

Hello, my name is Jeff Miller. I am a York City resident who was asked to serve on a committee formed by Representative Steve Stetler to draft the anti prostitution legislation being discussed here today.

Last spring and summer we experienced first hand an upswing of prostitution activity in our southwest York neighborhood. We organized neighborhood meetings to bring attention to the problems that prostitution is causing in our neighborhoods. I realize that this is yet another in a long list of crime related problems plaguing yet another city in our Commonwealth. However, to those of us living with it daily, it is a very real problem and a very serious concern to us.

I wish to summarize some of the problems we in southwest York have endured collectively in our neighborhoods over the past few years, and especially during spring and early summer, so you have an understanding of what we're been enduring. We have:

Had numerous residents verbally harassed, spit on and a few actually physically assaulted by prostitutes when they have been asked to move off front porches and streets.

Public intoxication and open drug use by prostitutes and their pimps.

Sexual activities on side streets, parking lots. Empty houses broken into and set up for sexual and drug activity.

Condoms and drug paraphernalia littering streets and walks.

Solicitations of residents at their homes. (One resident, a mailman, was offered ½ price, because he was in uniform).

Solicitations in the parking lot across from William Penn Senior High School while school children are waiting to enter school.

Prostitutes trying to get in resident's vehicles while stopped at traffic signals.

Johns trying to stop/solicit female residents who are walking in the neighborhood.

John's vehicles blocking streets while negotiating with prostitutes.

Loitering on street corners and "squatting" on resident's front porches.

I personally have been followed to my job, which is close by my home, and was confronted by one particular prostitute who was aware that I had photographed her activities and turned the photos over to the police. She wanted to know if "we could work something out" so that I would leave her alone.

Subsequent to that encounter she approached me again to let me know she had searched the neighborhood and now knew where I lived. I took it as a not so veiled threat.

Another prostitute makes a point of giving me the finger when she sees me driving by because we have had words about her activities in the neighborhood.

I'm sure I could fill most of my time here with tales of neighborhood resident's encounters and problems they've encountered with our local prostitutes. However, venting frustrations, swapping horror stories and complaining does not move us forward toward a solution.

I've had to endure a lot of ribbing over the last year since this issue hit the media from friends and co-workers who live

in other parts of the city or county. They don't understand why I feel this is such a big deal, after all, according to them, nobody is getting hurt. I usually, half seriously, tell them I would be happy to give the girls directions to their neighborhood and they can decide for themselves whether it's a problem or not!

It has been said that prostitution is not a victimless crime and I contend it is not. My contention was proved correct last summer when a 42 year old Spring Garden man was shot and killed by a 16 year old boy in an argument over a prostitute and money. This man paid the ultimate price for his association with one of our local prostitutes. I contend this is a problem of the same caliber as drugs and violence. It all works hand in hand and the net effect is the degradation of our cities. As evidenced by this shooting, even though it occurred in Spring Garden Township, it was just one block outside the city, there is a ripple effect into the county.

Residents of our neighborhoods have suffered declining property values (after all, who wants to buy a house in an area where prostitutes are sitting on the front porches and standing on street corners?), other illicit activities are encouraged, (i.e. after all, if we didn't do anything about the prostitutes, why would we do anything about other activities), quality of life in the neighborhood declines (we have neighbors who were quoted in the newspapers saying they don't go outside because of criminal activity & we have female residents solicited by johns).

The problem is not just limited to resident's properties, it adversely affects our cities at large. It adds to the perception that our cities are totally crime ridden. It affects, in the case of York City, redevelopment efforts planned by the city and YMCA for the 200 & 300 blocks of West Market Street and the arrival of the York County Heritage Rail Trail. This area is planned to become the hub of a thriving downtown tourist area. I question how successful these efforts will be if we continue to allow prostitution activities and the other crime it lures into the area.

I ask you to imagine the reaction of tourists visiting York who could be treated to the sight of prostitutes and their pimps sitting on the steps of downtown businesses, drinking cheap beer, who then walk down the street to pick up a man to get the money for more beer or drugs. Or of the family on a Sunday outing on the York County Heritage Rail Trail who encounters a prostitute soliciting at the trail's intersection with Princess Street. Or the same family going to tour the York County Industrial Museum only to encounter yet another prostitute stationed at the phone booth on the corner. Then they decide to go to downtown for lunch only to encounter still another prostitute working across the street at the Post Office. Think it's not happening? Think again.

