

Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force

Minutes

Wednesday

March 18, 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), Dana Wedeles (City Manager's Office), Rachael Dischner (Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School), Timothy Brannon (Francis C. Hammond Middle School), Timothy Beaty (Alexandria School Board), Steve Nelson (African American Community), Marilyn Nevy Cruz (Latino Community), Roberto Gomez (Parent of Youth), 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: Vice Mayor Bagley (City Council), Councilman Abdel-Rahman Elnoubi (Alexandria City Council), and Reverend Anthony Oliver (Faith Based Community).

Staff Group on Gangs Members Present: Linda Odell (RPCA), Dr. Marcia Jackson (ACPS), Dana Wedeles (City Manager's Office), Lt. Liz Magyar (APD), Caitlin Sweeney (DCJS), Mike Mackey (CSU), Sherrif Sean Casey (ASO), and Carlos Canas (ASO).

Guests/Staff: Kennetra Wood (ACPS), Jasmine Coombs (DCHS), Kate Reen (NVFS), Victor Guzman (NVFS), Jewel Harris (AYA), and Lela Gormley (AYA).

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 6:10 p.m. All present confirmed their attendance.
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. Strategic Direction Workgroup Readouts
 - Chairman Dillon provided a readout regarding his breakout group’s strategic direction, “Expand youth leadership and peer-led solutions.” His workgroup discussed how the Junior City Academy worked previously and how to improve it moving it forward, including things such as expanding awareness of the program, transportation, timing, and engaging the right population of students. Some ideas were offered from task force members, including possibly offering the program as a school elective, tapping into the chance for change students, offering resume building opportunity for the participants, and pairing each youth participant with a task force member to follow up with. Mr. Beaty offered his support in making sure information about the Junior Academy is widely distributed throughout ACPS. There was discussion about the benefits of youth experiencing the program at different locations throughout the city. Discussion about the “profile” of a youth who shows up to the program every week. Others ideas offered: providing school credit for participating, providing a certificate of completion, and attempting to reach a younger audience.
 - Mr. Broomell and Mr. Daniele provided readout regarding their workgroup focused on supporting “access to safe afterschool and enrichment.” Action steps for the group are first to Conduct gap analysis using reports already available (Out of School Time Report from 2023, Community Health Assessment 2025, perhaps others), secondly to Identify neighborhoods, schools, or demographic

groups with low participation but high need. Focus on Identify where programs don't match what youth want and Highlight barriers (transportation, cost, parent/family awareness) between available programs and actual access/participation. Next,

- Create inventory of Task Force member and community resources (vans, known funding sources, untapped networks, etc.) that can address these barriers. Also Promote [ALX Beyond](#) and Youth Resources (<https://www.alexandriava.gov/child-and-family-services/youth-resources>) wherever possible. Lastly, Advocate for and highlight programs during and outside of meetings that are youth-informed, culturally responsive, and aligned with student interests.
- Ms. Wedeles mentioned possibly having Caitlin Brown from ALX Beyond come and give an overview of the program, the gap analysis she did, and giving information about the program. She is working with consultants to figure out what is the right access and how to get the word out about this. Ms. Wedeles also mentioned hearing about the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). More information about the CHIP can be found on the health department website and how to get involved.

5. Staff Group on Gangs Updates:

- Ms. Wedeles provided update regarding SHARE Team, a group made up of 30 public safety, social services, and other representatives from various city departments such as housing, DCHS, and recreation. Goal of the group is to develop data that helps the group identify where there are potential trends, incidents, calls for service that are on the rise, at the property level, not city wide. This is not for everything in the city, the group is looking at particular addresses. Then the group gets together and figures how to best deploy resources based on increase in code violations, pest control issues, etc. She shared there was an initial meeting a couple weeks ago. There is a dashboard which is internal and private based on private property information, not available to the public. A very specific approach is being taking on this to figure out who is the first person to go. The main takeaway is that the city is looking at how it can proactively coordinate an appropriate public safety and support service response for increased calls and trends in properties that have specific needs.
- Lt. Magyar shared updates on youth fights and gang-related activity. McDonald's locations, particularly on W. Glebe Rd., continue to be common sites for fights among youth. She noted that officers can designate an incident as gang-related on police reports when there is substantial evidence, such as the recent fight connected to an MS-13-related hand sign. She emphasized that while heat maps are useful, monitoring calls for service provides better insight into the nature of incidents. She also reported a large fight at the Kenmore shopping area, where 75–100 youth are often present during incidents. More youth are congregating there, while conditions at Bradlee Shopping Center have improved.
- She shared that McDonald's recently joined the Bradlee Stakeholder Group and is participating in discussions on improving security and addressing youth disorderly conduct. Lt. Magyar also shared that the Youth Resource Unit will be

dissolved after March. The group discussed trends related to fights occurring in schools. Ms. Wedeles mentioned there may be an opportunity to partner with McDonald's to take a more proactive approach to addressing youth-related incidents and safety concerns.

