

Noise complaints garner few tickets

Noise:

By Mack Burke

Transcript News Editor

The Norman Police Department received 848 noise complaint calls in 2018. Only two resulted in case reports.

Ward 4 resident Sara Wallace Boyd said that fact is surprising.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” she said. “That can’t be it.”

In a way, she said it makes sense, however. She said she can’t keep track of how many times she has called police about a nearby fraternity house that routinely blasts loud music and she has yet to find relief.

As a realtor, she said she understands that her “family neighborhood” is now more of a rental neighborhood. Still, she said, that doesn’t mean noise ordinances should be ignored.

“You couldn’t go to Arbor Lake on the west side and have loud outdoor music and blaring parties without getting a permit and giving your neighbors a heads up,” she said. “Here, just because it’s close to the fraternities, it’s a free-for-all. The argument that ‘oh you know

See **NOISE** Page A2 **LAW & ORDER**

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From **Page A1** where you’re living’ doesn’t hold water because it’s against the rules. It wasn’t even this way five years ago. It wasn’t tolerated and it shouldn’t be.”

She said she doesn’t want to be “that neighbor,” but said the situation is out of control.

OUPD Maj. Bruce Chan said though campus police does offer assistance at NPD’s request, NPD has jurisdiction at fraternity and sorority houses. Chan said the one exception is the Pi Kappa Psi fraternity house at 720 Elm Ave., which is owned by the university.

The Transcript reached out to NPD to talk about noise complaints and why tickets are rarely written. Lt. Jeff Robertson said the police response is often dictated by the person who files a complaint.

“Not all noise complaints are created equal, so how the call comes in dictates how the officers respond,” he

— a flushing toilet would qualify at around 70 decibels — is, according to the letter of the law, a violation of the city’s commercial sound ordinance. For residential areas the allowable cap is 55 decibels during the day and 50 decibels from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m.

“If the sound level is above the allowable level, officers will give the suspect(s) a warning to turn down the noise level or they will be issued a citation on a second response,” Robertson said. “If the officers respond to a noise level violation on a third occasion in one night, officers have the option to write the suspect(s) an additional noise violation citation and arrest them.”

Regardless, Boyd said the situation has not improved and now she doesn’t know where to turn. She reached out to council member Bill Hickman, who in March discussed Boyd’s situation with City Manager Mary Rupp and former NPD Chief Keith Humphrey.

“I am continuing to receive resident complaints in the south Greek area in the neighborhood south of Lindsey adjacent to Chautauqua and over to Berry Road ... I

said. "Reporting parties who call in loud party calls and regular noise disturbances are asked by dispatch if they would like to sign a complaint. If they say yes, then officers respond to the location of the reporting party for them to fill out a docket. This in turn leaves the officer out of the procedure other than delivering the docket and acquiring the information from the suspect(s).

"If they do not want to sign a complaint, the officers respond to the location of the noise, attempt to contact a responsible party and advise them that they are disturbing someone."

In most instances, complaints are not signed. So, a simple "turn-it-down" talking-to is the norm. However, Robertson said officers can issue disturbing the peace tickets if noise is "unreasonable for the circumstances." But that doesn't happen all that often, either.

NPD issued five disturbing the peace tickets in 2018.

"If the reporting party requests (as in the case of live music venues) that the noise is violating City Ordinance 10-304, a very select number of officers are trained to respond to the location of the noise with the sound meter to measure the sound level," Robertson said.

In 2018, the department purchased a 3M SoundPro to measure decibel levels. Without a special permit, anything over 60 decibels

respectfully request that we increase our efforts in this area as, if history has taught us anything, it will get worse before the semester is over," Hickman wrote.

Rupp said the city has taken steps to address speeding vehicles in the neighborhood and offered Boyd the opportunity to accompany officers on a ride-along.

As far as the noise goes, Rupp said police have been enforcing the law and the city is open to working with Boyd and all area residents to address issues.

"The thing that would help the police department is if citizens would be willing to sign complaints," she said.

Boyd said she fears retaliation and believes that code enforcement shouldn't be residents' responsibility.

"There is no harmony living here," she said. "People walk through my yard to go to parties, they're peeing in my yard, I've had them throw up on the side of my house. The bottom line is Norman PD is doing nothing about these noise complaints. Why? ... They should have the same rules as any other residential area in this city."