolster a gay resident whose flag was repeatedly stolen. Now, although non-gay residents are also being egged and insulted, their courageous stand against anti-gay bigotry has only increased their resolve. They are convinced they can outnumber and outlast hate-filled bigots. They are a shining example of a community uniting in defense of one of its own, and their rainbow flags salute their strength in numbers.

Numbers have weight.

Think about it: How can a city agency or your City Council representative ignore dozens of calls about a neighborhood nuisance? But if he or she doesn't know about it, the problem will remain, and probably escalate.

Perhaps brighter lights on South 12th Street would have discouraged the men from harassing and killing McCullough; we'll never know. But now that this situation has been raised — and after a death of one of our community members — we owe it to ourselves — and McCullough to see it through.

Residents joined city officials Nov. 10 to talk and solve neighborhood problems. If you missed the Nov. 10 meeting, you can attend the next town meeting, set for 6 p.m. Nov. 16 at the William Way Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center.

If we all considered ourselves potential victims of crime, we would think more seriously about addressing crime. We all are potential crime victims; Alphy McCullough proved that. ▼