

Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force

Minutes

Wednesday

January 21, 2026

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), Councilman Abdel-Rahman Elnoubi (Alexandria City Council), Dana Wedeles (City Manager's Office), Rachael Dischner (Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School), Timothy Beaty (Alexandria School Board), Steve Nelson (African American Community), Roberto Gomez (Parent of Youth), Reverend Anthony Oliver (Faith Based Community), Bryan Kirkes (Citizen At-Large), Frank Broomell (Citizen At-Large), Clara Kwayke (Youth Representative), and Madeline Barrientos Recintos (Youth Representative).

Task Force Members Not Present: Marilyn Nevy Cruz (Vice Chair, Latino Community) and Timothy Brannon (Francis Hammond Middle School).

Staff Group on Gangs Members Present: Linda Odell (RPCA), Dr. Victor Martin (ACPS), Miguel Blancas (DCJS), and Dana Wedeles (City Manager's Office).

Guests/Staff: Kennetra Wood (ACPS), Olivia Bassingthwaite (Alexandria Youth Ambassadors), Jasmine Coombs (DCHS), Liliana Janssen-Checa (NVFS), and Chelsea Eickert (DCHS).

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. Ms. Clara Kwayke (At-Large, Representing Youth of the City)
15. Ms. Madeline Barrientos Recintos (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, Introductions, Roll Call: Chairman Dillon called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m. All present confirmed their attendance. Each member of the Task Force introduced themselves, including two new youth members, and all shared why they joined the task force.
2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes: There was a quorum to approve meeting minutes from November, and the minutes were approved.
3. City Council Opening Comments: None.
4. Chelsea Eickert Presentation on “Safety and Belonging”
 - Mr. Daniele introduced Chelsea Eickert, who is leading development of the Children, Youth, and Community Plan (CYCP) for the next five years. He explained the purpose of the workshop was to identify areas of alignment between the Task Force and the CYCP.
 - Ms. Eickert shared that her goal is to help all children in the city thrive. She noted that she would present feedback from youth listening sessions, focusing on themes of safety and belonging. The listening sessions were conducted as part of a citywide outreach effort. Discussion included how the Task Force could amplify or champion priorities identified in the CYCP.
 - Mr. Gomez asked what youth demographics were represented in the listening sessions. Ms. Eickert responded that the team visited government and civics classes across the city to reach a broad range of students rather than relying on self-selected participants.
 - Ms. Eickert noted that youth shared both concerns and potential solutions, and that safety ranked highly in survey responses when youth were asked what matters most to them.
 - Chelsea shared data and feedback indicating many students still report feeling unsafe and less engaged at school. She noted many things including the following: that enforcement alone does not create a sense of safety ,and that violence and

conflict are influenced by environmental factors such as crowded spaces; students also citing social media, family conflict carried into school, chaotic hallways, and a negative school climate as contributing factors; students reporting low trust in adults and concerns that issues may not be handled appropriately, which discourages reporting.

- Chelsea asked the Task Force to discuss where there is alignment or energy from the Task Force, where efforts could be strengthened, and where the group could add value in six strategy areas. The six strategies were: expand safe after-school and enrichment opportunities; improve community safety conditions; build conflict resolution and coping skills; elevate youth leadership and peer-led solutions; expand mental health supports; and strengthen reporting, follow-through, and trust.
- There was discussion about how the group can work together to bring voices to the table from alternative schooling placements at detention, Sheltercare, CFC, Satellite, etc. Mr. Gomez said he feels passionately about reaching higher risk individuals, and he stressed the importance of bringing these voices to the table.
- Mr. Gomez mentioned that expanding safe afterschool opportunities is a strategic direction that the task force can align with. Providing incentives and finding creative ways to spur interest among youth to participate in programs instead of going to unsafe areas like Bradlee is something we should be focused on.
- Youth representatives said that the programs are there, such as Youth in Progress, but people don't know about them or just aren't interested in going unless they are connected with someone like Ms. Bonilla who has a good relationship with the kids. They shared we just look at more creative ways to generate interest for youth instead of trying to force kids to go.
- The Vice Mayor referenced ALX Beyond and questioned whether investments are reaching the right places and whether students and parents know how to access the program. Ms. Dischner said investments should prioritize students with the greatest needs and discussed how to better leverage relationships and positions to reach them.
- Youth representatives noted that some sports programs require students to maintain at least a C average and attend tutoring (e.g., on Wednesdays) to remain eligible. They added that some students still choose not to attend tutoring..
- Mr. Kirkes asked youth representatives what types of speakers or mentors are most effective. Youth representatives said students are more likely to attend programs that are nearby, familiar, and where their friends are going. They emphasized the importance of trusted adults they already know, such as teachers, and speakers who show genuine care. Athletes and other guest speakers can be engaging, but youth noted that relying on coaches or school "celebrities" may not reach students who are not involved in sports or activities. Spanish-speaking speakers and individuals with strong connections to students were also noted as helpful. There was mention of bringing a gang task force meeting to another location where more youth might show up. There was additional discussion amongst youth representatives about the type of events or programs that would interest students.
- Pastor Oliver asked about what types of classes or subject matters that students would gravitate towards.

