

MAYOR MARVIN'S COLUMN

Again this past weekend, large groups of young people from area schools spent most of Friday and Saturday nights congregating in our business district. On Friday, there were upwards of 60 children and Saturday night the number topped 100.

Upon speaking with them, a vast majority attend Fordham Prep, Iona Prep, Ursuline and Archbishop Stepinac. They either arrive by Metro North or are dropped off by parents. Though I am very sympathetic to the lack of organized teen activities and the boredom that sets in, the Village of Bronxville can no longer act as a babysitter.

Many of you have expressed similar sentiments and have asked what can the Village do to mitigate this situation, knowing that continued warm weekend nights are upon us.

In addition to the normal two police officers on patrol, we added four more walking officers to keep the groups moving, orderly and out of store and residential doorways. This necessitated an overtime expenditure of \$2,000 - tax dollars that could have been spent on so many other improvements for the Village, save being a high priced babysitter. It is particularly frustrating that during an economic downturn this is how we must spend our limited resources.

We do need the officers out there because in early spring we had cases of bodily harm and verbal abuse. Anytime you have groups of 100, there also exists that potential for anything to happen.

Though the incidents have diminished, the noise, the language, the blocking of sidewalks continues and has certainly diminished the quality of life for our residents, and sadly has affected our merchants. Many residents, young and old, have told me they do not come in to their own Village on weekend nights because they find the atmosphere uncomfortable and disruptive. It is not a pleasant outing to have to run the gauntlet to buy an iced coffee.

Unfortunately, our options are limited in handling the crowds. The New York State Penal Laws only define "loitering" as remaining in a public place for the purpose of engaging in gambling or sex acts. Just hanging out in large numbers and blocking the sidewalk does not meet the loitering definition.

One recourse we do have is the ability to enforce the New York State Penal Law Violation of Disorderly Conduct against teens 16 and over, if conduct is witnessed by a police officer as alarming, annoying or disturbing. This is where residents can really help our police department by calling them immediately upon witnessing such behavior with a good description of the persons involved and with the willingness to make a statement thereof. Calling or e-mailing us on Monday about disruptive behavior on the weekend allows us to do nothing. Disorderly conduct is punishable by a fine of \$50 to \$100. Children under 16 cannot be charged with a violation, so in their cases, the police require that a parent come pick them up.

Many of you have offered suggestions on how to stem this problem including the involvement of the County police and District Attorney's Office, the formation of citizen patrols or the employment of the Village Noise Ordinance.

County and District Attorney assistance is required only when there is a spate of criminal activity, such as the recent rash of bank robberies, that requires additional manpower and expertise. Our situation is not a question of having enough officers, rather whether paying overtime to have them sassed at by teens is the way to deploy our force. This is not police work. As for civilian patrols, the amount of training required and the potential for liability if a confrontation occurs does not make this a feasible option. The Village's noise ordinance references loud and unusual noises that are prohibited and is most often enforced for complaints of loud music and construction noise after business hours and on weekends.

We are already taking proactive steps because this issue affects the quality of life of all our Villagers, and it is simply not right that the people who maintain its charming character cannot enjoy it.

We will be adding signs and gates at our tennis courts, another center of teen activity, notifying users that the complex closes at dusk and those found on the property after that hour will be trespassing. We are also reviewing the usage of all of the Village's open space after dark.

I have been calling the principals of many area schools asking for their assistance and cooperation in dissuading their students, and especially their parent body, from using our Village as the weekend babysitter.

We are also seriously studying the possibility of a seasonal evening curfew since warm weather has historically brought problems in the business district

with a financial impact on our merchants, our Village budget, and most importantly a diminution of the quality of life in our Village.