- Mr. Kirkes asked about a recent incident where an 8-year-old brought a gun to a school, but no information was available on that incident as it is still under investigation.
- There was discussion regarding how police respond when crime or suspicious activity increases at a business location, such as McDonald's. The response is typically coordinated at the sector level where police captains review weekly crime trends across the city. If a location shows increased activity, officers are assigned strategies to address the issue. Often, a designated officer works directly with the business's management to provide guidance, ensure staff know how to report problems, and connect them with available resources.
- Mr. Beaty stated he suspects employees of local community businesses, who are mostly from the local community, such as the McDonalds on W. Glebe, could be very helpful to APD and to ACPS if they knew who to contact when trends increase and if they received a little bit of training.
- Lt. Magyar shared that recent youth disturbances have primarily occurred in the Sanger-to-Ramsey corridor and around Kenmore after school hours. She noted that many incidents are organized quickly through texting, Instagram, and social media, allowing large groups of youth to gather rapidly for fights.
- She explained that most incidents do not appear to be gang-driven, but rather begin as unresolved conflicts between individuals that escalate as friends and peers become involved.
- Members discussed that the activity is largely connected to school dismissal times, as youth from different schools use that time to meet and confront one another in the community.
- Lt. Magyar announced that the Youth Resource Unit will be dissolved at the end of the month, with officers reassigned to patrol due to staffing needs. She praised the unit's work and thanked community partners for their collaboration and support.
- Members discussed the value and positive impact of the Youth Resource Unit and requested outcome data and reports documenting the unit's accomplishments. Lt. Magyar agreed to share available reports upon request.
- Lt. Magyar also announced her retirement after 33 years of service. Task force members thanked her for her collaboration, leadership, and continued support of the group over the years.
- Dr. Jackson shared updates on ACPS family wellness seminars designed to support students returning from suspension or disciplinary placements. The monthly sessions connect students and families with available school and community resources related to mental health, social-emotional support, and overall wellness.
- She emphasized that while some youth conflicts may be connected to school relationships, many incidents are occurring outside of school settings and after school hours. ACPS remains focused on maintaining safe learning environments

and preventing students from becoming involved in violence or gang-related activity.

- Dr. Jackson stressed the importance of continued collaboration between schools, families, community organizations, and law enforcement to support at-risk youth and connect families with needed services and interventions.
- Members discussed recent youth fights occurring near schools and in the surrounding community. One incident began as a conflict between two students and escalated after peers and other youth became involved through social media and word of mouth, resulting in a large crowd gathering to watch the fight.
- ACPS representatives shared that fights inside schools appear to be decreasing compared to the post-COVID period, though some conflicts are continuing off campus after school hours. Staff noted that restrictions on cell phone use during the school day may have helped reduce in-school incidents.
- Members discussed the challenges associated with student suspensions, noting that suspended youth are often unsupervised in the community during the day, which can contribute to additional problems. The group emphasized the need for stronger collaboration between schools, law enforcement, families, and community organizations to better support at-risk youth.
- APD representatives explained that when schools or SROs become aware of potential fights, they coordinate with patrol officers to increase police presence in targeted areas, which has helped prevent or de-escalate some incidents. However, staffing limitations can impact the department's ability to consistently respond in this way.
- Members discussed alternatives to out-of-school suspension, expressing concern that suspended youth are often unsupervised at home and may become involved in additional problems in the community.
- Participants explored the possibility of expanded in-school suspension or alternative placement models that would allow students to continue schoolwork while remaining separated from peers involved in conflicts. Suggestions included temporary placement at another school site or structured alternative education settings.
- ACPS representatives explained that while alternative education options are being considered, there are significant logistical, staffing, transportation, supervision, and budget challenges associated with implementing those models. Concerns were also raised about bringing suspended students into different school environments.
- Dr. Jackson emphasized that prevention and relationship-building remain the most effective strategies. She stressed the importance of ensuring students have trusted adults they can turn to before conflicts escalate and highlighted mentorship and school connectedness as key priorities moving forward.
- Mr. Daniele shared APD heat maps identifying locations of incidents that may have gang-related indicators, as well as general residential areas associated with involved youth. APD clarified that the maps do not confirm gang involvement, but instead track behaviors and incidents that may warrant additional attention.

