



YOUR Community, YOUR Neighbors
OUR RESPONSIBILITY
get involved today

Columbia Neighborhood Watch

June 2026

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Summer Safety: Protecting Our Neighborhood During the Busy Season

Summer brings longer days, vacations, outdoor gatherings, and more activity throughout our neighborhoods. While this is a great time to connect with friends and neighbors, it is also a season when property crimes such as theft from vehicles, burglaries, and scams tend to increase. Criminals take advantage of distractions, open garages, and predictable routines.

Staying informed and practicing a few simple habits can greatly reduce the risk of becoming a victim.

"See Something, Say Something!"

In This Issue:

Letter from Chief Schlude	2-3
CPD Liaisons Corner	4
Speaker Available	5
New Initiative	6
Vacation Awareness	7
Scam & Fraud Awareness	8
Crime Stoppers	9
Columbia Police Dept	10 -11
Support our Blue	12
Humor	13
Our Partners	14

If you see suspicious behavior:

- **Call 911 in an emergency**
- **Use 311 for non-emergency concerns**

COLUMBIA NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH is tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Message from the Chief

Dear Columbia residents,

As your Chief of Police, I am honored to serve a community that values safety, trust, and partnership. The Columbia Police Department's work depends on strong relationships with residents, neighborhood groups, businesses, and community partners, and I appreciate the continued role Neighborhood Watch members play in helping keep our community informed and engaged.

Recent citizen survey results reaffirmed what we hear often from residents: public safety remains a top priority in Columbia. In the survey, 51% of respondents identified the quality of police and fire services as an important issue, and 65% highlighted the importance of crime prevention efforts. Those priorities are central to how we think about staffing, response capacity, prevention, visibility and long-term public safety planning.

Columbia has changed significantly over the past several decades. Since 2000, our city has grown by nearly 50,000 residents. During that same time, police staffing has not kept pace with population growth or service demands. Today, Columbia has approximately 1.39 officers per 1,000 residents, which is lower than the number of officers per 1,000 residents the city had in 2000 and below both the national average of 2.3 and the Midwest average of 2.2 officers per 1,000 residents.

This staffing gap affects more than emergency response. It also affects the department's ability to maintain visible patrols, conduct traffic enforcement, follow up on neighborhood concerns, investigate crime, engage with residents, and dedicate officers to proactive prevention efforts. When staffing is limited, officers spend more time moving from call to call, which reduces the time available for problem-solving and community policing.

The public safety tax initiative that will appear on the Aug. 4, 2026, ballot is intended to address several long-term public safety needs in Columbia. From the police department's perspective, the plan includes adding 50 police officers over four years, reinstating dedicated units such as a Downtown Unit and Traffic Unit, investing in technology, supporting officer wellness, funding the pension, and addressing facility needs, including replacement of the department's 93-year-old Downtown headquarters.

Message from the Chief

Additional staffing would allow the department to improve patrol capacity, increase visibility in neighborhoods and high-activity areas, strengthen traffic safety efforts, improve response capacity, and provide more time for proactive work. Facility needs are also part of the long-term discussion. The current Downtown police headquarters is 93 years old and was not designed for the size, technology, evidence needs, training demands, or operational complexity of a modern police department. A new facility would provide the space and infrastructure needed to better support police operations, training, employee wellness, and future growth.

Officer wellness and retention are also important parts of public safety capacity. Recruiting and training a police officer takes significant time, and it can take approximately 10 to 12 months before a newly hired officer is fully trained and working independently. Retaining experienced officers, supporting their wellness, and ensuring competitive compensation and benefits are essential to maintaining a stable and effective police department.

As Chief of Police, my role is to provide factual information about the department's current needs, operational challenges, and how proposed funding could be used if approved by voters. I encourage residents to learn about the issue, ask questions, and make an informed decision when the initiative appears on the ballot.

Thank you for your continued trust, partnership, and commitment to the safety of Columbia. Neighborhood Watch members are an important part of our public safety network, and we appreciate your continued engagement with the Columbia Police Department.

**Sincerely,
Police Chief Jill Schlude
Columbia Police Department**



Highlights from Officer Thornsberry

THEFT PREVENTION TIPS RELAYED FROM THE COLUMBIA POLICE DEPARTMENT'S CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIVE DIVISION:

#1 thing to protect yourself is to lock your car doors and close your garage doors.

Groups of people (mostly juveniles) walk around at night and check car doors and enter open garage doors. If the doors are locked, they usually keep moving until they find easier targets.

Scammers often trick their victims into sending gift cards, itunes cards, or Google play cards. They claim the funds can be used to pay for missed jury duty, taxes, bail, debt collections, or towards fees to pay for computer virus protection. Scammers also contact their victims via email, text, or facebook and pretend to be a friend and ask for gift cards.

