



MINUTES
SPECIAL COMMISSION FOR SAFE COMMUNITIES - REGULAR SESSION
THURSDAY, October 24, 2024, 1:00 PM.

The Special Commission for Safe Communities convened in regular session in the Government Center Boardroom at 1:00 PM, on October 24, 2024. Chairperson Denton called the meeting to order.

Roll Call

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Scott Denton	Chairperson	Present
Elizabeth German	Vice Chairperson	Present
Cathy Lust	Commissioner	Present
Kaitlyn Selman	Commissioner	Present
Ryan Bertrand	Commissioner	Present
Timothy Harris	Commissioner	Present
Aron Klein	Commissioner	Present
Christopher Cashen	Commissioner	Absent

Staff Advisors Present:

Lieutenant (Lt.) Clayton Arnold, Staff Liaison

Sergeant (Sgt.) Kiel Nowers, Staff Liaison

Public Comment

Public comment was provided in-person by Molly Ward, Ward 7 Bloomington City Council Member

Approval of Minutes

Item 4.A. Consideration and action to approve the Minutes of the September 26, 2024, Regular Special Commission for Safe Communities Meeting.

The minutes of the September 26, 2024, Regular Special Commission for Safe Communities Meeting were not posted and were unable to be approved at this meeting.

Chairperson Denton directed the Staff Liaison to call roll:

AYES: Klein; Lust; Bertrand; Harris; Selman; German

Motion carried.

Regular Agenda

The following item was presented:

Item 5.A. Presentation and discussion by the Bloomington Police Department on the current status of gun violence in the Bloomington-Normal area.

Lt. Arnold shared that year-to-date there have been 35 shooting incidents in Bloomington. Since the last commission meeting, Bloomington Police Department (BPD)

recorded two incidents of shots fired (East Washington Street and West Illinois Street); both caused property damage. No injuries were reported from either of those incidents.

Since the last commission meeting, Normal recorded four shootings, two of which occurred during the Illinois State University (ISU) Homecoming weekend. Of the two victims from those shootings, one died from their injuries. Additionally, there was an exchange of gunfire between two adult subjects during a youth football game. No injuries were recorded during that event and both subjects were arrested and charged.

Recently, members of the Joliet Police Department visited BPD to learn how BPD is using a combination of technologies to combat violent crime.

Commissioner Lust asked if BPD would be able to include incidents of domestic violence in the data reported during the commission meetings. Lt. Arnold replied that BPD could provide that data; however, he cautioned that the numbers could appear high because BPD takes a very proactive approach with reporting domestic violence. For example, BPD gets called to disagreements between domestic parties and officers take down information in case something escalates into a bigger situation later, so the numbers may be high and alarming if taken without context. Commissioner Selman mentioned that the mayor has requested the commission pay attention to domestic violence in its information gathering. Commissioner Denton asked if there was a way to separate out initial contacts with repeated contacts. Lt. Arnold said he would look into it, see if there is a way to filter the data.

Item 5.B. Presentation and discussion by Dr. Dawn Beichner-Thomas regarding the relationship between gun violence and domestic violence.

Dr. Dawn Beichner-Thomas is an ISU professor in the Criminal Justice Sciences Department and Women's and Gender Studies Program. Her areas of teaching and interest include gender and crime, victimology, international justice, and global social problems. The main focus of her discussion was Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

Dr. Beichner-Thomas opened by sharing that historically, victims and survivors of IPV have not received a lot of attention. Focus has primarily been on the perpetrator(s) and punishment. She urged the commission to keep victims and survivors in mind while focusing on IPV. Some information Dr. Beichner-Thomas shared:

- www.Giffords.org and Giffords Center for Violence Intervention. Led by former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. Its mission is to end gun violence.
- Approximately 90% of IPV victims had already interacted with police regarding their situation prior to their injury or death.
- IPV abusers need to be disarmed/have firearms removed from their possession
- Currently, 32 states prohibit domestic violence abusers from legally owning firearms.
- Education and awareness are key
- Orders of Protection (OP) and IPV need to be taken seriously
- Need to prioritize IPV data collection and funding for it
- Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund advocates in state legislatures for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- More activism and reform, guided by evidence-based practices, is necessary
- Victims of IPV need to understand that they must follow through by attending the hearing after a temporary OP is issued. This is critical when seeking to remove firearms from the abuser's possession.

