

Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force

Minutes

Wednesday

May 15, 2024

6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Charles Houston Recreation Center

901 Wythe Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

- ❖ Please advise Chairman Dillon of any discrepancies regarding attendance. It is respectfully noted that Task Force members are expected to attend at least 75% of scheduled meetings. Please advise Chairman Dillon if you need to be excused.

Task Force Members Present: Jim Dillon (Chair, Business Community), Dana Wedeles (City Manager's Office), Timothy Beaty (Alexandria School Board), Rachael Dischner (Elementary School), Tim Brannon (Francis C. Hammond Middle School), Frank Broomell (Citizen At-Large), Steven Nelson (African American Community), Brian Kirkes (Citizen At-Large), Roberto Gomez (Parent Representative), Reverend Anthony Oliver (Faith Based Community), and Cassandra Lewis (ARHA Resident).

Senior Policy Group on Gangs Members Present: Sheriff Sean Casey (Alexandria Sheriff's Office) and Mike Mackey (Alexandria Court Service Unit).

Guests/Staff: Deputy Carlos Canas (Sheriff's Office), Officer Anggelo Suarez (APD), Sgt. Ian Torrance (APD), Lt. Tara May (APD), Asia Jones (DCHS), Carlton Gerald (ACPS), David Ulloa (Alexandria Mentoring Partnership), Alston Waller (Boys and Girls Club), Kennetra Wood (ACPS), Michael Diggins (ACPS), and Dr. Marcia Jackson (ACPS).

Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force Members:

1. Councilman Canek Aguirre (Member, Alexandria City Council)
2. Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins (Member, Alexandria City Council)
3. Ms. Dana Wedeles (City Manager's Representative)
4. Mr. Timothy Beaty (Alexandria City School Board)
5. Mr. Michael Burch (Alexandria City High School Representative)
6. Mr. Tim Brannon (Francis C. Hammond Middle School, Middle School Representative)
7. Ms. Rachael Dischner (Elementary School Representative)
8. Mr. Steve Nelson (African American Community Representative)
9. Mr. Bryan Kirkes (Citizen Member, At-Large)

10. Mr. Jim Dillon (Chair/Business Community Representative)
 11. Ms. Marilyn Nevy Cruz (Vice Chair/Latino Community Representative)
 12. Reverend Anthony T. Oliver (Faith Based Community Representative)
 13. Mr. Roberto Gomez (Parent Representative)
 14. Mr. Mubashir Adelaja (At-Large, Representing Youth of the City)
 15. Mr. Everin Zelaya (At-Large, Representing Youth of the City)
 16. Mr. Frank Broomell (Citizen Member, At-Large)
 17. Ms. Cassandra Lewis (Resident of ARHA Properties)
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1. Call to Order and Roll Call: Chair Dillon called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. All present confirmed their attendance. Ms. Lewis introduced herself and shared why she decided to join the task force.
 2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes: There was a quorum to approve meeting minutes from March 20, and the minutes were approved.
 3. Our Lenses:
 - Focus on At-Risk and At-Promise kids, versus crew and gang members
 - Widen our age target, as early as 5th grade, while not losing site of the parents
 - Build opportunities and support outside of school and home
 - Look more critically at areas that face the biggest challenges
 - Advocate to support our partner efforts
 4. City Council Opening Comments: None.
 5. Public Comment: None.
 6. Partner and Task Force Member Updates:
 - Mr. Nelson said mentoring is going well, but there is always a need for more mentors.
 - Mr. Gomez said he is waiting for his nonprofit to receive 501(c)(3) from the IRS. There are 30 youth on the waitlist for his program. He provided more details about his program and said he is right on the verge of getting the funding needed to bring kids off the waitlist. He also plans on bringing the program into the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home to help youth get set up with employment opportunities upon reentry to their communities.
 - Timothy Beaty spoke about the ACPS initiative to get more youth involved in sports on the middle school level, through the launch of a middle school athletics program. He also spoke about the new Minnie Howard campus and how it meets

the environmental standards of the city and reflects the values in the community. He stated Minnie Howard will be a campus for all four grades.

