

Williamsburg Historic Neighborhoods “When and How to Call for Assistance” Guide

In a collective effort to preserve the residential history, aesthetic, and spirit of Burns Lane, Powell Street, Goodwin Street, and adjacent Jamestown Road households, an association of neighbors from the Burns Lane neighborhood created this guide to help individuals decide when and how to call City officials for assistance with persistent or egregious concerns. Representatives of the Williamsburg Police Department (WPD), the City Planning Department, and William & Mary contributed to the creation of this resource in 2016 and then participated in a review and revision of it in 2022-2023. We hope it serves as a useful resource to residents of other Williamsburg neighborhoods in their efforts to do the same.

Listed below are five phone numbers and information about their respective purposes and availability.

Phone Number	General Purpose
911	This number should be reserved for Emergency Dispatch , namely when there is an imminent safety concern.
(757) 220-2331	This is the Non-emergency Dispatch number. It is staffed 24 hours a day, and it actually contacts the same dispatch center as 911 but gives the call a different priority level. The dispatcher may also be reached at (757) 220-2332 or (757) 220-2333 .
(757) 220-6136	This is the City’s Office of Code Compliance . Call during normal business hours, Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 a.m.
(757) 220-6130	This is the City’s Planning Department . Call during normal business hours, Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
(757) 220-6254	This is the Parking Enforcement phone line. It is not staffed on a regular schedule, but messages can always be left.

On the pages that follow are:

- A helpful two-page table indicating specific circumstances in which a resident might need the City’s or the WPD’s assistance and the specific number to call.
- A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that can help when working either proactively or reactively to keep your neighborhood safe and peaceful.

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WHEN TO CALL	HOW TO CALL
<p>Noise Nuisance <i>Excessive noise</i> is defined as “Any sound which disturbs humans or which causes or tends to cause an adverse psychological or physiological effect on humans.” During the Day (7:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Any sound that is plainly audible above the background noise level to a person of normal hearing acuity at a distance greater than 50 feet from the place at which the sound is being generated or produced shall be presumed to exceed 65 dB at 10 feet of distance” and thus a violation. • Decibel level exceeds 65 dB. You are <i>not</i> required to record a decibel level. The description above assumes a decibel level exceeding 65 dB.* <p>At Night (11:00 p.m. – 7:00 a.m.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When sound from radios, stereos, televisions, musical instruments, or similar devices, such as portable personal sound devices, is “plainly audible across a residential real property” or “when the sound is plainly audible at a distance of 50 feet or more from its source.” • “When yelling, shouting, or other vocal sounds in excess of normal conversational level, whistling or singing, any of which occurs...so as to create a plainly audible sound across a residential real property line or on a public right-of-way...or that is plainly audible to an occupant of a dwelling.” • When a “large party nuisance...continues unabated for 30 minutes or more and emanates from a gathering of ten or more people where the gathering is not completely contained within a structure, but spills outdoors into balconies, yards, common areas, parking lots, or other outdoor spaces and is plainly audible across a property line.” • Decibel level exceeds 55 dB. You are <i>not</i> required to record a decibel level. The descriptions above assume a decibel level exceeding 55 dB.* <p><small>*Smartphone apps are available for decibel readers, but they should only serve as a reference point for you, if you choose. They are not admissible in court. The WPD has a certified decibel reader.</small></p>	<p align="center">(757) 220-2331</p>
<p>Profanity Per City code, “If any person shall, in the presence or hearing of another, curse or abuse such person, or use any violent, abusive language to such person concerning such person or any of his relations, <i>or otherwise use such language, under circumstances reasonably calculated to provoke a breach of the peace</i>, he shall be guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor.”</p>	<p align="center">(757) 220-2331</p>
<p>Parking on the Street in a Restricted Zone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the location and reason for your concern. • Note the make, color, and tag number of the automobile(s). 	<p align="center">(757) 220-2331 or (757) 220-6254 (Parking Enforcement)</p>

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<p>Outdoor Fire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open fires (e.g., bonfires, fire pits) are restricted by size (e.g., height), containment type (e.g., open, trash can), proximity to structures (e.g., homes, sheds), and material (e.g., building materials may not be burned). • Note location, time, and reason for your concern. 	<p>(757) 220-2331 or 911 (if an emergency)</p>
<p>Drunk in Public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note location, time, and reason for your concern. • Drunk behavior may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staggering while walking ○ Having to be supported by others to walk ○ Confrontational behavior ○ Urinating in public ○ Suspected injury • Note the identity or physical features of individual(s). 	<p>(757) 220-2331 or 911 (if an emergency)</p>
<p>Speeding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the location, time, and reason for your concern. • Note the make, color, and tag number of the automobile. • Note the identity or physical features of the driver. 	<p>(757) 220-2331 or 911 (if an emergency)</p>
<p>Trespassing (whether in-progress or after-the-fact)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note location, time, and reason for your concern. • Note the identity or physical features of individual(s). 	<p>(757) 220-2331 or 911 (if an emergency)</p>
<p>Vandalism (whether in-progress or after-the-fact)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note location, time, and reason for your concern. • Note the identity or physical features of individual(s). 	<p>(757) 220-2331 or 911 (if an emergency)</p>
<p>Littering (that is, acts of littering on streets, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note location, time, and reason for your concern. • Note identity or physical features of individual(s) and/or vehicle(s). 	<p>(757) 220-2331</p>
<p>Refuse on Property / Poorly Maintained Property</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncollected trash or litter on property • Disrepair of structure 	<p>(757) 220-6139 (Code Compliance Office)</p>
<p>Car(s) Parked in the Yard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the location and reason for your concern. 	<p>(757) 220-6131 (Zoning Enforcement)</p>
<p>Suspected Violation of 3-Person Rule/4-Person Exception</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the location and reason for your concern. 	<p>(757) 220-6130 (Planning Office)</p>

