

## **Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force**

### **Minutes**

Wednesday

June 25, 2025

6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

901 Wythe St., 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), Vice Mayor Bagley (City Council), Abdel-Rahman Elnoubi (Alexandria City Council), Marilyn Nevy Cruz (Vice Chair, Latino Community), Dana Wedeles (City Manager's Office), Timothy Beaty (Alexandria School Board), Michael Burch (Alexandria City High School), Timothy Brannon (Francis Hammond Middle School), Roberto Gomez (Parent of Youth), Reverend Anthony Oliver (Faith Based Community), Frank Broomell (Citizen At-Large), and Steve Nelson (African American Community).

Task Force Members Not Present: Bryan Kirkes (Citizen At-Large), Kurt Campos (Youth Representative), Rachael Dischner (Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School), and Cassandra Lewis (Resident of ARHA Properties).

Staff Group on Gangs Members Present: Sheriff Sean Casey (ASO), Michael Diggins (ACPS), and Carlos Canas (ASO).

Guests/Staff: Lt. Liz Magyar (APD), Carlos Mendieta (ACJS), Lisa Sheads (DJJ), Emily Gibson (DCHS/CSB), Sgt. Ben Saks (APD), Deputy Carlos Canas (ASO), Hope Sievers (Opioid Work Group), Jennifer Beatty (Commission for Women), Joseph Regotti (ACJS), Jessie Spaulding (ASP), Kennetra Wood (ACPS), Olivia Bassingthwaite (Alexandria Youth Ambassadors), Jasmine Coombs (DCHS), Anggelo Suarez (APD), and Lee Conroy (ACPS).

Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force Members:

1. Vice Mayor Sarah Bagley (Member, Alexandria City Council)
2. Councilman Abdel-Rahman Elnoubi (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 (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. Frank Broomell (Citizen Member, At-Large)
15. Ms. Cassandra Lewis (Resident of ARHA Properties)
16. Mr. Kurt Campos (At-Large, Representing Youth of the City)
17. Vacant (At-Large, Representing Youth of the City)

1. Call to Order and Roll Call: Mr. Daniele called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. All present confirmed their attendance.
2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes: There was a quorum to approve meeting minutes from May 21, and the minutes were approved.
3. City Council Opening Comments: None.
4. Updates from Task Force Members:
  - Roberto Gomez shared an update on Cornerstone Craftsman, which is expanding to serve up to 36 youth this summer through a wraparound approach addressing risk factors for court involvement and supporting youth in the juvenile justice system. At a Prince William County symposium, he presented the nonprofit's work, shared success stories including partnerships with Alive and ACPS teachers, and discussed a new economic and workforce development initiative. He also noted concerns from his network about youth avoiding public transportation due to disputes between African American and Afghan groups, and said he intervenes to deescalate potential violence or retaliation when possible.
  - Mr. Diggins acknowledged Mr. Gomez reception of the Champions of Children Award.
  - Pastor Oliver shared plans for the annual Back to School Block Party in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club, RPCA, and local barbershops. The event will offer haircuts, school supplies, clothing, food, and a CPR training provided by a partnering community member. Date and location details are forthcoming.
  - Mr. Nelson mentioned that the Bradlee Shopping Center had a few incidents right before school was let out although nothing major, there is a security guard in the

McDonalds that may be acting as a deterrent. He also said there are community cookouts going on throughout the summer. Those are listed on the city website as well as other good ways for community members to get involved.

