



MINUTES
SPECIAL COMMISSION FOR SAFE COMMUNITIES - REGULAR SESSION
THURSDAY, APRIL 25, 2024, 1:00 PM.

The Special Commission for Safe Communities convened in regular session in the Government Center Boardroom at 1:00 PM, on April 25, 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
Jay Shannon	Commissioner	Present
Timothy Harris	Commissioner	Absent
Aron Klein	Commissioner	Absent

Staff Advisors Present:

Aaron Veerman, Staff Liaison

Public Comment

The following person provided in-person public comment: Surena Fish. No emailed public comment was received.

Approval of Minutes

The following item was presented:

Item 4.A. Consideration and action to approve the Minutes of the February 22, 2024, Regular Special Commission for Safe Communities Meeting.

Commissioner German made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Lust, to approve the Item as presented.

Chairperson Denton directed the clerk to call roll:

AYES: Shannon; Selman; Lust; German

Chairperson Denton: Motion carried.

The following item was presented:

Item 4.B. Consideration and action to approve the Minutes of the March 28, 2024, Regular Special Commission for Safe Communities Meeting.

Commissioner German made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Lust, to approve the item as presented.

Chairperson Denton directed the clerk to call roll:

AYES: Shannon; Selman; Lust; German

Chairperson Denton: Motion carried.

Regular Agenda

The following item was presented:

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

Since the last meeting, Bloomington had three recorded incidents of street level gunfire.

- March 28: 1100 block of W. Jackson Street, rounds were fired into a residential home. The case was still under investigation by the Criminal Investigation Division and no recent leads were received.
- April 7: Rounds were fired outside a home in the area of Oakland Avenue/Clayton Street. A juvenile was identified and taken into custody. No injuries or property damage were reported.
- April 15: There was an apartment parking lot dispute between groups of people in the area of 200 Reeveston. There were no injuries on scene. Officers developed a vehicle description for the suspects but were not provided with a license plate. Officers utilized the ALPR license plate reader data and located a matching vehicle and license plate. The owner's address was determined after the license plate was run. Bloomington Police Department (BPD) officers proceeded to the registered owner's address in north Normal and found the vehicle and vehicle occupants. Evidence was developed which implicated two subjects, and two firearms were seized. Two arrests were made for the earlier shooting in Bloomington.

BPD was also assisting in an April 16, 2024, homicide in rural McLean County. BPD's ALPR system and Public Safety Camera network greatly advanced their case. No further details were released.

During the same period of time as the incidents outlined above, Normal had three additional shooting incidents.

Chairperson Denton asked for clarification on if there were any injuries in any of the shooting incidents. Asst. Chief Veerman indicated there were no injuries reported.

Item 5.B. Presentation and discussion by Commissioner Klein on several articles located earlier this month, including (1) In Chicago visit, Attorney General Merrick B. Garland announces \$78M anti-violence initiative | WGLT; and (2.) Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Office of Justice Programs Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative Site-Based Grant Program | Bureau of Justice Assistance (ojp.gov).

Commissioner Klein was absent but a discussion amongst commissioners was held regarding solicitation by the U.S. Department of Justice - Bureau of Justice Assistance, for applications for the FY24 Office of Justice anti-violence initiative grant program. The deadline to apply was May 30, 2024.

Commissioner Selman stated she believed these types of grants and investment in community-based responses are important for prevention. Much of the commission's focus has been on prevention and part of the commission's charge is to focus on immediate needs and what is unique to Bloomington - what do people here need and how can the commission support

them. Also, how can the commission prevent violence based on what can be learned from what is happening in other places. How could we learn from what other communities are doing and use that to frame this commission's response. Reiterated the belief that we should invest in prevention rather than reaction.

Commissioner Shannon stated Bloomington has a history of investing in these types of grants. Bloomington was among the first in the state to get some gang intervention grants, which eventually morphed into other programs. Our cyber task force eventually became known nationwide. There are unique things that can be done here in Bloomington because of it being a smaller community that other, larger jurisdictions, could also try to implement. It is important Bloomington stay at the forefront with these types of programs.

