

Van Grack backs police foot patrols

by Stephanie Reynolds

Mayor Steven Van Grack said he is "very inclined" to support more police foot patrols in Rockville.

"I'm very receptive to that. I might even be a strong proponent," Van Grack said Monday.

This is the second summer that Rockville police officers have left their cars to patrol the neighborhoods of Lincoln Park and Mary-

vale on foot.

Van Grack walked with officers John Converse and Alan Rawlings as they patrolled the two adjacent neighborhoods Friday afternoon.

"I wanted to have firsthand knowledge on what's going on down there," Van Grack said.

He added that the program also might be effective in other neigh-

borhoods, such as Twinbrook.

Two police officers patrol Lincoln Park and Maryvale on foot Tuesday through Saturday between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Police Chief Jared Stout expects this year's program to end sometime in October, depending on the weather. After that, according to Stout, the department will gear up for the holiday season, when crimes such as burglaries usually increase.

Foot patrol is suited to the Lincoln Park and Maryvale neighborhoods, said Stout, because it is more effective at dispelling such warm-weather problems as "on-street disorderly gathering, drinking, the sale of drugs, verbal comments to people walking on the street...all of which disturb the ability of residents to enjoy some measure of peace in their front yards."

Patrolling on foot also allows officers to get to know residents better, particularly younger children, said Stout, "to close the distance."

"I think we've achieved both parts," he said, citing an increase in the number of area blocks now involved in Neighborhood Watch.

Stout also said he believes the community generally supports the foot patrol program.

Van Grack agreed, saying residents told him Friday they would support an extension of the program to the evening hours.

"They don't want to be under a controlled police state, but they like the foot patrols," he said.

Foot patrol is more expensive than car patrol because the officers cover a smaller area, according to Stout. He said he would like to expand the program by adding a nighttime patrol and increasing the number of months the program operates.

Van Grack said the city council might examine expanding the program after receiving the report of an outside consultant it has hired to study police services in Rockville. The report is expected in October.