- Mr. Kirkes asked a question about APD being awarded a grant to prevent gun violence. Sgt. Torrance and Lt. May talked about how current funds are being used and noted that later funding will be geared to help law enforcement in the area of gun violence prevention.
- Officer Suarez noted that a futsal tournament will be held June 15.
- Mike Mackey announced the possibility of offering new prevention services to help youth avoid court involvement.

7. Deputy Canas:

- Deputy Canas provided demographic information about jail population.
- He reminded the task force about the definition of gangs according to VA Code.
- He stated MS13 represents the largest number of gang members since 2003 (approximately 453).
- Since 2003, approximately 224 Security Threat Groups (STGs)/gangs have been in the jail.
- He provided info regarding significant gang leaders who have been in the jail.
- Mr. Kirkes asked question about Sheriff's role vs. Chief of Police role. Sheriff Casey clarified by highlighting some differences between the two, and Lt. Tara May reiterated the good working relationship APD has with the Sheriff's Office.
- Deputy Canas said there are certain protocols in place to protect certain persons in the jail.
- Mr. Gerald stated how there needs to be more emphasis on providing adults with more information on how to communicate with parents about their youth's potential involvement in a gang.
- Ms. Dischner talked about the need to talk to families at the elementary school level. He reiterated the importance of law enforcement and gang prevention workers coming to talk to parents. She said true prevention involves having more of those face-to-face conversations.
- Mr. Dillon and other members stated there is a need for more of task force presence needed at community cookouts. Next community cookout is May 21 at Southern Towers.

8. Gang Prevention Coordinator Updates:

- Mr. Daniele announced that Junior Academy ended last week and was very successful. The academy participants were recognized at City Hall legislative meeting last night. Feedback from youth will be provided at next task force meeting.
- Mr. Dillon shared about how much work went into this initiative and the desire to build more capacity for successful future iterations.
- Mr. Daniele highlighted the Pillars Series also finished April 30 and was successful.
- Dr. Jackson mentioned a need for more in school time programming.

- Ms. Wedeles mentioned how the Youth Support Network is working on a program locator. Mr. Ulloa mentioned that Taneika Tukan with ACPS is involved in this initiative.
- Mr. Daniele talked about Senior Policy Work Group meetings that have been taking place and how more focused objectives are needed. Mr. Daniele presented the top three objectives for the task force in FY25:
 1. Strengthen mechanisms for receiving and acting upon relevant information within the task force and amongst partnering agencies.
 2. Provide opportunities and social intervention to underserved populations most at risk of gang/crew involvement.
 3. Advocate for formal and informal social controls, such as appropriate Law Enforcement staffing levels to address gang/crew issues.
- Mr. Daniele talked about the need to establish a baseline of current data regarding youth prosocial activity involvement and juvenile delinquency.
- Ms. Dischner mentioned the idea of incorporating talks or other curriculum like the Pillars Series into ACPS academies.
- Mr. Waller talked about need to connect more kids with different trades, in addition to presenting them with college opportunities.

9. Chairman's Readout:

- Mr. Dillon provided his perspective on and got feedback from the group on his SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis. Some of the items discussed included the following:
 - Further emphasis needed on leveraging voices in the room.
 - Sgt. Torrance said we need more involvement from parents.
 - Dr. Jackson talked about making sure we keep in mind human needs along the lines of mental health and trauma.
 - Mr. Kirkes asked for more info from ACHS on what schools are doing to address bullying and other issues in the schools.

10. New Topics:

- May is Mental Health Awareness Month.
- Arlington's Annual Gang Prevention Soccer Tournament will be held towards the end of June at Washington Liberty High School. Mr. Daniele will send out email with flyer/additional information.

11. Administrative Items:

- Task Force members shall attend at least 75 percent of the meetings of the bodies on which they serve each year.

12. Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 26, 2024, 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. at Charles Houston Recreation Center.

Remaining 2024 Schedule

June 26

September 18

November 20

13. Meeting Adjourn: 7:43 p.m.