



WALLINGFORD POLICE DEPARTMENT



135. N. Main Street
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News Release

John J. Ventura
Chief of Police
Chief's Office (203) 294-2828

Date: February 14, 2023

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Four Arrests made in Doolittle Park Playscape Fire

On October 29, 2022 around 11:07PM, Wallingford Police officers investigated a suspicious fire at Doolittle Park (80 South Elm Street). When officers arrived, they discovered the playscape fully engulfed in flames. The Wallingford Fire Department responded to the scene and extinguished the fire. Small fires were started on a basketball court and in a nearby porta-potty as well. The Wallingford Fire Marshall responded to the scene and determined that the fires were intentionally set.

With assistance from the Wallingford Fire Marshall, a lengthy investigation was conducted by the Wallingford Police Detective Division. Ultimately, four male juveniles were arrested and charged for setting the fire. All four juveniles are Town residents and each was charged with violation of Connecticut General Statutes 53a-115- Criminal Mischief in the First Degree, and 53a-48/53a-115- Conspiracy to Commit Criminal Mischief in the First Degree. They were all assigned a court date in February at Superior court of Juvenile Matters- New Haven at 239 Whalley Avenue.

The total cost to repair the playground will be approximately \$69,000.00. The Playground Replacement is going before the Wallingford Town Council tonight, the evening of February 14, 2023.

Please see the following page for a special statement from the Chief of Police...



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Statement of Chief John Ventura

The arrest of the juveniles responsible for the destruction of the playscape puts some closure on the events of last year at Doolittle Park. There is an open bid for a surveillance system at Doolittle which closes on March 1st. We are confident that the company that is awarded the bid will provide the system we need to ensure the safety of our community while protecting Town property.

Unfortunately, the issues with juvenile behavior in Town have not gone away but have increased 165 percent from this period last year. We have been speaking with merchants in the Center Street and Simpson Court areas along with the Wallingford Public Library who have been inundated with juveniles who are causing issues for their establishments. Complaints of theft, inappropriate behaviors, trespassing, vaping, and bicycles being used in a menacing manner both on and off the roadway are just a few of the complaints that have been received by this agency. Enforcement efforts by the Patrol Division have been increased and these efforts have been met with resistance by the juveniles we have been dealing with who continually disrespect the officers assigned to address the issues.

In discussions with the Law Department and the Department of Youth and Social Services, we are looking to implement some initiatives to address these negative behaviors. A bicycle ordinance is being constructed to allow officers more enforcement options when dealing with the juveniles who constantly create traffic issues by riding in the middle of the roadway often in a dangerous manner. Also in coordination with Youth and Social Services, we have formed the Wallingford Juvenile Diversion Program which mirrors the Juvenile Review Board model to address the nuisance issues we are encountering in a formal process requiring both the parent and child to appear to speak directly to the negative behaviors.

I understand the frustration of our business community and the citizens of this Town and the Wallingford Police Department is committed to addressing these juvenile issues and will do everything we can to curb the behaviors that have been plaguing the hardworking business owners who have already been through so much over the last three years.