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## Large Gathering in Oakdale Park

West St. Paul, MN - April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020 - Earlier this week South Metro Fire Department received a request to take part in the posthumous birthday parade for one of our young community members whose life was tragically lost last year. The request was to be a part of a *Social Distancing Parade* to celebrate the birthday. South Metro Fire Department reached out to West St. Paul Police to join in the event. Members of both departments who responded to the call that took the young man's life agreed to honor the request as a way to recognize the deceased in a safe, responsible way during this pandemic.

As requested, vehicles from SMFD and WSPPD drove through to the family's street then left the location and returned back to regular business around 5:30 pm. After both departments left the vicinity, some community members made their way to Oakdale Park and congregated in a large gathering. This gathering was not part of the request as either department understood and was not sanctioned or endorsed by the South Metro Fire or West St. Paul Police Departments.

During the time the congregation began, a flurry of life-threatening and emergency calls began to come in to dispatch. These calls are outlined below. Officers correctly prioritized these situations over the gathering. By the time officers were able to get to Oakdale Park the crowd had dispersed on their own. The timeline of some of last night's priority calls is detailed below.

- 5:29 pm: Officers responded to a domestic call in which an individual left their residence in an agitated state, threatening to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge. A missing persons report was made and two officers spent the next two hours searching for the vulnerable individual.
- 5:52 pm: A call came in regarding a gathering at Oakdale Park. As an officer was en-route to this call, they were re-routed to a mental health emergency in which three officers responded. This scene was cleared at 6:15 pm.
- 6:02 pm: The second call came in regarding the Oakdale Park gathering. All squads were busy on calls.
- 6:15 pm: Officers closed the mental health emergency call and began toward Oakdale Park but were called away on a possible theft in progress.
- 6:47 pm: Officers were called to a retail business for a drug overdose. The overdosed individual was revived with NARCAN and transported to the hospital. During this call, individuals with active warrants were located and had to be addressed by these responding officers.
- 7:25 pm: Officers were called to another retail establishment for an active Order of Protection violation in progress.
- When officers were eventually able to respond to Oakdale Park, they found no individuals present that were in violation of the Stay at Home order.

As we have received a number of complaints regarding the delayed response to the gathering, we wanted to make sure the community is aware of exactly why there was a delay. Yes, the gathering was dangerous, however, not immediately dangerous as many other calls were. In the tight time-frame of all of the calls coming in, our officers made the correct decision to attend life-threatening and in-progress crime calls before the gathering. We hope the community can use the events of last night as a reminder of just what our officers and fire fighters deal with every single shift they come in for.

Moving forward, please know that any large gatherings are not permitted as per Governor Walz's executive orders and will be addressed by the West St. Paul Police Department as this one would have, had there been available officers. We thank those that organized and attended the *Social Distancing Parade*, but did not congregate at the park afterwards.

Please stay safe and make good choices as we continue to navigate this pandemic.

**Your Chiefs,**  
**Brian Sturgeon - WSPPD & Mark Juelfs - SMFD**