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Prepared Remarks
District Attorney Press Conference
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Thank you for being here this afternoon, with me are Assistant Chief Timothy Miller and Captain Jody Miller of the Williamsport Bureau of Police; Lisa Harbauch of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement; Chief County Detective William Weber; and Williamsport Codes Administrator Joe Girardi.

Strong neighborhoods are places we feel at home. They are places where the everyday practice of life occurs and, thus, neighborhoods become personally meaningful. Ann's Tavern, located at 503 Rose Street, had become a nuisance property, and the neighborhood was asking for law enforcement's help.

And so, our office worked in cooperation with the Williamsport Bureau of Police; the Bureau of Liquor Control Enforcement, and the Williamsport Bureau of Codes to close the property.

Ann's Tavern is now the third nuisance bar in the City that we have permanently closed since 2014. You may recall that we also closed the Port Tavern in March of 2014 and the Fifth Avenue Tavern last summer.

What each of the bars had in common is that they were neighborhood bars that had become a dangerous and unwelcome nuisance for the good residents whose homes were nearby. During the period of time from June 15, 2014 through September 16, 2015, the Williamsport Bureau of Police responded to 15 criminal incidents at Ann's Tavern that resulted in police action. These episodes included incidents of firearm violations, fighting, stabbing, assaults, robbery, theft, and public intoxication.

Recent incidents at Ann's Tavern included a brawl at the bar during the early morning hours of July 4, 2015. The bar's video cameras captured the melee, showing punches and chairs being thrown, as well as people swinging pool sticks. A total of six people were arrested on charges including Defendant Dwayne Hall, who has also been charged with the shooting death of Irahmeen Mills in the 700 block of Fourth Street on September 6th, just 5 days after Hall was arraigned on the Assault related charges.

In a separate case, Ann's Tavern was again a crime scene, when Samuel Duane Childress was arrested for allegedly stabbing 2 bar patrons, one inside the bar, the other outside, at about 2:15 a.m. on September 16, 2015.

Neighbors in the immediate vicinity surrounding Ann's Tavern have signed complaint letters addressing their concern for their safety and the negative impact that Ann's Tavern has had on them and their neighborhood. It had become apparent that the bar could not control the patrons and persons attracted to the vicinity of the bar, and that the acts associated with the bar would continue to terrorize the neighborhood and force residents to live in fear and danger of shootings and other violent acts.

It was at that time that I, along with the Williamsport Bureau of Police and Liquor Enforcement met with the owners of Ann's Tavern, Rochelle Hurlbutt and Sidney Litzelman, to explain that it was the intention of the District Attorney's Office to file an injunction against the property under the Liquor Code. Ms. Hurlbutt and Mr. Litzelman cooperated with my office and agreed to Ann Tavern's immediate closure and further agreed not to re-open the property until we could reach a long-term settlement agreement.

Under the Liquor Code, the District Attorney's Office has the power to seek a court injunction against a nuisance bar that can result in its closure for up to one year. But law enforcement and the neighbors of Rose Street wanted a long term fix. We did not want to find ourselves back in the same situation one year from now.

And so, by agreement, Ms. Hurlbutt and Mr. Litzelman sold the property, its contents and their liquor license at auction on January 23, 2015. The owners have further agreed to the filing of a new deed on the property that now places a deed restriction at 503 Rose Street, effectively preventing it from ever operating as a liquor establishment again in the future.

As I stated previously, Ann's Tavern is now the third nuisance bar in the City that we have permanently closed over the last 2 years. Last spring the Fifth Avenue Tavern was the scene of a homicide. Defendant Derrick Boone was arrested following the fatal shooting of Yusef Wilson inside that bar at 1:00 a.m. on April 25, 2015. We likewise met with the owner of the Fifth Avenue Tavern, and within a few months of that fatal shooting and had agreed to the voluntary closure of that bar as well.

Because the Fifth Avenue Tavern was in close proximity to Penn College, and was frequented by its students, its continuing operation was a concern not only to the neighborhood but to the College as well. I reached out to the Penn College to gauge their interest in purchasing the Fifth Avenue Tavern property outright.

Very quickly, the sale of the property to the College was finalized and on October 30, 2015 the Fifth Avenue Tavern was bulldozed and raised and is now a grassy lot, returning much needed peace and quiet to that area.

In every instance where we have used our power under the Liquor Code to force the closure of these nuisance bars, the neighborhood has been grateful. I know I speak for the Williamsport Bureau of Police, the Pennsylvania Liquor Enforcement, and Williamsport Codes when I say that it has been our pleasure to help.

We will continue to work with bar owners who seek our assistance in maintaining a cooperative and symbiotic relationship with their neighbors. But I will not hesitate to exercise the powers granted to me under the law to force the closure of bars that can no longer control the patrons attracted to their establishment and that continue to reek chaos on the neighborhood and residents around them.