Dr. Beichner-Thomas provided all commission members with a handout she put together titled, "IPV and Gun Violence Reading List".

Commissioner Lust asked who leads a victim of IPV to the path of obtaining an OP. Dr. Beichner-Thomas replied that local advocates are available through a call line to assist victims. She also reiterated the importance of victims following through with attending a hearing to get an abuser's firearms taken away.

Commissioner German mentioned that locally, counselors with the Stepping Stones program through the YWCA are all trained to be victim advocates. They will also walk a victim through the process even if the victim does not want to formally partner with Stepping Stones. In addition, they work in conjunction with Mid Central Community Action.

Commissioner Bertrand noted he is a task force leader with Amnesty International and he has trouble finding good, unbiased, non-politically affiliated data on the success of specific gun violence prevention measures. He wondered if Dr. Beichner-Thomas was aware of any data he could source that fit within the parameters mentioned in the previous line. Dr. Beichner-Thomas stated she believes the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions is unaffiliated politically.

Commissioner German asked if there is anything Dr. Beicher-Thomas would suggest that the commission should recommend to the city. Dr. Beichner-Thomas responded that she believes it would be feasible to hold some type of summit with various community stakeholders to discuss issues such as, what it is like for first responders when they answer an IPV call, and what challenges do they face, as well as getting the perspective of victims and survivors who are comfortable talking with the community about their experiences.

Commissioner Denton asked how guns can be kept out of the hands of those who should not have access to them. Dr. Beichner-Thomas stated that as the community shows its stance on the subject, groups will come together, and it will lead to more education to a wider base of people. At this time the focus needs to be on taking OPs seriously and getting firearms out of the hands of abusers.

Item 5.C. Presentation and discussion by Kevin Jones, who previously worked with the Regional Office of Education and is now a consultant/trainer with Pathways 2 Restorative Leadership.

Kevin Jones is the Director of the Restorative Leadership Project at Regional Office Education District #17 and has lived in the Bloomington-Normal area for 40 years. His professional life includes experience working in residential treatment programs with The Baby Fold, the Center for Human Services, and he was the Student and Family Services Administrator for the Regional Alternative School, among other organizations and agencies. Director Jones has extensive experience using and teaching restorative justice and restorative leadership practices, such as listening circles. He came across the practice of restorative practice/restorative justice approximately 13 years ago and began leaning into it with his work.

Director Jones has experience facilitating "listening circles" within communities across the United States, from rural areas of Wisconsin to urban areas such as Compton, California, as well as countries besides the United States. He began doing listening circles during the COVID pandemic and then kept them going. Listening circles create space for people to be heard. Listening circles are spaces for listening first, without debate, discussion or problem-solving.

Restorative justice has its roots in the criminal justice arena. It gives an opportunity for victims to have a voice in the outcomes of what happened as the result of a criminal/violent act. There is a fundamental hypothesis that humans are happier when people of influence do things with them rather than to them, for them, or being neglectful of them. Approximately 80% of restorative justice/leadership is building relationship before a big event happens. When a triggering event occurs and people are in trauma mode, they may go into survival mode. They may strike out, either at other people or at themselves. They may withdraw by running away or avoid the trauma by turning to substances like drugs. Twenty percent of restorative justice/leadership work is about response to harm; restorative justice/restorative leadership works within the other 80% of time to build community and help people build the necessary skillsets to prepare them for that 20% of the time they will deal with trauma.

