

Health & Safety Coordinating Committee

Minutes

Friday, January 10, 2025

8 a.m. – 9 a.m.

City Council Workroom, Alexandria City Hall

301 King Street, Alexandria VA 22314

Attendees: Mayor Alyia Gaskins; Alexandria City Councilwoman Jacinta Greene; Kate Garvey, Director, Department of Community and Human Services; Alethea Predeoux, Deputy City Manager; Dana Wedeles, Strategic Initiatives Officer, City Manager’s Office; Shawn Casey, Sheriff of the City of Alexandria; Jim Parajon, City Manager; Tarrick McGuire, Chief of Police, Alexandria Police Department; Felipe Hernandez, Fire Chief, Alexandria Fire Department; Yon Lambert, Deputy City Manager; Natalie Talis, Population Health Manager, Alexandria Health Department; Miguel Blancas, Deputy Director, Alexandria Criminal Justice Services; Desha Hall-Winstead, Alexandria Criminal Justice Services; Mike Mackey, Director, Court Service Unit; Alex Carroll, Complete Streets Program, Manager, Transportation and Environmental Services; Amanda Calligheri, Supervisory Crime Analyst, Alexandria Police Department; Jack Browand, Interim Director, Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities; Marcia Jackson, Chief of Student Services, ACPS; Helen McIlvaine, Housing Director, City of Alexandria; Dennis Andreas, Captain, Alexandria Police Department; David Lord, Office of Commonwealth’s Attorney; Leyla Dawson, graduate student supporting the Office of the Mayor; Paul Garbarino, graduate student supporting the Office of the Mayor; Josh Ferguson, analyst, Office of Performance Analytics; Gregg Fields, Director, Code Administration; Bryan Smith, A/V support, ITS; Tenesia Wells, DECC

1. Introductions:

Mayor Gaskins began the meeting stressing the importance of the Committee’s work, and how the City and its citizens depend heavily on this committee and its members, its departments toward the City’s well-being and management. Mayor Gaskins introduced Councilwoman Greene, who was attending this meeting as an elected official for the first time, and she elaborated on that, and how she had collaborated previously with many members present on previous initiatives and projects.

Mayor Gaskins said that at conclusion of the meeting, she wished to have seen the delivery of three things:

-HSCC background; a quick narrative description

-Committee reports, specifically Significant Change Data; and Data Report Improvements;

-HSCC Approach – Discussion on future meetings format and topic areas

2. **SIO Dana Wedeles:** begins by offering **HSCC background** and its 1980s inception; Meetings always held the first Friday of five select months. Used to be called the Alexandria Quality of Life Committee, and noted that as time progressed, the working emphasis was placed more on data and interagency data dissemination rather than its former iteration, which relied heavily on report-outs. CCJB joins HSCC for two meetings each year.

3. Significant Change Data portion of the meeting:

Sheriff Casey reported that one of our indicators – our federal jail population – has demonstrated a significant increase. Our jail has had a robust relationship with the federal government for several years, dating back to the jail’s inception in 1987.

- Many federal pretrial detainees were to be housed in the new upcoming jail, and the City took \$2.3M in federal funds to slightly expand the jail. We now house 150 pretrial (this number fluctuates) detainees. Alexandria receives a \$6M to \$6.5M stipend for that. Our jail can accommodate 340 inmates.
- During covid, the population dropped significantly (a trend elsewhere, too). We saw a short uptick after covid ended. Right now we have a local population of 147 inmates in house, and 127 federal detainees.
- While these numbers have dropped, some of the population are deemed as much more “acute,” and require much more attention.

City Manager Parajon added that a lot of this data mentioned may not necessarily be a trend, but a factor at a particular point in time, so a spike may not at all indicate a trend but an instance in time, and not a pattern, per se.

Mayor Gaskins added that even though we might have less people, their needs are more complex, mental health and addiction often accompany people coming in, particularly in the younger population. These institutions need to adapt to meet this demand.

Mike Mackey notes that we are understaffed when it comes to meeting the mental health needs of the population. This makes it a challenge to recruit staff.

Sheriff Casey reports that we have a recruitment plan, and have stepped up efforts digitally, and in-person, to bring in staff. Recruitment candidate numbers are up 400%, but the applicants are not meeting the standard. Oftentimes, candidates have criminal charges against them when they show up for the interview process. This is a recent trend across the region, he adds.

City Manager Parajon prompted Sheriff Casey about a hiring bonus program he has authorized to attract candidates.

Sheriff Casey said that this program has been implemented, but it is still a tough environment in which to hire.

Mayor Gaskins inquired about construction that is to take place in some of the jail space – when does that start, she asked the Sheriff.

Sheriff Casey said that DGS is going out for bid this or next month, coupling this with a job taking place at 2003-2001 Mill Road. Major plumbing work to ensue and will be complicated by sinking ground underneath the jail building itself.