The scammers express the need for quick action. They tell their victims not to tell anyone what they are doing, and that they will be arrested if they hang up or don't cooperate.

If a friend has asked you to buy them gift cards, please talk to that friend in person or over the phone before you purchase any.

Government agencies will not ask for gift cards as payment for fines or bail.

If you think someone is trying to steal your money with one of these scams, please call 311 to have an officer contact you for more potential report details.

CNW Speakers Available for Clubs and Organizations

Columbia Neighborhood Watch (CNW) offers knowledgeable speakers who are available to present at neighborhood associations, civic groups, clubs, churches, and other organizations interested in community safety and crime prevention.

CNW speakers provide practical information on topics such as neighborhood watch basics, crime prevention strategies, personal safety, and how residents can partner with law enforcement to keep neighborhoods safe and connected. Presentations can be tailored to be from 5 minutes to 30 minutes and are designed to be informative, engaging, and easy to understand.

Organizations interested in scheduling a CNW speaker are encouraged to reach out in advance to discuss audience size, and timing. These presentations are a great way to educate members, spark discussion, and strengthen community involvement in public safety efforts.

For more information or to request a speaker for your club or organization, contact Columbia Neighborhood Watch at:

col.neighwatch@gmail.com

Columbia Neighborhood Watch Launches Citywide Initiative

Columbia Neighborhood Watch (CNW) has launched a multi-year outreach initiative designed to strengthen neighborhood safety and expand community involvement across Columbia. The initiative focuses on increasing participation in Neighborhood Watch programs while strengthening partnerships between residents and the Columbia Police Department.

“Our mission has always been simple—neighbors looking out for neighbors,” This initiative gives every subdivision in Columbia a clear and easy path to start or strengthen a Neighborhood Watch group, with free training, materials, and ongoing support.”

The outreach effort follows a structured three-phase approach. The first phase focuses on neighborhoods that already have homeowners associations or active leadership, helping them expand watch groups, recruit block captains, and connect directly with law enforcement. The second phase reaches neighborhoods that need assistance getting organized by offering presentations at meetings, training sessions, and volunteer recruitment support. The final phase emphasizes long-term sustainability by preparing experienced volunteers to mentor new groups and develop future CNW leaders.

CNW provides all services at no cost to participating neighborhoods. Support includes Neighborhood Watch training, help recruiting block captains, watch signs and materials, safety education resources, and direct communication channels with the Columbia Police Department. Ongoing mentorship helps neighborhoods keep their watch programs active and effective.

This initiative is part of CNW’s long term vision to achieve consistent growth in active Neighborhood Watch groups and broader citywide participation in the years ahead. This effort ensures that no part of Columbia is left behind.”

Neighborhood associations, HOA boards, and subdivision leaders interested in participating are encouraged to schedule a brief 5–7 minute presentation at an upcoming meeting. CNW handles all setup, training, and materials, making it easy for neighborhoods to take the first step toward a safer, more connected community.

CNW can be contacted by emailing at: col.neighwatch@gmail.com

Summer travel can unintentionally signal to criminals that a home is unoccupied. Before leaving town, take steps to make your home appear lived in.

Helpful tips include:

- Ask a trusted neighbor to watch your home
- Place lights on timers
- Secure doors, windows, and garage entry points
- Hold mail deliveries or use a locking mailbox

Avoid posting travel plans or real-time vacation photos on social media. A well-connected neighborhood is one of the most effective deterrents to burglary.

Vehicle Theft & Theft From Vehicle Prevention

The most common summer crime reported by Neighborhood Watch programs nationwide is theft from unlocked vehicles. In many cases, thieves simply check door handles and move on if the vehicle is locked.

Residents are encouraged to:

- Always lock your vehicle and close all windows
- Never leave keys or key fobs inside the vehicle
- Remove valuables or keep them out of sight
- Park in well-lit areas whenever possible

Lock garage doors and the door between the garage and house

Even small items left in plain view—such as purses, backpacks, change, or electronics—can make a vehicle a target.

If you ever have questions about CNW or how to get involved, we can be contacted at: col.neighwatch@gmail.com

Scammers remain active year-round and often increase efforts during the summer months, posing as government agencies, businesses, or even friends and family. Many scams rely on urgency, fear, and secrecy.

Important reminders:

- Government agencies will **never** request payment using gift cards
- Do not click links or provide personal information from unsolicited emails or texts
- If something feels off, slow down and verify before acting

When in doubt, contact the person or agency directly using a verified number

If you believe you are being targeted by a scam, contact **CPD at 311** for guidance.

