



MINUTES
SPECIAL COMMISSION FOR SAFE COMMUNITIES - REGULAR SESSION
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2024, 1:00 PM

The Special Commission for Safe Communities convened in regular session at 1:00 PM, February 22, 2024. Chairman Denton called the meeting to order.

Roll Call

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Timothy Harris	Commissioner	Present
Scott Denton	Chairman	Present
Elizabeth German	Commissioner	Present
Cathy Lust	Commissioner	Present
Kaitlyn Selman	Commissioner	Present
Jay Shannon	Commissioner	Present
Aron Klein	Commissioner	Absent

Public Comment

No in person public comment was received. 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 January 25, 2024, Regular Special Commission for Safe Communities Meeting.

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

Chairman Denton directed the Staff Liaison to call roll:

AYES: Selman; Lust; German; Denton; Harris

Motion carried.

Regular Agenda

The following item was presented:

Item 5.A. Consideration and Action on Approving a Vice Chairperson for the Special Commission for Safe Communities.

Chairman Denton indicated that the statute the commission operates under requires a Vice Chairperson. He stated the commission needs to elect a Vice Chairperson in case he was not present.

Chairman Denton asked if anyone wanted to nominate someone to be the Vice Chairperson for the commission or if they wished to be the Vice Chairperson themselves. Vice Chairperson German volunteered to take on the role of Vice Chairperson. Chairman Denton nominated Vice Chairperson German to be Vice Chairperson.

Chairman Denton made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Harris, to select Vice Chairperson German as the Vice Chairperson.

Chairman Denton directed the staff liaison to call roll:

AYES: Selman; Lust; German; Denton; Harris

Motion carried.

The following item was presented:

Item 5.B. Discussion regarding the R3 grants and follow up on the letter drafted by the Commission.

Chairman Denton sent an email that outlined the Commission's concerns and outlined R3 grant. Young Women's Club of America (YWCA), Project Oz and Prairie State Legal get substantial R3 grants. Chairman Denton's email requested the Administration see if there was any way to have the grants expedited by the state government. He has not heard back yet but planned to follow up.

Vice Chairperson German stated she had talked to them the day prior to the meeting and they stated the grant for YWCA had been expedited; however, she stated they had been told this four times previously as well. She indicated the last month they got paid for was May 2023. She had a link she could share with other grantees if they would like it. Chairman Denton stated he had links he would share as well, pursuant to the Illinois Open Meetings Act. Chairman Denton stated if anyone else wanted to lobby as well, they could.

The following item was presented:

Item 5.C. Brief overview of recent gun violence in the Bloomington Area presented by A/Chief Veerman.

Assistant Chief Veerman gave a brief overview of three shootings since the last meeting which were under active investigation at the time of the meeting.

- On February 8, 2024, Bloomington Police Department (BPD) responded to reports of an 18-year-old victim of a non-fatal gunshot wound on West Market Street. Review of public safety cameras and Automatic License Plate Reader (ALPR) helped BPD develop suspects in the shooting.
- On February 10, 2024, BPD responded to two separate reports of shootings, one on MacArthur Street and one on West Olive Street. In both incidents, BPD identified evidence of shots fired: On MacArthur, no damage to property or persons was located; on West Olive, damage from gunshots was sustained by a residence, although there were no reported injuries at that location.

These bring the number of reported shootings to 14 in 2024.

Commissioner Harris asked if there was a particular time when shootings begin to "amp up." Asst. Chief Veerman indicated that activity did tend to increase as weather warmed up and more people are outside.

The following item was presented:

Item 5.D. Brief overview of the Police Departments response to Active Assailant Situations.

Asst. Chief Veerman introduced Sergeant Joe Rizzi with the Bloomington Police Department (BPD), who is involved with the Department's Active Shooter Program. Sgt. Rizzi provided information and discussion regarding BPD's active shooter training.

Sgt. Rizzi advised he started getting involved in active shooter training as a role player during training events. He had a professional background that included SWAT and the Street Crimes Unit, was a Certified Active Assailant Instructor, and had other tactical training such as open-air urban tactics training. Sgt. Rizzi stated that BPD was very good about providing training for officers and was ahead of the curve in many aspects.

The BPD Active Assailant Program was a compilation of certified instructors from a variety of agencies, including BPD, Normal Police Department, Illinois State University (ISU) Police, and the McLean County Sheriff's Department, and there was a possibility of opening it up to some of the smaller agencies if their resources allowed (some departments don't have a lot of officers). The more officers who were certified, the more instructors there could be and the more agencies who can get the training.