SIO Dana Wedeles then adds how to discuss how we approach these meetings, going forward, offering the 3 format options (last change to the meeting format was in 2015):

- Option 1, “As-Is” using Significant Change Data and/or full data report on topic area
- Option 2, “Deep-Dive,” a little bit of a hybrid, to guide in-depth discussions around shared programs and resources as a topic
- Option 3, “Listening Session,” Significant Change Data and “listening sessions” with community organizations/ reps at various locations, giving staff an opportunity to listen. Could be a moveable event, and an “eyes and ears” option.

Deputy Manager Yon Lambert added that for #3, let’s think about the listening session allowing people to identify departments and problems that arise, but not to turn it into a problem-solving forum, and to leave for follow-up and conclusion in subsequent meetings.

SIO Dana Wedeles cited Friends of Guest House as a potential site for an Option #3 meeting, as Guest House and its mission encompass housing many of the aforementioned issues and interests.

Mayor Gaskins asked, regarding Option #2: Is the idea that there would be a space for real-time problem solving?

Deputy Manager Yon Lambert responded that often it takes more time and with 30 ppl in the room, not enough time would be allowed. Key stakeholders need more time and could report out later after consultation with subject matter experts.

Councilwoman Greene then inquired about hearing more about option #1.

David Lord said that that the meeting format did not matter as much as how should his department tailor the information in a way that makes it easier to deliver their data.

Helen McIlvaine asked how can we use the brain trust to work on specific trends or issues in the community.

Mayor Gaskins reiterated Helen’s point about ‘what are we not getting.’ She recounts scenarios re: an apartment housing situation, ACPS and programming, and etc. How are we looking at the data to see that these things are working? How are we looking at performance measures? Where are the pieces where we still need to communicate and work together? She cites these meetings as good places for all departments to convene their thoughts.

(No ID) asked ‘what is it that informs policy?’ and ‘what is it that informs your work, makes this different from other venues? Asking these questions allows the dept heads focus in more on Council priorities.

(No ID) agrees that inquiries like this illuminate such challenges

Mayor Gaskins asked the room if the forementioned models were suited to help department heads address the issues, and challenge areas.

APD Chief McGuire said indicated his looking at #3, all the while asking that data drives the conversation in such a format.

(No ID) called for the importance of using specific data to be used to enhance the conversation.

Mayor Gaskins said that in the last such meeting they discussed the frequency of false alarms, and their coming from the same building.

Tenesia Wells said that she liked the data, but that we were missing the interconnectedness of the data and their respective departments. She cited the interconnectedness of 911 and 311 calls as an example.

(No ID) said that such data is crucial to serving the needs of the students, and that perhaps **smaller meetings** would allow respective departments to fulfill that need. Smaller meetings sometimes allow people to feel more comfortable when discussing such matters.

(No ID) said that special topics and presentations have been really helpful.

Mayor Gaskins said that what she is hearing loudly/clearly is that the data has to be the foundation in how we start these conversations, and that every meeting may not need to be the same format (sic) and maybe smaller groups are better. Are we getting what the Council needs? Are we sending you the topics that we need to discuss? She gives pause regarding the ‘outside organizations’ aspect of such programming. But focusing on *internal* power, what is that we are doing internally with each other, that is helpful?

Councilwoman Greene said that a little tweaking / revision might be helpful.

(No ID) #1 and #2 are great, but we need to add a piece regarding how this group is working. We need to find a way to measure that, and doing it in a department-specific approach sio would be great.

City Manager Parajon mentioned the importance of looking at data, and that #1 and #2 would be good....but sometimes getting more focused is good, and that multiple departments may meet in a smaller venue, so as to not water down the message and approach toward a solution.

SIO Dana Wedeles mentioned that quick updates from departments might be helpful.

Mayor Gaskins looked toward the next meeting, which will be in March.

City Manager Parajon also said that focusing on what Council wants could inform the March – and subsequent – meetings.

Mayor Gaskins concurred with Manager Parajon, regarding a Council priorities-based approach, too.

Housing Director Helen McIlvaine said that perhaps different departments could arrive at such meetings with white papers or progress updates to inform the group.

DCHS Director Kate Garvey said that focusing on helping unhoused people, working on mental health issues in advance of the March meeting would be helpful.

APD Chief McGuire agreed that yes, and to connect with that thought process, namely TDOs, which connect to the mental health issue, might be a good focus.

Kate Garvey said it might be appropriate to do a case study (in light of TDOs and mental health) to show exactly what happened and a conclusion thereof.

SIO Dana Wedeles said that re: those who are unhoused – best to wait until the May meeting, because CCJB is interested in that conversation.

Mayor Gaskins said I think we have three suggestions, asking Dana to coordinate with respective departments; the Mayor said she will work closely with Council to find out their priorities; and that we will test it out in March.

(No ID) said let's discuss the start-time of the meeting – perhaps a different start-time.

City Manager Parajon suggested a :30 minute later start time for March is better.

Mayor Gaskins seconded that ask, and the room responded with nodding heads, she noted.

(No ID – perhaps Mike Mackey) suggested that the 8 AM start time might work out better with the courts, due to the scheduling of the courts' workdays.

Mayor Gaskins stressed that it is important to have a consistent start time (whether it be 8 or 8:30 AM) to ensure continuity.

At **8:57 AM**, **Mayor Gaskins** adjourned the meeting.

END