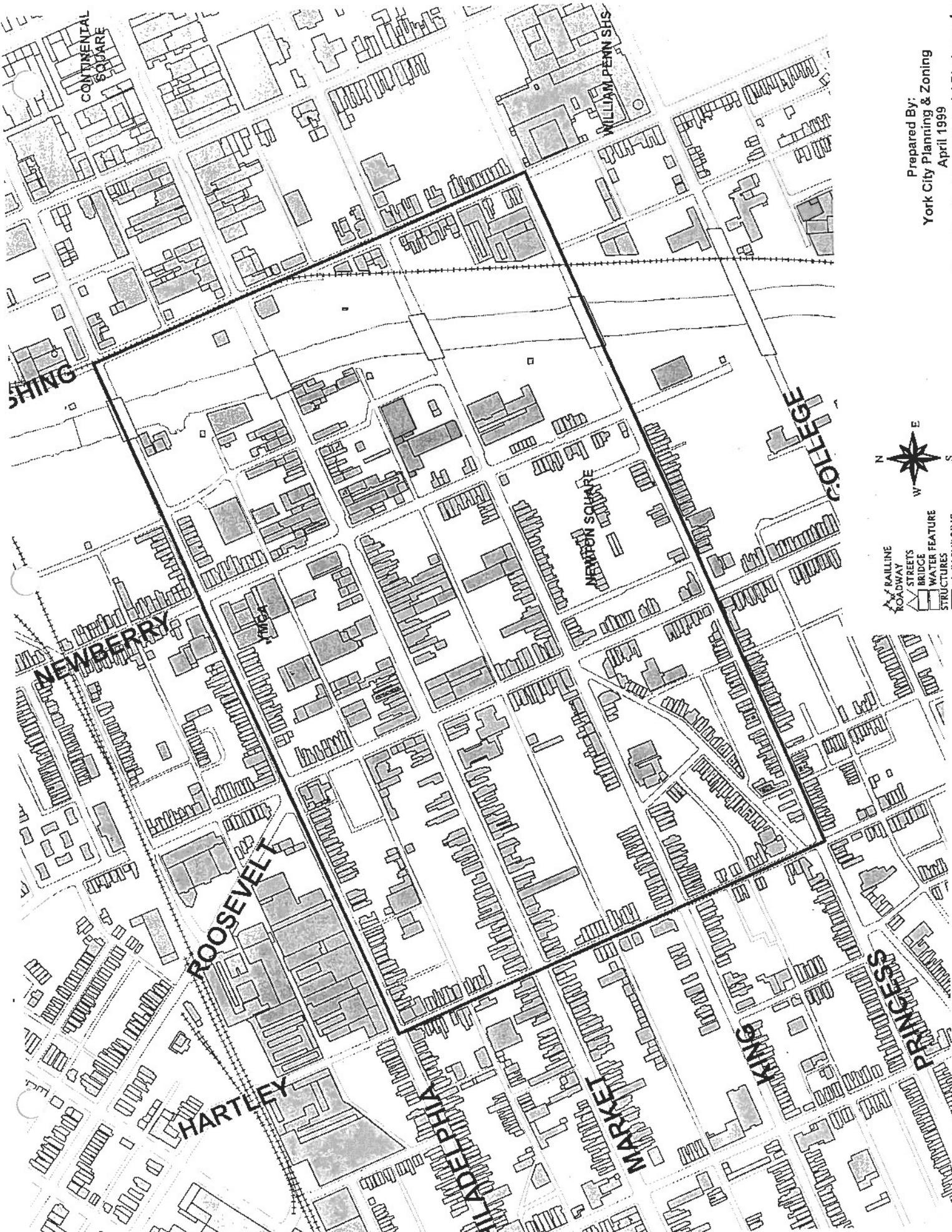
If female residents are uncomfortable walking in their own neighborhoods because of johns cruising for pick-ups, just imagine what a chilling effect will be on visiting tourists.

So, how do we correct the problem?

We give our police officers the tools to effectively make arrests when they see prostitution offences being committed. We need our prosecutors and magistrates to support our police officers when they make these arrests, and to use the law to it's fullest extent for both the prostitute and their customers, regardless of who the customer is. We do this by enacting legislation as proposed in House Bills 212 thru 215 into law.

We elevate the penalty to be commensurate to the crime. Perpetrators who continue to engage in prostitution activities would be faced with not only risking their drivers licence but also potentially the very vehicle they commit the crime in, this sends a strong message that our communities will not tolerate prostitution activity. Laws in the past have been geared to prosecution of the women engaging in prostitution while leaving the men involved untouched. The legislation proposed puts punitive sanctions on both the prostitute and their customers where it really belongs.

House bills 212, 213, 214 & 215 go to the heart of the problem. Eliminate the customer base and the prostitutes go away. It's that simple.



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