

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

### **Minutes**

Wednesday

November 19, 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), Marilyn Nevy Cruz (Vice Chair, Latino Community), Dana Wedeles (City Manager's Office), Timothy Brannon (Francis Hammond Middle School), Rachael Dischner (Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School), Roberto Gomez (Parent of Youth), Reverend Anthony Oliver (Faith Based Community), and Frank Broomell (Citizen At-Large).

Task Force Members Not Present: Abdel-Rahman Elnoubi (Alexandria City Council), Timothy Beaty (Alexandria School Board), Kurt Campos (Youth Representative), and Steve Nelson (African American Community).

Staff Group on Gangs Members Present: Deputy Carlos Canas (ASO), Lt. Liz Magyar (APD), Linda Odell (RPCA), Dr. Marcia Jackson (ACPS), Miguel Blancas (DCJS), and Dana Wedeles (City Manager's Office).

Guests/Staff: Sgt. Ben Saks (APD), Kennetra Wood (ACPS), Olivia Bassingthwaite (Alexandria Youth Ambassadors), Jasmine Coombs (DCHS), Liliana Janssen-Checa (NVFS), and Clara Kwakye (ACHS Student).

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. Tim Brannon (Middle School Representative)
6. Ms. Rachael Dischner (Elementary School Representative)
7. Mr. Steve Nelson (African American Community Representative)
8. Mr. Bryan Kirkes (Citizen Member, At-Large)

9. Mr. Jim Dillon (Chair/Business Community Representative)
10. Ms. Marilyn Nevy Cruz (Vice Chair/Latino Community Representative)
11. Reverend Anthony T. Oliver (Faith Based Community Representative)
12. Mr. Roberto Gomez (Parent Representative)
13. Mr. Frank Broomell (Citizen Member, At-Large)
14. Mr. Kurt Campos (At-Large, Representing Youth of the City)
15. Vacant (At-Large, Representing Youth of the City)
16. Vacant (Resident or Representative of ARHA Properties)
17. Vacant (Alexandria High School Representative)

1. Call to Order and Roll Call: Chairman Dillon called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. All present confirmed their attendance.
2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes: There was a quorum to approve meeting minutes from June 25, and the minutes were approved.
3. City Council Opening Comments: None.
4. Updates from Staff Group on Gangs
  - Mr. Daniele reported a successful October 25 soccer tournament and suggested expanding volunteer involvement and agency participation next year to boost youth engagement. He emphasized the importance of gang task force presence. The event was funded by DCJS, ASA, Nova Raft, and the APD Foundation, with ACPS helping recruit youth and teams. Mr. Blancas recommended exploring additional funding sources for future tournaments. Vice Mayor Bagley asked what services or opportunities should be offered at future events, and Mr. Daniele said those ideas can be developed with this task force and the Staff Group on Gangs.
  - Mr. Blancas provided an update on the Anonymous Notification System (ANS). A tip form will be hosted on the DCJS website, with submissions forwarded to the Gang Prevention Coordinator and APD Gang Detective. He, Mr. Daniele, and OCCE are finalizing details. Questions addressed included: how to handle requests from other agencies (the city's guidelines will apply); how to prevent emergency misuse (clear 911 disclaimers will be included); and whether it could operate through 311 (it cannot, due to anonymity requirements). QR codes will be placed in city hot spots. ARHA's previous contact for QR placement is no longer there, so a new representative is needed.

- Mr. Dillon asked whether the system would mirror ACPS's tip line; Mr. Daniele said core components are already in place. Mr. Gomez asked about community input, which has not yet been gathered. ACPS received 36 tips in its first three semesters, which Mr. Dillon noted as a model of success. Next steps include aligning the ANS form with the ACPS format and submitting it to the GTF. After implementation, usage data (number and type of tips) will be reported back. Concerns were raised about how information will be handled, including potential consequences of false tips.
- Mr. Daniele reported ongoing collaboration between members of the Staff Group on Gangs and ACHS deans through monthly drug and crime prevention meetings. These meetings help review trends, cases, and incidents. One noted trend is an increase in youth referrals to the Opportunities Seminar, which includes substance abuse prevention. Sgt. Saks added that this work reflects a joint effort with ACPS to develop holistic responses and solutions.
- Mr. Daniele reported that CSU has recorded only one gang observation this year— involving the same student linked to one of five observations last year.
- Mr. Daniele reported progress on launching the GREAT program at Francis Hammond Middle School. He met with five school counselors, and they are beginning to identify students for the 13-week course.
- Lt. Magyar reported a smooth start to the school year, with most incidents handled by school administration. An assault at Bradlee was linked to a prior school incident, though SROs were not involved and gang ties are undetermined. Bradlee remains cooperative, but McDonald's continues to attract student loitering, especially after school, with recent Latino-on-Latino fights, mainly between American born latinos and those who have immigrated recently. Sgt. Saks' youth resource unit is present in the area, and school representatives continue to monitor Bradlee. In response to questions, Lt. Magyar noted that many school incidents are low-level and addressed through diversion or discipline rather than by SRO involvement. She also confirmed the Bradlee satellite office remains operational. It is mostly a place for officers to safely write their reports, do trainings, have lunch, and handle other nonurgent matters.
- Lt. Magyar reported that Bradlee has two dedicated detail officers funded by the shopping center, and McDonald's has its own security officer. She emphasized that McDonald's remains the main hotspot, with many students who should be in school congregating there. Security staff intervene to prevent fights and address concerning behavior. She also noted an increase in conflicts between American-born Latino youth and recently arrived Latino immigrants, with the former using "Chents" as a derogatory term for newcomer, referring to those who are recently arrived, non-English speaking, or otherwise seen as outsiders.
- Mr. Gomez asked whether the city is actively discussing solutions for the Bradlee issues. Lt. Magyar said she is not aware of city group efforts but noted ongoing actions by property management and McDonald's, including coordination with corporate and security measures to limit student congregation. She added that incidents have recently decreased.