Additionally, having instructors at different agencies train and work together means they all learned the same tactics and would be on the same page when responding to critical events. When a critical event happens, there is a massive response by emergency responders and because they have all been trained the same way, they all know what would be expected of them when arriving on scene. Additionally, all responders can get pulled onto the same incident command structure and everyone will know what their role would be.

While the focus of the training was primarily on events happening at schools, the training encompassed how it could be used when a critical event to occur at, for example, somewhere like a government building or large corporation. A lot of the trainings that were done were held at schools while students are on break. The instructors coordinate with the School Resource Officers (SROs) at various schools to set up training classes while the schools are not in session.

Courses were set up through the local Mobile Training Unit (MTU) and held for two days at a time and held as often as possible. The first part of the course covers skillsets that the officers will need to be safe and efficient while responding to critical events, such as safe weapon handling movements and best practices for room entering. There was a lot of repetition, going through the schools using stairs, classrooms, and other areas within schools. Role players are enlisted to act as students, assailants, teachers, and any number of different roles. They try to make the role playing as realistic as possible, including alarms, loud music, and other sounds; it can be intense. The training was meant to assist in bringing officers to

the stress level they would reach during a real critical event. The training begins from outside the building.

They use simunitions, which were essentially paint markers, as ammunition, used in special types of training weapons. All precautions are taken to ensure the training was safe. They also include training scenarios when the critical event turns out to be a false alarm and nothing happens when the officers arrive on scene.

The officers are required to go through this training on an annual basis. Additionally, the instructors were sent to different training programs to see if there were other types of training that they thought would work better or could be incorporated into their current training (do the tactics seem more sound, were they more realistic for their communities, etc.), and to stay up-to-date on evolving tactics and events. For example, before, the main concern with critical events at schools was activity happening within the walls of the schools. Now, police may encounter Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) outside the school in parking lots, assailants with different weapons besides guns, or doors being chained closed. He stated the police have to continually adapt and stay ahead of the curve. Sgt. Rizzi concluded his prepared presentation by stating it's a comprehensive program and asked if there were any questions.

Chairman Denton asked how the police respond to "swatting" incidents. Sgt. Rizzi responded that within training, they do have some scenarios where nothing happens. The officers were trained to be able to assess a situation and make commands. Exposing officers to these types of situations in training was beneficial. He stated that BPD responded to what turned out to be swatting events and it typically became apparent relatively quickly that a call was the result of swatting. He stated this community was fortunate in that we have top-notch SROs in the schools. When a call comes into a school about a possible critical incident, the SROs immediately take all necessary precautions and communicate with the local police departments.

Asst. Chief Veerman interjected that several things happen at once when a call about a school comes in: the police respond to the call while also trying to verify the veracity of the call. Officers would still be sent to the school(s) but calls would also be made to the SROs, school administration, and any other relevant contacts to learn as much as possible before officers ran into the schools and frighten the students.

Commissioner Lust indicated she had questions.

1. She asked if the police attend and observe when the schools conducted drills. Sgt. Rizzi responded that yes, officers attended those drills and work with the SROs during school drills. He stated courses were available that train businesses on how to respond to active assailant events.
2. She asked if those trainings would ever come to a community or if you would have to travel to attend training. Sgt. stated that training like ALICE and the I Love U Guys Foundation will travel to organizations to conduct training.

3. She asked if Sgt. Rizzi and the instructors were working with the universities. Sgt. Rizzi indicated they haven't had much of a conversation with Illinois Wesleyan University, located in Bloomington. He was unsure what conversations, if any, the Normal Police and Illinois State University Police may be having. Asst. Chief Veerman interjected that it would be challenging for the police departments to do the same type of training practice on a university campus as on an elementary, junior high or high school campus.

Vice Chairperson German @34: asked if the police have a partnership with hospitals. Sgt. Rizzi indicated that the SWAT team would do walkthroughs of different organizations like hospitals and corporations so they can become familiar with a building's layout. He stated that the training exercises they do at schools would be the same way they would respond to a critical event at a business or hospital. The tactics would be the same just in a different environment. Commissioner German (Selman?) stated they had sent people to the training in the past and wanted to let the Commission Members know that the training was found to be worthwhile.