- Mr. Beaty invited any present school staff to give announcements regarding summer school, sports programs or any other relevant upcoming events.
- Mr. Burch mentioned a monthly violence and gang prevention meeting that will be taking place between himself, Mr. Diggins, central office staff, and other community partners. Mr. Burch mentioned summer school includes about 500 students and they are all seniors and juniors due to the needs of the student population. Sports tryouts start July 31. Mr. Burch announced there are 19 female flag football teams starting in Fairfax, and Alexandria may have one as well.
- Mr. Beaty reported that the school board recently approved its annual budget. He also noted that the redistricting process is underway. While the new maps have already been drawn, they will not take effect until next year, at which point the changes will begin impacting residents. Most adjustments will affect elementary schools in the western part of the city, including expansions to the MacArthur and George Mason attendance zones. Finally, Mr. Beaty shared that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between APD and the schools regarding School Resource Officers is still in progress and expected to be finalized this fall.
- Vice Mayor Bagley shared that a final draft of the MOU between APD and the Auditor's Office is expected soon, with the goal of signing at the last public hearing before summer recess. Recent feedback from the board emphasized ensuring the auditor has access to crime scenes and involvement in officer-involved incidents. The auditor has been active in community engagement, for example recently setting up an outreach booth and speaking directly with residents about their experiences. While much feedback on APD was positive, some residents shared past concerns. The auditor brings significant legal and civil rights experience, and her presence has been well received. One seat on the commission remains vacant.
- Mr. Burch recognized the community outreach wing of APD and the impact its mentors have had, highlighting how every graduating student received a laptop.
- Mr. Gomez reported high youth interest in the Arlington gang prevention soccer tournament, including from surrounding counties and Maryland, noting a waitlist and the possibility of hosting a similar event in Alexandria.
- Mr. Daniele added that the Arlington Gang Prevention Soccer Tournament will take place June 28, 10 a.m.–6 p.m., at Washington-Liberty High School. Volunteers are still needed, with setup beginning at 9 a.m. Shifts are flexible, and a signup link is available.
- Councilman Elnoubi explained that state law requires the MOU to be renewed every two years. To guide this process, a joint subcommittee of City Council and School Board members was formed, known as SLEP 2.0 (following the original community-based SLEP 1.0). The subcommittee reviewed best practices, including the national “triad model” for SROs where the officer serves as a mentor, counselor, and law enforcement officer. Recommendations were made to strengthen the MOU by incorporating this model, adding metrics, and setting measurable goals for program success. Councilman Elnoubi said that while most

recommendations were accepted, a concern remained regarding student information sharing. The draft MOU gave SROs access to student records without going through administrative process. Both Council and the School Board were not comfortable with this, so the MOU will undergo another round of revisions to address this issue.

- Mr. Gomez reported that Mr. Kirkes recently brought a Washington Wizards player to visit the Cornerstone Craftsman facility, where about 16 youth participated. The Wizards plan to invite youth to games during the upcoming season, providing experiences they otherwise might not have access to. This may create opportunities for additional youth beyond those currently in the program to attend. Mr. Gomez also recognized Mr. Kirkes for helping secure up to \$40,000 in funding for the organization, which will expand available services. Additionally, he noted that Fury 13 Tattoo on Duke Street offers tattoo removal for adults with gang-related tattoos. While they are hesitant to work with minors, the service may be a resource for those seeking tattoo removal.
- Mr. Dillon reported on the second cohort of the Junior Academy held this past year. The program consisted of five sessions, though attendance was lower than expected. Despite that, the students who participated found it valuable and engaged, and Mr. Nelson noted that he personally learned new information about city functions he had not known before. Mr. Dillon emphasized that the goal of the program is to demystify city leadership for youth. Overall, the program format is solid and effective, but greater community support and higher participation are needed to maximize its impact. He thanked Mr. Nelson for his involvement and support.
- Mr. Daniele shared he received initial feedback from the Youth Ambassadors, who suggested improving communication to ensure more students are aware of the opportunity. He noted there were a few additional suggestions and emphasized the importance of incorporating their feedback to strengthen the program for next year.
- Mr. Daniele shared that the Court Service Unit completed its second cohort of the G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education and Training) program this year, graduating three youth, the same number as last year. While the sample size is small, none of the youth who successfully completed the program have reoffended, and four of the six participants have been released from probation. Mr. Daniele credited colleague Carlos Mendieta for his excellent facilitation of both cohorts and noted that he is now also certified to facilitate. He shared excitement about expanding G.R.E.A.T. into middle schools next fall, as it is designed for classroom settings.
- Mr. Daniele shared that National Night Out is scheduled for August 5 from 5–8 p.m.
- Mr. Daniele shared about the IPE Waitlist Support Program: The city continues to face a high waitlist for the Intervention, Prevention, and Education (IPE) program. To address this, Mr. Daniele, Mr. Mendieta, and Mr. Regotti are launching a short-term, triage-style initiative beginning July 1. This program will provide mentoring, counseling, and home visits to youth already referred to IPE, focusing on those at higher risk. Unlike the standard six-month IPE program, this support will run approximately 90 days. Capacity will be limited to about three - five youth per

staff member (15 total at a time), which will effectively cut the current waitlist in half. Mr. Daniele emphasized that this is not a new program but a temporary measure to reduce the backlog and ensure timely support for youth on the waitlist.