- Mr. Dillon asked about the incident involving masked individuals threatening a household. Lt. Magyar said the family declined to prosecute and was acquainted with or related to the individuals involved
- Sgt. Saks said that 17 of the youth served last school year by the youth resource unit graduated from high school, and 13 of them got into college. The unit is currently serving 60 youth, and additionally 10 who are not official but are still receiving informal attention, needs being met, or some sort of contact with the three officers in the unit. He mentioned kids are being ordered by judges to be in the program. For the holiday season, the unit is delivering about 40 turkeys to their houses. There is also a toy drive upcoming. There was conversation about the importance of ensuring there is a budget to continue doing this important work. Sgt. Saks said his unit works with the most truant youth, and his unit tries to meet kids needs to get them back into school.
- Sgt. Saks reported that of the youth served by the youth resource unit last school year, 17 graduated and 13 enrolled in college. The unit is currently working with 60 youth, plus about 10 more who receive informal support. Some participants are court-ordered to be in the program. For the holidays, the unit is delivering roughly 40 turkeys and preparing for a toy drive. He emphasized the need for sustained funding to continue this work and noted that the unit focuses on highly truant youth, helping meet their needs and reconnect them with school.
- Dr. Jackson emphasized that most of ACPS's 16,000 students are doing well and that administrators work hard to maintain safety and keep students on track. She highlighted student leadership efforts, noting that ACHS students in the Multicultural Student Achievement Network are concerned about peers missing school and want to help strengthen connections with staff and classmates.
- Dr. Jackson stressed the value of programs like Cornerstone Craftsman and Sgt. Saks' unit for non-traditional learners. She also noted a recent proposal to the school board for a 9th-grade alternative learning program to address behavior, attendance, and academic challenges without relying on suspension. ACPS is also developing a wellness seminar for frequently suspended students, improving access to resources, and expanding partnerships for mental health (such as Hazel Health) and after-hours family support.
- Vice Chair Nevy-Cruz noted a recent ICE presence at a D.C. school that she said led to a sharp drop in attendance and asked whether similar effects were seen locally. Dr. Jackson said ICE activity has been observed in nearby communities and in the media, but she said attendance changes in ACPS cannot be directly linked to it. She added that family support liaisons may hear concerns from families, and the division works with partners to help families to feel as safe, supported, and connected as possible.
- Ms. Odell reported that the Connecting Youth Initiative gathered feedback from 58 parents and school staff. All school deans participated in the workshops, along with CSU, DCJS, APD, DCHS, AFD, Planning and Zoning, and Sheltercare. Three workgroups were formed to improve youth engagement, create a citywide calendar of youth programs, and build a community of youth leaders through efforts like Caring U. When Ms. Janssen-Checa asked how service providers can

stay informed about opportunities, Ms. Odell noted that increasing access to this information is a key goal of the workgroups.

- Dr. Jackson said, thinking outside the box, that obviously the school is the place where kids are and obviously that's the place to recruit kids. But sometimes kids that we need to focus on are not in school, so she's asking where are the other areas of the city and organizations that we can do some outreach and pushing out information. She's essentially just asking if there are some nontraditional ways of getting this information out to parents and youth.
- Ms. Nevy Cruz introduced Brian MacNair who is the CEO of Kitchen of Purpose.