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Do I have to report nuisances or concerns? No, everyone’s level of tolerance for the behavior of others (whether neighbors or guests in the neighborhood) is different. However, many of us feel unsure or uneasy about reporting nuisances or fears to officials. The purpose of this guide is to provide each of us with a degree of confidence about our rights and responsibilities when we are confronted with a need to make a decision like this.

Should I attempt to resolve the situation with the individual or groups of individuals about whom I have a concern? Probably not. When your concern has risen to a level that you are considering contacting the WPD, you should opt for that. Situations such as those listed in the accompanying table can quickly spiral out of control, especially after dark or when alcohol or multiple people are involved.



When I call, should I ask for a call back from the responding officer? Yes, we recommend that you do. A call back to you will help you gauge the level of future concerns you might have. However, whether you request a call-back or not, all calls for service dispatched to units are assigned an incident number, which can be utilized for call-tracking and statistical analysis.

Should I be afraid of retaliation? Upon contacting a dispatcher or official, you may choose to remain anonymous. Just let the dispatcher or official know. Also, WPD officers are trained to de-escalate conflict within neighborhoods. While no one can guarantee the reaction of any single individual, City officials have advised residents to contact authorities when there are persistent concerns or egregious incidents. Peace and security are important to our community.



Should I be concerned about being labeled a problem by the WPD? No. As residents, our expectations for peace, psychological well-being, protection of property, and safety are fair and reasonable. The City explicitly states, “...our mission as the city’s elected, career, and volunteer team is to continually provide and secure...**Safety** of our residents...**Quality** of our neighborhoods...**Involvement** of citizens in local government decisions....**Satisfaction** of those we serve.”



When William & Mary students are involved, should I contact an official at the university directly? This is your choice. W&M’s official position is that students living off-campus are of majority age and, therefore, are legally responsible for their own decisions and behavior. However, the Student Code of Conduct extends to behavior in the community, and W&M wants to maintain positive town-and-gown relationships. Therefore, their awareness of the seriousness of our concerns is important. The contact at the university is **Michael Fox** in the President’s Office. He can be reached at **(757) 221-1346** or mjfox1@wm.edu.

While the William & Mary Police Department is legally unable to enforce city codes or state codes in the city, **the number for the WMPD is 757-221-4596**. WMPD works very closely with WPD on noise violations and follow-ups. WMPD is in regular contact with the WPD command staff and has found success with confronting issues in conjunction with WPD and City residents.

Should I contact the landlord of a rental property directly when I have a concern? This is your choice. Tenants are responsible for their own behavior. Landlords are not compelled by city ordinance to be

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responsible for the behavior of their tenants, but landlords can be held responsible for the condition of the rental property. Some landlords demonstrate a genuine concern for maintaining both good properties and good relationships within neighborhoods. These landlords (that is, *landlords that care*) welcome contact from owner-residents. *Landlords that care* are willing to take proactive steps such as (a) speaking with their tenants about being responsible neighbors and (b) including non-party clauses in their rental contracts. It is also helpful to note that landlords of properties of a rental with a 4-person exception can be contacted by city officials if there are repeated or egregious violations of the city’s noise ordinance.

This seems so reactionary and negative. How can I address my concerns more proactively and positively? We all share this concern, but here are some other helpful steps:

- **Get to know your neighbors, including student renters.** In doing so, make your expectations for the peace, tranquility, attractiveness, and safety of our neighborhood clear to them. It might help to remind them of how they or their own family would want to be treated if in your situation. You might explain that families with young children, professionals with busy work-a-day lives, and retirees live in our neighborhoods. Encourage them to be a good neighbor.
- **Get to know the landlords and encourage them to be “Landlords That Care.”**
- **Talk with other owner-residents about any concerns you have.** One of the reasons why we choose to live in neighborhoods is so that we are part of a close-knit community and do not feel alone, powerless, or afraid. Talk with your neighbors and look out for each other.
- Attend meetings of the **Neighborhood Council of Williamsburg (NCW)**, which meets the first Saturday of each month 8:00 – 9:30 a.m. at the Quarterpath Recreation Center. A central part of the mission of the NCW is “to work as a team [among Williamsburg neighborhoods] to help the City and each other address the issues which affect the quality of life within the City and its neighborhoods.” It’s a great venue to connect with other Williamsburg residents, learn about interesting events and initiatives, and also share concerns with and enlist support from others.