- The task force can use the data to guide prevention and outreach efforts in areas where youth fights and disturbances are occurring, such as Bradlee and Kenmore Shopping Center.
- Mr. Dillon expressed the continued use of APD heat maps and the potential for SHARE data overlays to better identify trends, target resources, and coordinate prevention efforts in areas experiencing higher levels of youth violence and disorder.
- Mr. Daniele shared that the anonymous community violence tip line is now active online. Residents can anonymously submit concerns related to violence, gangs, or weapons through a QR code and web portal.
- Provided an update on the “Kitchen of Purpose” introductory culinary class held in Arlington. Twelve youth participated, including several from Sheltercare, and multiple participants expressed interest in pursuing culinary careers. The program focused on workforce exposure, skill-building, and mentorship opportunities. Members also discussed exploring future culinary boot camps and certification opportunities tied to employment pathways for youth.
- Mr. Daniele shared updates regarding city guidance on responses to unidentified law enforcement activity, including ICE-related concerns. Informational handouts and online resources were distributed to help residents understand how to safely respond and report concerns.

6. Gang Task Force Member Updates:

- Mr. Beaty shared two updates: First, the revised Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ACPS and the police department regarding School Resource Officers (SROs). A public hearing on the revised draft is scheduled for April 16, and updated materials have been added to the public agenda packet for review.
- Mr. Beaty also highlighted ACPS’s annual Essential Workers Appreciation Day, which began during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to be held each year at an elementary school. The event brings together law enforcement, firefighters, SROs, custodial staff, and other essential workers to engage with students and discuss their roles in the community. The program was recognized as an important opportunity to build positive relationships between youth and public safety personnel while increasing student awareness and appreciation for essential community workers.
- Mr. Beaty presented an overview of ACPS budget challenges and potential reductions for the upcoming fiscal year. He explained that ACPS receives approximately 80% of its funding from the city and only about 20% from the state, one of the lowest levels of state support in Virginia due to the state funding formula and local composite index. He also noted that ACPS serves a high percentage of English language learners, increasing instructional and support costs.
- Mr. Beaty shared that ACPS has already implemented approximately \$7.7 million in reductions and continues to face rising healthcare and staffing costs. He explained that ACPS remains near the bottom regionally in staff compensation, creating concerns about employee recruitment and retention.

- He discussed a projected funding gap of approximately \$5.6 million between ACPS needs and the current city funding proposal. As a result, the division is evaluating potential reductions, including increased class sizes, staffing reductions, and cuts to extracurricular and after-school programming.
 - Members specifically expressed concern about the possible loss of middle school athletics, Communities in Schools programming, clubs, and other non-academic activities that provide youth engagement opportunities and positive outlets outside of school hours. It was emphasized that many of these programs play an important role in violence prevention and youth development.
 - Mr. Beaty clarified that the proposed reductions are not final and that the city and state budget processes are still ongoing.
 - Mr. Kirkes expressed significant concern regarding the ACPS budget presentation and expressed surprise at the level of state funding disparities and regional staff compensation rankings presented during the discussion. Several members noted that there appears to be a widespread public misconception that ACPS receives among the highest per-pupil funding levels in the region.
 - Members emphasized the importance of improving public awareness and community education regarding school funding challenges, staffing pressures, and the potential impact of proposed cuts on youth programming and student supports. Suggestions were made to share the information more broadly through PTAs, civic associations, and other community groups.
 - The group discussed the possibility of drafting a task force support letter related to the budget concerns, though members acknowledged challenges associated with taking a formal position given the makeup and structure of the task force.
 - Members also discussed the importance of improving coordination and communication around youth programming and community resources, including the development of a centralized calendar or information-sharing platform for youth opportunities and events.
 - The meeting concluded with reminders regarding upcoming meetings, breakout group follow-up work, and continued coordination around task force priorities and prevention strategies.
7. Public Comment: There was announcement made regarding the Teen Calendar which is now available on the youth resources page of the City Website. Submissions can be made to Chelsea.eickert@alexandriava.gov.
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, May 20, 2026, 6 - 8 p.m. at Charles Houston Recreation Center.

2026 Meeting Schedule

May 20

June 17

September 16

November 18

10. Meeting Adjourn: 7:57 p.m.