

Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force

Minutes

Wednesday

October 18, 2023

6:00 p.m. – 8:00 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: Ms. Marilyn Nevy Cruz (Vice Chair/Latino Community Representative), Michael Burch (Alexandria City High School Representative), Steve Nelson (African American Community Representative), Rachael Dischner (Elementary School Representative), Noraine Buttar (City Manager's Representative/DCHS Representative), Roberto Gomez (Member, Parent of Youth), Frank Broomell (Citizen Representative), and Brian Kirkes (Citizen Representative)

Senior Policy Group on Gangs Members Present: Katherine Beye (Commonwealth Attorney's Office)

Guests/Staff: Michael Diggins (Alexandria City Public Schools), Hope Murphy (Alexandria City Public Schools), Dr. Marcia Jackson (Alexandria City Public Schools), John Contreras (Alexandria City Public Schools), Asia Jones (Outreach Specialist, DCHS), Officer Richard Sandoval (Alexandria Police Department), Deputy Carlos Canas (Sheriff's Office), Mike Mackey (Alexandria Court Service Unit)

Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force Members:

1. Councilman Canek Aguirre (Alexandria City Council)
2. Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins (Member, Alexandria City Council)
3. Mr. Willie Bailey Sr. (Alexandria City School Board)
4. Ms. Noraine Buttar (City Manager's Representative/DCHS Representative)
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. (ARHA Representative) – Vacant
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1. Call to Order and Roll Call: Vice Chair Nevy Cruz called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. All present confirmed their attendance.
 2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes: There was not a quorum to approve meeting minutes from September 20.
 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:
 - Ms. Buttar announced Youth and Caring Adult Summit, put on by ACHS Youth Ambassadors, will take place on November 9 at First Baptist Church.
 - Mr. Nelson announced he has a mentoring program and is looking for mentors for Wright to Read.
 - Officer Sandoval reported a recent incident when a School Resource Officer was required to chase a vehicle that came on school property. The vehicle was apprehended at the Eisenhower Connector area. It is not clear whether this was gang related.

- Mr. Kirkes shared regarding concerning incidents occurring in the bathrooms of some of the businesses at Bradlee Shopping Center, specifically at the Starbucks.
- Mr. Nelson reported there do not appear to be large groups of youth congregating at the McDonalds at Bradlee Shopping Center, as there was previously.
- Mr. Daniele reported he has been working with the IPE program counselors to provide presentations at Francis Hammon Middle School and Alexandria City High School. Mr. Daniele reported there is a Gang Prevention handout available with has a QR code linked with a resource website. Mr. Daniele reported there have been two successful sessions of the “Seven Pillars” series at CASA Chirilagua. A DC United Soccer Player spoke at the last session. The next session is November 14.

7. Court Service Unit (CSU) and ACPS Updates:

Mr. Mackey recognized the Task Force as being 20 years old. He announced January is National Mentoring Month, and this will be an opportunity to increase the important work of adults helping youth. Mr. Mackey reported out on some takeaways from a recent City Council legislative meeting that included a three hour portion on crime.

Mr. Mackey reported that the CSU is prepared to handle the challenges that come with increasing arrests. Some of the outcomes of the work probation officers do at the CSU, including the diversion program where 90% of those released from both diversion and probation supervision do not become court involved again. Mr. Mackey reported that detention numbers have increased, a decade long trend. However, youth spend 70% less time in detention versus previous years.

Regarding mentoring, a vital aspect of gang prevention, Mr. Mackey reported the CSU has the only mentoring partnership coordinator in Virginia. Mr. Mackey also referenced the IPE program and the forensic treatment team as programs involved with the CSU.

Ms. Murphy and Mr. Diggins reported about the initiative “Keeping Students in School: A Community Approach.” She mentioned how attendance is a top priority for ACPS. Truancy outreach recently added Susan Parcell as a specialist. Attendance Review Panel (ARP) works in partnership with other agencies, including DCHS and the CSU. Ms. Murphy talked about truancy versus chronic absenteeism. There is a multi-tier system of support for students experiencing these. Prevention practices, including mentoring opportunities, is a tier 1 practice. There is a parent square application which is multilingual. Ms. Murphy reported about her partnering with the CSU to develop a mentoring program to target truant middle school students.

8. Vice Chairman’s Readout:

- Ms. Nevy Cruz proposed the idea of having a retreat for the Task Force. There was some discussion about this being an opportunity for the Task Force to enhance their strategic plan.

9. New Topics:

- Deputy Canas reported some information about the adult jail population and mainly pointed out that there is a lot of fluctuation. There are five members of the Bloods being held on federal charges. Overall, there is a large gang presence in the jail, and MS13 continues to have the highest representation.

10. Administrative Items:

- Task Force members shall attend at least 75 percent of the meetings of the bodies on which they serve each year.
- Frank Broomell was recently appointed to the Task Force, filling the previously vacant Citizen at Large position. There is one remaining vacancy (**ARHA Representative or ARHA Resident**).

11. Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 17, 2024, 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. at Charles Houston Recreation Center.

Suggested 2024 Schedule

January 17th

March 20th

May 15th

June 26th

September 18th

November 20th

12. Meeting Adjourn: 7:37 p.m.