

Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force

Meeting Minutes

September 20, 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: Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins, (Member, Alexandria City Council), Jim Dillon Chair/Business Community Representative, Ms. Marilyn Nevy Cruz (Vice Chair/Latino Community Representative), Luke Daniele, (Youth Crime and Gang Prevention Project Manager), Rachael Dischner (Elementary School Representative), Ms. Noraine Buttar (City Manager's Representative/DCHS Representative), Mr. Bryan Kirkes (Citizen At-Large), Reverend Anthony T. Oliver (Faith Based Community Representative), Mr. Tim Brannon (Middle School Representative), Roberto Gomez (Member, Parent of Youth) Everin Zelaya (At-Large Member From and Representing the Youth), Mubashir Adelaja (At-Large Member From and Representing the Youth)

Senior Policy Group on Gangs Members Present: Katherine Beye (Commonwealth Attorney's Office) Leon Semper (Adult Probation and Parole)

Guests/Staff: Kate Reen (Program Manager, Northern Virginia Family Service), Liliana Janssen-Checa (IPE Supervisor, Northern Virginia Family Service) Michael Diggins (Alexandria City Public Schools), Dr. Marcia Jackson (Alexandria City Public Schools), Carlton Gerald (Alexandria City Public Schools), Asia Jones (Outreach Specialist, DCHS), Deputy Carlos Canas (Sheriff's Office), Alston Waller (Branch Director, Dunbar Alexandria-Olympic Boys and Girls Club), Ian Torrance (Alexandria Police Department), Officer Andrew Harrell, (George Washington Middle School), Linda Odell (Alexandria Court Service Unit, Crime Prevention Programs Manager), and David Ulloa (Alexandria Mentoring Partnership Coordinator).

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. Mr. Khalil Coates (At-Large Member, Representing Youth of the City)
13. Reverend Anthony T. Oliver (Faith Based Community Representative)
14. Mr. Roberto Gomez (Parent Representative)
15. Mr. Mubashir Adelaja (At-Large, Representing Youth of the City)
16. Mr. Everin Zelaya (At-Large, Representing Youth of the City)
17. (Citizen Member, At-Large) - Vacant
18. (ARHA Representative) – Vacant

1. Call to Order and Roll Call: Chair Dillon called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. All present confirmed their attendance.
2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes: Ms. Nevy Cruz made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded, and members approved.
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:
 - Officer Torrance and Officer Harrell mentioned YRTS, (Youth Runs the Streets), a local middle/high school aged group that is public on social media and are found

in the Madison, Wythe and the 900 block of Montgomery Street in Alexandria. This group reportedly engages in drug use and drinking.

- Deputy Canas stated that the jail is currently seeing a large majority of the gang members being MS-13 and that roughly 35 to 40 percent of the identified gangs in the jail are MS-13. Additionally, federal inmates are mixed with local inmates. There was a question regarding why this is taking place and if it can be prevented.
- Mubashir Adelaja/Chair Dillon stated that there are activities of fighting, especially one-on-one fighting, and that social media (Instagram) is used quite often when initiating the fights.
- “M4L” or “Mob4Life” were brought up as two groups. Additionally, music groups are being referenced.
- Pastor Oliver stated that his church (Mt. Jezreel Baptist Church) partnered with Alston Waller, who is the Director of the Dunbar Alexandria – Olympic Boys and Girls Club to do a back-to-school backpack giveaway. There were 250 backpacks given away and food was donated as well.
- Bryan Kirkes stated there has been an uptick in crime and that the crews are not referring to themselves as gangs or being affiliated in a gang.
- Officer Torrance reported that there are just 5 SROs, working weekdays from approximately 8 - 4 p.m. SROs are assigned as follows: one at Hammond, one at GWMS, one at MH campus, and two at the main ACHS campus. There is also a security team hired by ACPS, as well as an outside contractor. There are no SROs stationed at elementary schools, Chance for Change or Satellite. A need was raised regarding floater SROs.

7. Alexandria Mentoring Partnership:

- **Please see attached PowerPoint presentation.**

Mr. Ulloa presented the Alexandria Mentoring Partnership presentation and discussed the importance of becoming a mentor. The Alexandria Mentoring Partnership has been in existence since 2006 and it is a collaboration of over a dozen mentoring programs and program leaders that supports nearly 1,000 mentoring relationships at approximately 20,000 volunteer mentoring hours each year. The Alexandria Mentoring Partnership recruits volunteer adult mentors to serve children, teens and young adults; works to ensure best practices in mentoring and provides training to program staff and volunteer mentors.

Some of the programs that the Alexandria Mentoring Partnership collaborates with are:

- Casa Chirilagua
- Community Lodgings
- Higher Achievement
- Space of Her Own (SOHO)

- The Untouchables
- Wright to Read
- The Alexandria Seaport Foundation
- Building Better Futures
- Decoded
- The Spitfire Club
- Alexandria Tutoring Consortium
- 4-H Alexandria
- The Dream Project
- GoPursue
- UNCUT Youth

8. Chairman's Readout:

Initiatives in Motion

- **Anonymous Notification System** – Our letter recommending implementation of the ACPS tip line was written to the City Council and School Board and is now successfully being implemented.
- **Bradlee Shopping Center** – Chair Dillon stated there is movement and calls have been made to business owners, property manager of the Bradlee Shopping Center, Police, Dash and the City as well. It was also mentioned that APD is working to finalize a lease agreement to place a sub-station at the Bradlee shopping center.
- **Pillars Round #2 (Casa Chirilagua)** Begins October 3, 2023. There will be 20 active participants from grades 9-12. Guest speakers could include DC United, Child Psychologist, Real Estate Agent, Nurse, Business Owner, Restaurateur
- **Liberty's Promise** – Mr. Daniele stated he is working to collaborate with Melissa Gelinis, Director of Liberty's Promise Northern Virginia Programs, to conduct workshops that will promote civic engagement, gang awareness and crime prevention amongst recently immigrated youth. Among groups identified are 15-25 Spanish-speaking boys, as well as a group of recently immigrated Afghan

- girls. NVFS IPE/VPIP counselors are potential co-facilitators for these sessions.

9. New Topics:

- Rivals in other parts of the region, kids getting picked up in other jurisdictions, after hours and weekends.
- Information was shared regarding groups referencing music groups or neighborhoods.
- Substance abuse was raised as a major concern, as well as use of Narcan as a life-saving measure.
- There are nefarious sources providing drugs and weapons. There is an ongoing trend of ghost guns being used.
- It was suggested that a health class be offered at ACPS for credit, with emphasis on social emotional learning, moral reasoning, anger control, and life skill development.

10. Administrative Items:

- Task Force members shall attend at least 75 percent of the meetings of the bodies on which they serve each year.
- **Gang Prevention Brochure** – Waiting on internal City communications for final draft.
- There are 2 vacancies currently open. (**ARHA Representative or ARHA Resident and Citizen at-Large**)
- **Cops vs. Kids Futsal Tournament** October 9 on the field behind 3831 Mount Vernon Avenue. Warmups will begin at 12:30 p.m. and the first game starts at 1 p.m.

11. Next Meeting: Wednesday, October 18, 2023, 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. at Charles Houston Recreation Center.

Suggested 2024 Meeting Schedule

January 17

March 20

May 15

June 19

September 18

November 20

Scheduled Meetings for the remainder of the year:

- October 18 from 6 - 8 p.m.

12. Meeting Adjourned at 7:56 p.m.