- Mr. Gomez asked whether students who are getting into trouble would attend these types of events. A youth representative said participation depends on the activity and emphasized the need for varied options, noting there is no single solution. She also noted that directly providing outreach to students who need help could be perceived negatively and discourage participation. The Vice Mayor said this highlighted how adult phrasing can land differently with youth and noted the comment was a powerful and valuable insight.
- Councilman Elnoubi said he is hearing that students often ask, “What’s in it for me?” He asked Mr. Gomez what strategies he feels have been successful in this regard. Mr. Gomez shared that he has incentivized participation by providing transportation, food, basic needs, and opportunities for youth to earn money. Youth representatives agreed that incentives and making events easy to attend help increase participation. They noted that programs are more likely to resonate when they are close to home, both geographically and personally, and when youth are invited directly. Roberto suggested youth-led promotion with QR codes and live updates about nearby events that clearly show the date, location, and benefits, which youth representatives said would be effective. Youth representatives said this would be helpful.
- Ms. Eickert and Mr. Dillon asked the Task Force to vote on two or three of the strategic directions to help guide the work that is being done.
- The Task Force voted to focus on three priority areas: expanding safe access to after-school enrichment opportunities, building conflict resolution and coping skills, and elevating youth leadership and peer-led solutions. The Task Force broke up into three groups, with a youth representative taking notes for each group.
- Mr. Dillon shared that his group focused on improving the Junior Academy by elevating youth-led solutions.
- Mr. Gomez shared from his group that he was surprised youth reported a lack of conflict resolution and coping skills in schools and questioned whether resources exist or if students are simply unaware of them. Mr. Kirkes noted that students prefer smaller group settings rather than large assemblies.
- Ms. Barrientos Recinos said her group discussed ways to increase awareness among students and parents about existing programs and activities. Councilman Elnoubi added that many families may not know about programs like ALX Beyond if communication is limited. The group also noted space as an ongoing challenge.

5. Gang Task Force Coordinator Updates:

- Mr. Daniele shared information about Kitchen of Purpose’s “Intro to Culinary World” event on March 14. Transportation and food will be provided for youth. Vice Mayor asked if adults can sign up to provide transportation, as an example of not leaning too heavily on government to provide solutions to barriers like transportation.
- Mr. Daniele provided update on poster for Anonymous Notification System, saying OCCE is working in tandem on messaging and visual aspect of the poster. Next step is determining placement of the posters.

- Mr. Gomez proposed taking an inventory or matrix of resources (transportation, gift cards, etc.) from people involved in the Task Force. Pastor Oliver said that he knows about a couple churches who have buses that can be available.
- Mr. Gomez asked for task force members to be included on initiatives like listening sessions with youth.

6. Gang Task Force Member Updates:

- Mr. Gomez said he is taking a large group Cornerstone Craftsman youth to the Virginia General Assembly on January 22 to talk to legislature about the youth's experience with gun violence. He said they will likely have court involved youth in his program do a gun violence informative session with a state recognized program to help them understand the severity of choices made and help them stay out of the court system.
- Mr. Kirkes announced that APD officer Bennie Evans recently retired, who was very involved in community outreach initiatives such as the community cookouts.
- Councilman Elnoubi mentioned that budget season is currently underway.
- Mr. Beaty shared a conversation he had with a 6th grader who asked whether he could be sent back to Honduras if birthright citizenship were removed, referencing current Supreme Court discussions. Mr. Beaty said the exchange reflects the legal and political pressures many Latino and immigrant youth are experiencing. He also raised concerns about potential immigration enforcement impacts in immigrant communities. He also noted that ACPS is beginning its budget process, with possible concerns about cuts.
- Vice Mayor asked whether the Task Force tracks pending legislation to identify opportunities for youth or others to testify on issues relevant to the group's work. She suggested youth members could participate in speaking in support of legislation aligned with the Task Force's priorities.
- Mr. Nelson said he believes mentoring is impactful and is motivated to continue his personal efforts around mentoring.
- Pastor Oliver said he plans to help provide input and coordination around community events that include music, speakers, food and clothing giveaways, transportation, and gift card incentives.

7. Public Comment: None.

8. Follow Up Items for Next Meeting

- Each breakout group will meet between task force meetings and develop next action steps for each of the respective strategic directions. Each group leader will provide a readout of what was discussed during the next meeting.

9. Administrative Items:

- There are two vacancies on the Task Force: ACHS Representative and ARHA Resident or ARHA Representative.
- Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 18, 2026, 6 - 8 p.m. at Charles Houston Recreation Center.

2026 Meeting Schedule

March 18

May 20

June 17

September 16

November 18

10. Meeting Adjourn: 7:48 p.m.