Engage with others	Inclusive process/decision making • Intentional engagement, create space for voices • Explanation - allow people to ask questions • Expectation/clarity - what is the decision, what are the rules, how is it communicated, who are the stakeholders
Expressing/sharing & reflecting on emotions Understanding what is behind the behavior	Practicing across the continuum

If fair process is observed, people will go along with change even if they do not agree with it. When you label people, you push them out of the community. Create a sense of belonging. It's possible to dislike and address a behavior but not throw out the person. Remember that people have value; hold them accountable and provide support but don't throw them away.

If it is possible and safe for all parties, when a harmful event occurs (e.g. school bullying) get the victim and perpetrator together for discussion and work to repair the harm. The victim needs to have their voice heard and understand what to expect, what will occur next. For example, if a student is suspended from school for bullying another student, the bullied student will likely feel anxious about what will happen when the bullying student returns to school. Frequently, the victims are left without information that would help them know what to expect going forward.

Detroit, Michigan, has all been working to embed restorative justice practices in their work for the past 20 years. All the law enforcement personnel in Detroit have been trained in restorative justice practices. It is part of officer onboarding. More information about the "Detroit model" can be found online.

Director Jones noted that communities that practice restorative justice tend to have low crime rates and low suspensions and disruptions in the schools. He encouraged people to think about a person with authority or influence over you who engaged with you in some space in

your life and asked if you still respect that person today. If you do, he posited that that person engaged with you restoratively. They held you accountable and they also provided you support. When you messed up, they held you accountable, but they did not throw you away.

Commissioner Lust asked if the focus is more on restorative leadership and being preventative than being reactive now. Director Jones replied that the leadership piece, and by leadership he means "everyone", is leading the work. He mentioned one of the coolest things he's currently involved with is a program that started three years ago where on six different Saturdays a year, he meets with young leaders from the Unit 5 School District in Normal, Illinois, and they have a restorative leadership academy. He stated the leadership part of the academy isn't necessarily authority it's how do we lead. The strategies are restorative practices, the leadership part is how do we create more leaders to continue and expand the work. The key to restorative leadership is how do we engage with ourselves and how do we engage with each other.

Commissioner Selman mentioned that a previous guest speaker, Leslie Blockman, who is the Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning and Engagement with District 87, discussed the importance of building conflict resolution skills at a very early age. Director Jones stated that what he's learned from working within five different organizations and visiting with other agencies and organizations, is that it's not them, it's us, it's how we show up at a conflict that matters. The conflict is going to happen, so all the proactive work is building capacity - community capacity and relationship capacity - so that when the big things happen, everyone comes to the table with a similar mindset and a similar understanding. Before he sits down to facilitate a conflict circle, he interviews everyone that is going to be part of that circle. He is trying to determine if each person is showing up to help resolve the conflict or are they are showing up for some other reason. If anyone is not ready, he doesn't move forward with the conflict circle. He recommends that people in restorative leadership roles practice conflict circles in their personal lives before they need to handle one in a professional capacity, such as in their classrooms, so they are more comfortable and proficient at it.

Commissioner Selman then asked how to build community before a conflict happens. Director Jones replied, "The aim of restorative practices is to build relationships to develop community, because when we do that, we can manage conflicts and tensions better, when harm happens, we can repair harm, and we can restore the community that we built." At a training in Florida, a participant said, "We're going to focus heavy on building community, because you cannot repair community that you never built." He stated the need is to work on small things before they get big. The tendency we have is to all gather round and try to work together after something big happens, but we can be preventative by building that community before something happens.

Commissioner German asked if, in terms of embedding restorative community and making it sustainable, would Director Jones recommend that each major institution have it as part of their organizational procedures or workflow that is always part of their practice. He responded that yes, the training works. He said he's passionate about restorative community because he's seen it work. He said one challenge is that it's low profile and sometimes people don't know or hear about it. He commented that in previous monthly trainings he's given, he's had more people from surrounding areas of Bloomington-Normal attend local trainings than people within the Bloomington-Normal community.