## 5. Kitchen of Purpose

- Brian MacNair shared an overview of his nonprofit, Kitchen of Purpose (formerly La Cocina Virginia), which he founded in Arlington. After 10 years at DC Central Kitchen and 8 years working with José Andrés on World Central Kitchen, Brian focused on creating pathways for people, especially youth, interested in culinary careers but lacking access. Kitchen of Purpose trains about 70 clients annually, teaching in both Spanish and English through five culinary classes, and was the first program to offer culinary training in Spanish in the area. The program primarily serves adults, including parents, and has partnered with the Marriott Foundation to support youth ages 16–21, with most participants being 18 or older.
- Brian expressed strong interest in expanding youth programming in Arlington. One idea discussed was a Saturday introductory session where youth learn basic kitchen skills, prepare a meal, and explore interest in the culinary field, followed by a potential culinary bootcamp for those interested. Brian already has curriculum and indicated funding could likely be matched through Marriott. Transportation was noted as a challenge, with the possibility of hosting the bootcamp in Alexandria at Old Town Community Church, where Together We Bake is located. The bootcamp would last two months, with the possibility of providing certifications. He mentioned he would like to start with an introduction to culinary class.

## 6. Gang Task Force Member Updates:

- Ms. Nevy Cruz shared observations from her ride-along, including witnessing the arrest of a youth with repeated prior arrests and underlying mental health needs, highlighting a cycle of re-arrest driven by unmet support needs. She also raised concerns about insufficient lighting in parts of the city, identifying opportunities for improvement. The ride-along officer discussed ongoing APD turnover challenges. The Vice Mayor noted she could provide data on staffing and retention trends to show progress, even though issues remain. Ms. Wedeles added that one park with limited lighting is currently undergoing renovations, and she is open to providing more information on plan for lighting improvements in the city.
- Mr. Broomell shared that, beyond lighting concerns, the city's geography and terrain make it difficult for officers to pursue juveniles, who can quickly create distance and move across adjoining jurisdictions. His ride-along officer also raised

questions about a new affordable housing development in Arlandria, noting potential community dynamics that could arise as residents from different neighborhoods and backgrounds come together.

- Ms. Wedeles responded that while she is unable to speculate on who will move into the building, she noted that the development will include a city services center, DCHS and youth outreach staff, community resources, an APD satellite office, and many other resources to ensure integrated support. The Vice Mayor added that a key goal of the project is to protect and retain current neighborhood residents, with a significant portion of units intended for people already living in the community. She also noted the city's broader commitment to preserving affordable housing, referencing Resolution 830, and stated that the Arlandria development will include 474 units across multiple income levels.
- Mr. Broomell and Ms. Nevy Cruz shared some additional quality of life concerns that were raised during their ride alongs with APD.
- Lt. Magyar offered clarification and additional context on the housing concerns raised by ride-along officers.
- Mr. Dillon noted that many of the issues mentioned, such as lighting, logistical challenges, and drug use, mirror concerns raised during previous ride-alongs.
- Ms. Wedeles shared that at a recent Health and Safety Committee meeting, a "Safe Housing" Task Force discussed developing an "early warning" system using data from APD, Code Administration, and Alex311. Properties with concerning patterns, such as high volumes of service calls, code violations, and 311 requests within certain thresholds, would trigger alerts for outreach and intervention. Ms. Wedeles shared that the goal is to proactively identify and address issues before they escalate. She noted that all data should be available by January, after which the outreach model will be developed.
- Mr. Gomez shared positive updates from his program, including a partnership with DCHS to train participants in Narcan use and the installation of a condom dispenser in his building.
- Ms. Nevy Cruz reported that due to growing fears about ICE presence and employment challenges, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul provided \$500 in rental assistance to 16 Latino families, and larger amounts to some others.
- Pastor Oliver suggested creating a go-to resource or "cheat sheet" for use in common situations of need. He also shared that the recent back-to-school drive successfully provided school supplies, clothing, food, haircuts, and other resources to approximately 100–150 residents.
- Vice Mayor Bagley suggested developing a budget letter and noted that, given the challenging budget climate, boards and commissions should make highly specific, focused requests, ideally centered on a single priority area for additional funding.

## 7. Follow-Up Items for Next Meeting:

### **Anonymous Notification System (ANS)**

- Luke and Miguel will provide update on alignment with the ACPS tip line, as well as launch readiness and safeguards, including implementation timeline, outreach approach, community input, and measures to prevent misuse.

### **Kitchen of Purpose**

- Marilyn and Luke will provide update on potential youth culinary programming partnership and next steps.

### **Community Resource Coordination**

- The Staff Group on Gangs will consider the development of a simple “resource cheat sheet” for common family and youth needs, as suggested by Task Force members.
- Members from the Staff Group on Gangs will identify which agency or group will lead development and maintenance of this resource.

### **Budget and Advocacy Priorities**

- Luke will work to identify one or two priority funding needs for consideration in a future budget letter.
- The Task Force will then discuss whether the Task Force should submit focused, specific recommendations consistent with City guidance.

### **Gang Task Force Member Discussions**

- Jim and Luke will share feedback from Task Force members.

## **8. Administrative Items:**

- Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 21, 2026, 6 - 8 p.m. at Charles Houston Recreation Center.

### **2026 Meeting Schedule**

January 21

March 18

May 20

June 17

September 16

November 18

## **9. Meeting Adjourn: 8:01 p.m.**