Commissioner Denton stated one of the things the commission is responsible for is trying to find ways to prevent gun violence. Another responsibility should be to discuss what was done in the past and disseminate information to the public. He has printed out the articles Commissioner Klein provided if anyone wants to see them.

Item 5.C. Presentation and discussion by Karen Irvin, a volunteer with McLean County Moms Demand Action.

Karen Irvin, a volunteer with McLean County Moms Demand Action (MDA) presented. Karen stated MDA is active on a local, state, and federal levels. It is part of Every Town for Gun Safety. There are also two other groups, Students Demand Action and Mayors Against Illegal Guns. There are Moms groups in every state and local groups in every county. The groups are comprised of volunteers who received guidance and support from Every Town. At the local level, they started in March 2018. Some members have been very active and some just wanted to give support.

One of the basic things MDA has done is legislative work. MDA is not a partisan group but they have been political. They have worked at state and federal levels to elect people who are committed to passing Gun Sense legislation. They have met with legislators to educate them on bills MDA would like support on. They have participated in phone banking, canvassing, and postcard writing. There are some elected officials that have not understood Gun Sense and believed MDA is trying to infringe on second amendment rights. MDA has not been trying to do that; rather, they have been trying to educate on Gun Sense to keep guns out of the hands of people who should not have them, and guns that are illegally obtained. MDA has recognized and respected that there are responsible gun owners.

MDA at the local level has been very hands on with committed volunteers. They supported Illinois Governor Pritzker because of his commitment to Gun Sense. They have recognized there are other groups in existence who have worked against gun violence far longer than MDA. They have met and collaborate with other groups to raise awareness. MDA's strongest partnerships have been with NAACP, Prairie Pride Coalition, Mid Central Community Action, YWCA, YMCA, and NAACP Youth Group. Some of what they have done is the dissemination of information at events and participation in donation drives. They attended the West Bloomington Block Party and provided some of the backpacks for children that were needed. They worked with the Prairie Pride Coalition on a memorial for the Pulse Nightclub shooting. They've worked with Midwest Food Bank. They have also worked with Habitat for Humanity when NAACP was building a house for a family and again with NAACP for a memorial for George Floyd.

They have had internal and external events, such as BeSmart, which is part of their education work on secure firearm storage. Their team has worked to build strong relationships with schools, law enforcement, and health care providers. One thing they have been working on is education on extreme risk protection orders. One of MDA's successes within the past year has been that Unit 5, District 87, The Baby Fold, and Illinois State Lab Schools all agreed to support and share the BeSmart message regarding secure storage of firearms with parents in the form of handouts and booklets. They have also shared the message about securing firearms without judgment with parents who are known to have firearms at home. Many of MDA's team members have had connections that allow them to better transmit the BeSmart message.

Recently, BeSmart worked with Carle to drop off some posters for their emergency rooms. Nurses were trained on the BeSmart message to make sure parents knew how to secure firearms. Regarding extreme risk protection orders, MDA worked on an awareness campaign to temporarily remove accessibility to firearms from those who are at the greatest risk of using them against themselves or others. Accessibility to guns has driven the numbers up for suicides and domestic violence situation.

MDA's team has had a great relationship with law enforcement and officers have accompanied their team to events, which gives MDA greater credibility. Law enforcement agencies have also shared MDA's message on social media, which has helped.

Bloomington Police Department (BPD) asked MDA/BeSmart to attend two events in 2023 which were part of a grant: the gun lock giveaway and the Gun Buyback.

MDA One Thing You Can Do mission was for people to understand that one thing they can do is remove a gun rather than look back when a tragedy has happened.

MDA provides survivor support. A survivor is anyone who has personal experience with gun violence. Gun violence has taken many forms and has had the potential to be traumatic. It is important to note that not everyone who has had experience with gun violence considers themselves a survivor.

When MDA began in 2018, it was through multiple community networks that survivor moms found their way to the MDA group. They were able to provide support and introduce other survivors so they could share their experiences. MDA connected survivors in their local group and offered to assist in scheduling memorials or services. MDA has given survivors a platform to speak about their experiences and give the community the opportunity to support the survivor. An important part of what MDA has done locally is to provide one-on-one support to a survivor mom who are going through the trauma of a trial. Ms. Irvin stated BPD was exceptional in the rate at which they have solved these homicides one after another. The moms have had to sit in court and relive the trauma as the details of the homicides are laid out. The moms wanted someone they trust to be with them in court as support during the trials, which is what MDA has been able to provide.