Commissioner Denton asked if restorative justice has a place in preventing the escalation of domestic violence and intimate partner homicide. He asked if what Director Jones is applying to schools can be applied to the most dangerous place for a woman, which is in her

own home. Director Jones stated that although the framework for restorative community trainings is generally designed for each specific audience (e.g. schools, workplaces), the training requires personal reflection and people tend to think of their own personal situations in relation to the training they receive. A lot of the work starts with how we apply restorative justice/ to ourselves, e.g. how do you apply the strategies to yourself, what does fairness look like when you're making decisions for yourself, how do we give ourselves grace when we're working through things for ourselves as individuals.

Commissioner Denton asked Dr. Beichner-Thomas what her thoughts were on the topic. She stated that she believes it can be possible to use the restorative justice techniques Director Jones talked about in some IPV situations. In situations where it would not be safe for a victim or survivor to be in the same room as the perpetrator, a surrogate for the victim can be used so the perpetrator has an opportunity to be heard and to be somebody other than just the perpetrator. If everyone is entering into it voluntarily, it can work. In New Zealand, they are working with the idea of family group conferencing, which brings together all the children who have witnessed the events taking place in their home and thinking about how to restore and rebuild, how to make it so the children understand what a healthy relationship looks like and understand taking ownership for wrongdoing. In Europe, in the area of the world with New Zealand and with indigenous people generally, it is a long-standing practice to allow all the community, all the stakeholders, to come together and find a solution.

Dr. Beichner-Thomas continued with we know that with IPV, it's not going to end without an invested interest from the person who perpetrated the violence. If the perpetrator wants to change, we should be there to help them through that, and from a law enforcement perspective, if we can get to the stage of having a listening session, we want law enforcement officers to be able to talk about the frustrations of repeatedly going to a home over and over again and listen to a survivor say they don't want to move forward with it. We also need to understand why, understand all the parameters of what is happening.

Director Jones added that punishment is categorized as passive discipline, because the person who caused the damage never has to acknowledge that they caused harm. If someone who caused harm will not say they are sorry or won't take any accountability, the restorative justice process cannot move forward. Another key is the person who was harmed often does not want to have anything to do with the perpetrator/abuser. Punishment can move forward in those situations, but restorative justice cannot.

New Business

Commissioner German suggested not having a guest speaker for the November commission meeting and instead having that time be used as a working meeting for the commission. She suggested this will give the commissioners an opportunity to assess what has already been presented to date and identify any gaps in information.

A formal motion was not made but all commissioners in attendance agreed to have the November meeting be a working meeting.

If held on its regularly scheduled fourth Thursday of the month, the November meeting would fall on Thanksgiving Day. Discussion was had about moving the meeting to the Thursday before Thanksgiving Day, November 21, 2024. Commissioner Denton asked the present commission members if there was any objection to moving the meeting and there was none. No formal motion was made; it was agreed by a quorum of present commissioners to move the next meeting to November 21, 2024.

Commissioner Member Comments

Commissioner Selman attended an Illinois Humanities Envisioning Justice event recently and had the opportunity to speak with an individual who had spent time in prison and now is part of the initiative to support arts/cultural programs for people who are currently, or have been, incarcerated. He trains people on how to interrupt violence. He's trained over 1,000 people in their own neighborhoods. He posited that people respond better to mediation and learning things like conflict resolution skills with people who they are familiar with and know from within their own neighborhoods and communities rather than individuals they do not.

Commissioner Selman is now part of the Envisioning Justice Council, which has a new hub within McLean County through a partnership with the YWCA in Bloomington. They are trying to put on an event or series of events, on healing and building community and resolving conflict through art. She has also learned that there are a lot of interrelated councils that are doing the same type of work, but the different councils do not all know about each other and what each other are doing. They are hoping the Envisioning Justice Council will bring various stakeholders together to work together on violence prevention.

Commissioner Denton voiced the hope that everyone can be brought together at some point instead of working alone in separate "pockets".

Adjournment

Commissioner German made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Klein, to adjourn.

Motion carried (viva voce).

The Meeting Adjourned at 2:37 PM.

CITY OF BLOOMINGTON



First and Last Name, Chairperson

ATTEST



Clayton Arnold, Staff Liaison