Commissioner Harris asked how technology helped with critical events, such as surveillance and drones. Sgt. Rizzi stated that the schools had early alert systems and apps in place that have been helpful to the schools and SROs. He stated he did not want to speak too much about it as he is not as knowledgeable as the SROs on the topic.

Chairman Denton asked about the open air active assailant that was in Bloomington some years ago. Sgt. Rizzi indicated that he was on duty that day and he responded when the situation was brought under control, so he did not end up on scene. Chairman Denton further asked if the command center for an event was based on jurisdiction, to which Sgt. Rizzi replied in the affirmative.

Commissioner Lust asked if an event was considered the SROs' jurisdiction if it was at a school. Sgt. Rizzi said no, because the SRO would be in the "hot zone" and ideally, they would be the first person on the scene and received alerts about the situation in motion. Asst. Chief Veerman interjected that Command was one of the last things to be set up when first responding to a critical event, to which Sgt. Rizzi agreed.

No additional questions were asked. Chairman Denton thanked Sgt. Rizzi for his time and Sgt. Rizzi thanked the commission for having him.

The following item was presented:

Item 5.E. Discussion by Commission regarding themes and presenters going forward.

Chair Denton stated that Asst. Chief Veerman had done very well bringing in presenters to the meetings to discuss different topics and he asked the Commissioners if they had any ideas for future presenters. He indicated Asst. Chief Veerman would make a list of the mentioned potential presenters.

Commissioner Shannon mentioned he'd like to hear from representatives from the community centers and their experiences with those agencies, such as Western Avenue Community Center.

Commissioner Lust was interested in gathering information on what community resources were available. She indicated she would start pulling that together. She also indicated interest in hearing more information about gun suicides since 2018. She indicated she FOIA'd the McLean County Coroner, Dr. Kathy Yoder. She also mentioned the hospitals and PATH, with a focus on suicide statistics.

Commissioner German mentioned a list of agencies YWCA worked with regularly. She also mentioned Moms Demand Action and what information they gathered about gun violence locally. Further, the Labyrinth program was located on West Monroe and may have interest in being included in the gun violence conversation.

Commissioner Selman expressed interested in learning more about organizations such as Youth Build, YWCA, Project Oz, and other community organizations. She also indicated interest in hearing from an SRO. Asst. Chief Veerman interjected that this may be possible when school was not in session. Commissioner Selman also mentioned having a conversation about the connection between schools, bullying, and suicide, especially in the context of Nix Benedict and what support we have in place for that.

Commissioner Harris was interested in hearing from members of the community who could add perspective as people who have lived in areas with gun violence. He also mentioned learning about how the community could prevent gun violence.

Commissioner Shannon added he would like to see if the Commission could get some young people to come in and give their perspectives on safety and gun violence in the community. He mentioned school social workers as a good resource for identifying students who would be willing to give different perspectives.

Commissioner Harris suggested prioritizing the list, to help achieve a better result from all the discussions.

Chairman Denton suggested having presenters regarding suicide for the March meeting. He stated he would ask Dr. Yoder to present in March. Commissioner Lust reached out to PATH to present for March as well. He suggested Moms Demand Action and a group involving veterans and suicide to speak for the April meeting.

Commissioner Selman was interested in learning more about organizations such as Youth Build, YWCA, Project Oz and other community organizations. She also indicated interest in hearing from an SRO. Asst. Chief Veerman interjected that this may be possible when school was no longer in session. Selman also mentioned in having conversation about the connection between schools, bullying and suicide, especially in context to Nix Benedict and what supports we have in place for that.

Commissioner Harris was interested in hearing from members of the community who could add perspective as people who have lived in areas with gun violence. He also mentioned learning about how the community can prevent gun violence.

Commissioner Shannon added he would like to see if the commission could get some young people to come in and give their perspectives of safety and gun violence in the community. He mentioned school social workers may be a good resource for identifying students who would be willing to give different perspectives.

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New Business

No New Business was discussed.

Commission Member Comments

No Commissioner Member Comments were given.

Adjournment

Commissioner Selman made a motion, seconded by Chairman Denton, to adjourn the meeting.

Chairman Denton directed the Staff Liaison to call roll:

AYES: Selman; Lust; German; Denton; Harris

Motion carried (viva voce).

The Meeting Adjourned at 2:01 PM

CITY OF BLOOMINGTON



Scott Denton, Chairman



Aaron Veerman, Staff Liaison