- Lt. Magyar gave a summary of two recent shooting incidents in the city that occurred in April and May and involved adults. Investigations are still underway.
- Mr. Diggins shared that two months ago he invited Mr. Daniele and Mr. Gomez to collaborate with school administrators on strategies to address student safety and engagement. An initial meeting with deans and assistant principals—referred to as the ACHS Gang Task Force—focused on the following goals: Reducing violent incidents at the high school; building community among students; providing resources and supports to students and families; offering restorative skill-building opportunities; expanding workforce development through jobs and internships
- Mr. Diggins said the group was scheduled to reconvene this week, but the meeting has been postponed until later in the summer.
- Mr. Diggins noted that conflicts often stem from students on opposing sides encountering one another at school, which escalates into violence. Through disciplinary hearings, he has learned that some students act out for self-protection, while others are targeted or become involved in fights as a matter of survival. Students also report being assaulted at bus stops or walking in groups for safety.
- He emphasized the importance of information sharing and working with administrators to identify appropriate strategies. Mr. Dillon requested that updates from this group be shared with the Task Force as progress continues.

##### 5. APD Youth Resource Unit Presentation:

- Sgt. Saks and Lt. Magyar introduced themselves and the Youth Resource Unit's program to combat truancy at the high school.
- Presentation from Sgt. Saks – Youth Resource Unit
- Program foundation: building trust with youth; once one student trusts, peers follow ("snowball effect").
- Origin: Acting Chief Pedroso directed the unit to address truancy as a major issue.
- Approach: could not compel attendance → focus on making school more attractive than gangs/crime.
- Core goals and objectives:
  - Mentor youth through consistent presence and conversation.
  - Secure parental consent before working with any student.
  - Reduce truancy by addressing root causes.
  - Build strong relationships with families.
  - Address basic needs (food, clothing, utilities, childcare).
- Provide wraparound support through partners (ALIVE, Juvenile CSU, attendance officers, school staff).
- Early program: launched last September with 15 students, which grew to 65 official and around 85 total served.
- Waitlist: approximately 200 students.

- Mentorship: began organically; students shared personal challenges, officers responded with tangible help (e.g., clean clothes, food). Trust built through follow-through.
- Seven key areas of need identified by students: food, clothing, shelter/utilities, childcare responsibilities, transportation, academic support, emotional support.
- Example supports:
  - Laundry services provided encouraged students to begin attending regularly.
  - Food was distributed via ALIVE.
  - GED support, college application help, career readiness activities also were implemented.
- Collaboration: ongoing work with attendance officers, school administrators, Terry Wright, Susan Parcell, and Juvenile CSU.
- Diversion efforts: partnership with CSU allows first-time, lower-level offenses to be handled through mentoring rather than probation.
- Outcomes:
  - 100% of initial 50 students improved truancy/attendance.
  - 68% improved in-class attendance.
  - 100% improved behavior at school and home.
  - 76% reduced disciplinary issues (fighting, suspensions).
  - Roughly 60% improved their grades, while around 40% stayed the same.
  - 7 seniors successfully graduated (including students initially considered unlikely to graduate).
- Program expansion: summer activities (home visits, enrichment days, volunteer work, police department tours, career readiness trips).
- Staffing: 3 officers currently serving 65–85 students; ratio is ~15–20 students per officer.
- Distinction from SROs:
  - Youth Resource Unit focuses on prevention, mentoring, home visits, and family engagement.
  - SROs focus on enforcement and school safety.
- Information shared only with parental consent or when enforcement requires it.
- Community caretaking: officers emphasize “don’t make me do my real job”, and they operate in prevention space rather than enforcement when possible.
- Challenges: high demand and limited staffing; consistent presence required to build trust.
- Recognition: strong partnerships with ACPS staff, parents, and community organizations credited for success.
- Mr. Dillon commended the program for its collaboration and success, noting that the unit meets students where they are. He encouraged learning from this model as other mentoring programs in the city are not achieving comparable outcomes.

## 6. Public Comment:

- Mr. Dillon opened the floor for public comment.

- Upcoming APD community engagement: cookouts and other neighborhood events are scheduled. Mr. Daniele will send out follow-up with dates and times for these events.

7. Administrative Items:

- Mr. Dillon noted that APD has been asked to coordinate ride-alongs with task force members. The purpose is to visit areas experiencing the greatest challenges, observe conditions firsthand, and bring insights back to the task force for collective action.
- Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 17, 2025, 6 - 8 p.m. at Charles Houston Recreation Center.

**2025 Meeting Schedule**

September 17

November 19

8. Meeting Adjourn: 7:24 p.m.