CHARLOTTE

City Council
Follow-Up Report

September 9, 2011

August 22 – Citizens' Forum

Miracle House of Hope
Staff Resource: Deputy Chief Harold Medlock, CMPD, 704-432-0379, hmedlock@cmpd.org

At Council's August 22 meeting, supporters of the Miracle House of Hope at 1744 Wilmore Drive spoke to Council regarding what they perceive to be harassment from CMPD officers. City Council requested a report on the allegations from the supporters.

The Miracle House of Hope was founded by Bruce Little as a place where individuals can live while recovering from alcohol or drug addiction. Mr. Little feels that harassment from police officers began when he established the Miracle House of Hope in the Wilmore neighborhood. Two police officers own a home in the Wilmore neighborhood. One of the officers was familiar with Mr. Little through his prior involvement with CMPD and was aware that Mr. Little's driver's license had been revoked. On several occasions in 2009, the officer saw Mr. Little driving through the neighborhood. The officer eventually had warrants served on Mr. Little for driving with a revoked license and a fictitious tag. Mr. Little interpreted that as harassment. There was an instance in June of 2011 when the two officers drove by the Miracle House of Hope on their way to work, and Mr. Little and members of his church yelled at the officers and clapped as they drove by. On June 24 of this year, Mr. Little walked up and down in front of one of the officers' home for approximately one hour, taking pictures of the residence.

The complaints from Miracle House of Hope residents are focused on tickets that members of the group have received for soliciting in roadways and medians. The group solicits for donations all over the city and has been seen by officers in areas including Cotswold, West Boulevard and I-77, West Boulevard and South Tryon, the Ayrsley shopping center, and the University City area. CMPD officers have encountered the group at a number of locations and have responded to calls for service regarding their solicitations in a number of patrol divisions. The calls for service have indicated that their behavior has been aggressive and has included knocking on car windows.

Officers have issued citations to group members at various locations throughout the city. At least eight citations were issued between June 18 and August 22. In all cases, the Miracle House of Hope members were given verbal warnings prior to being cited and were ticketed only after failing to heed the officers' warnings that they were in violation of the law. All of the citations were based on violation of the city ordinance regarding solicitation from the street or median. None were based

on the type of literature distributed by the group. Officers are now using their in-car cameras to document encounters with Miracle House of Hope supporters.

Sgt. Bill Cunningham of the Central Division met with Mr. Little and his parishioners at the Miracle House of Hope the week of June 24. Sgt. Cunningham explained the laws relating to soliciting on streets and medians and provided them with a copy of the City ordinance. Mr. Little and his supporters were given an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback. The meeting has not resulted in any behavior change by members of the group.

In several instances, officers did confiscate the funds collected, plastic buckets, pamphlets, and ID badges and turned them into Property Control as evidence. The Police Attorney's Office advises that it is permissible to seize items that were used in commission of an offense. All of the items are appropriately documented on property sheets and copies of those sheets were given to the individuals from whom the items were seized. There are some discrepancies between the literature distributed by the Miracle House of Hope and the statements of its followers. The literature indicates that residents may stay at the house for free while fighting addiction. At least one of the group members who was issued a citation told the officers that residents of the Miracle House of Hope must raise $45.00 per day for their room and board and are allowed to keep any funds raised over that amount.

Despite repeated warnings and a meeting with CMPD, the residents of the Miracle House of Hope continue to violate the law. Police encountering them in violation of the law or responding to citizen calls for service regarding their behavior will continue to issue citations as they do to any other individual or group in violation of the ordinance.

City staff will ensure that Mr. Little and his associates also receive this information.