Working Together Makes a Difference

Neighborhood Watch is not about confrontation—it's about awareness, communication, and caring for one another. Getting to know your neighbors, watching for unusual activity, and reporting concerns promptly helps law enforcement respond more effectively.

If you see suspicious behavior:

- Call **911** in an emergency
- Use **311** for non-emergency concerns

See Something, Say Something

A quick phone call or conversation with a neighbor can prevent a crime before it happens. Thank you for doing your part to help keep Columbia's neighborhoods safe, connected, and welcoming this summer.

Last June we implemented a new on-line Crimestoppers reporting QR Code. I am pleased to say that since this program was initiated and we have received over 400 tips. That's more tips in one year than we have received in the existence of Crimestoppers. Just the past month alone we have received 38 tips. From January until May we receive 211 tips. We appreciate the number of tips coming in. The highest number of tips are drug related tips. Please let's continue the upward trend in submitting tips to Crimestoppers, "As Always Remember!" "We know that you know something we'd like to know!" "If you See Something Say Something!" Crimestoppers pay up to \$2,500.00 for any tips that lead to an arrest.

*Columbia/Boone County Crime Stoppers is a nonprofit program that allows citizens to anonymously report information about crimes. Working with local law enforcement and media, Crime Stoppers helps solve felony cases and may offer cash rewards for tips that lead to arrests. Submit tips online at 875tips.com or call **573-875-TIPS (8477)**.*

Secure your haven: Protecting your home while on vacation

Anticipating a vacation brings a sense of excitement, but leaving your property unattended can introduce unwelcome anxiety. Burglars frequently seek out easy opportunities, targeting homes that show obvious signs of vacancy.

Fortunately, by taking a few proactive steps, you can secure your home and enjoy true peace of mind while you are away.

Create the illusion of life

The primary objective of home security during travel is to make your house look actively occupied. Intruders usually monitor neighborhoods for indicators of an empty property.

Manage your deliveries: A mounting pile of mail, packages, or newspapers on your doorstep is an immediate giveaway. Request a temporary mail hold through the postal service or ask a trusted neighbor to collect your items daily.

Automate your lighting: Leaving a porch light on 24/7 looks just as suspicious as a completely dark house. Use smart plugs or traditional light timers to program interior and exterior lights to turn on and off at natural intervals throughout the evening.

Maintain the property: If you plan to be away for more than a week, arrange for a local service or a neighbor to mow your lawn. An overgrown yard quickly signals your absence.

Reinforce physical defenses

Before you head out on the highway, conduct a thorough walkthrough of your home's perimeter.

Lock every entry point: This sounds obvious, but secondary access points like basement windows, second-floor sliders, and the door linking your garage to the house are easily overlooked.

Secure the garage: Unplug your automatic garage door opener. Professional thieves sometimes use universal remotes or bypass mechanisms to trick garage doors into opening.

Hide your spares: Collect any spare keys hidden under doormats, flowerpots, or fake rocks. Experienced burglars know exactly where to look.

CPD offers tips to help prevent robberies

Robberies in Columbia aren't common, especially when compared to larger cities, but they do happen. In 2025 there were more than 40 reports of robberies and purse snatchings in the city.

Here are 15 tips to keep yourself and your possessions safe while you're out and about:

1. Be aware of your surroundings. Walk with a purpose, head up, and look around. Stay in lighted areas at night. Robbers don't want to be seen.
2. Stay with the crowd – there is safety in numbers.
3. Women should carry their wallet in their pocket, not their purse.
4. Don't leave a purse on a counter or in a shopping cart unattended.
5. Be cautious when wearing “flashy” jewelry.
6. Be conscious of people just “hanging around” anywhere, especially near public rest rooms, building entrances and garages.
7. Notify the police of strangers who are hanging around your home, apartment or place of business for no apparent reason.
8. Don't carry large sums of cash whenever possible.
9. Vary your routine – don't do the same thing at exactly the same time every day.
10. Be aware of people around you when you are using your ATM card. When possible, use an ATM that is located inside a business, such as a grocery store.
11. Lock your car doors when your vehicle is unattended even if you will only be out of it for a minute. When you return to your vehicle, look at the rear seats to make sure no one is hiding.
12. While driving, keep your vehicle doors locked.
13. If you are walking and a vehicle is following you, reverse directions or cross the street.
14. If someone acts suspiciously, looks at you closely or follows you, head for a populated and well-lit area, and call the police.

Show your support for our Police. To raise awareness we are selling “Back the Blue” signs for your yard or window at a cost of \$20 which is considered a charitable donation to a 501(c)3 organization.



The sign will be delivered and can be purchased on our website or click below.

Control click the button below

[PURCHASE SIGN](#)

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