Wear Orange is a national day for recognition and awareness of gun violence. They have had events attended by over 250 people who want to help support survivors of gun violence. The events give survivor moms an opportunity to speak publicly about their experience.

What has gotten the most media attention are mass shootings. What has been most prevalent is one-to-one singular shootings, however they are motivated. Visibility has been important to MDA. They have written letters to the editor, participated in panel discussions and

provided a space for collective community grief and action. They have gotten involved in parades and have had tables at events and developed a relationship with the media so MDA can continue to grow.

MDA wanted to acknowledge that mass shootings, as defined by Every Town are events in which four or more people, excluding the shooter, are injured or killed, get the most media attention. However, every day, in our country, more than 120 Americans have died by gun violence and hundreds more have been wounded. They believed the government needed to support local research, local law enforcement, and community-driven, evidence-based interventions. Those kinds of things are funded by the types of grants like the 2024 Office of Justice Programs Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative Site-Based Grant Program discussed earlier in the meeting.

Chairperson Denton stated the commission recognizes Gun Sense and the commission is not trying to take away legally possessed firearms. Ms. Irvin agreed and mentioned it is common for people to believe MDA wants to take away people's legally obtained guns, when they have just wanted people to practice safe ownership and secure their guns.

Chairperson Denton asked how MDA has been funded. Ms. Irvin stated they get some funding from Every Town. During vigils, they receive private donations. Each local group has received \$200 annually for what they need. They can also get donations in kind, no cash donations. Funds they receive through fundraising they do has gone to the state and is then distributed locally the state MDA.

Commissioner Selman asked if MDA has tried getting informational posters about secure firearm storage in pediatrician offices. Ms. Irvin replied they have tried to get information in the questionnaire for new parents and it is hard to find someone who can give approval for this in a hospital.

Chairperson Denton asked who to talk to about extreme protection orders. Commissioner Lust stated there was a training available through MDA that she took but she had not had an opportunity yet to talk to any community groups about it. She has done a presentation to MDA about it. Commissioner Lust spoke with Don Everhart, Circuit Clerk, to improve access to the form on the McLean County website. The form was made more prominent and Mr. Everhart said his office would answer questions about it, they will help with referrals.

New Business

Vice Chairperson German stated she had a conversation with Stephanie Barish from the Center for Youth and Family Solutions. She was explaining a programming in high schools in another county that sounded similar to what Project Oz does. Ms. Barish offered to talk to the commission. Commissioner Denton asked Commissioner German to find out if Ms. Barish would be available to come to the May meeting.

Commissioner Member Comments

Commissioner Shannon spoke previously about R3 funding that had been stopped by the state to which the commission had wrote a letter. Funding was reopened temporarily at a reduced amount, but it may help continue some services. They are writing a grant proposal for it. Project Oz wanted to thank the commission for its support.

Commissioner Selman wanted to put a project called Envisioning Justice, through Illinois Humanities, on everyone's radar. They have six hubs across Illinois, and they have

helped educate through the arts and humanities about the impact of incarceration. They are going to do a statewide convening here in Bloomington in the fall, where they will be bringing their community stakeholders. They are creating a hub here. Commissioner Selman thinks it would be worthwhile to hear from people in other cities who have experience with gun violence. The YWCA has had conversations with Illinois Humanities about being the hub. Commissioner Denton asked to see if someone from that group could speak to the commission in the fall.

Commissioner Denton asked if Commissioner Shannon could help organize having someone from the Western Avenue Community Center come talk to the commission at the May meeting.

Adjournment

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

Motion carried (viva voce).

The Meeting Adjourned at 2:01 PM

CITY OF BLOOMINGTON

Elizabeth German

Elizabeth German (Jun 6, 2024 15:35 CDT)

Elizabeth German, Vice-Chairperson

ATTEST

Aaron Veerman

Aaron Veerman, Staff Liaison