

COMBAT Commission Meeting
August 10th, 2023 10:00 AM – 11:56 AM
Zoom Meeting
Minutes

Present: Arimeta DuPree, Elizabeth Williams, Mark Bryant, Lanna Ultican, Larry Beaty, Alfred Jordan, Joseph Spalitto

Also Present: Vince Ortega, Joe Loudon, Bob Muenz, Dawna Shumate, Donna Peyton, Luis Ortiz, Matthew Young, Jamie Brown, Jean Peters Baker, Jennifer Dameron, Jennifer Emery, Ryan Taylor, Shannon Bobo, Joseph Cho, Courtney Crespo, Kari Thompson

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM.

Minutes Approved:

Liz Williams motioned to amend March 9th, 2023 meeting minutes to include Dr. Joseph Spalitto in attendance; motion was approved unanimously.

DISCUSSION:

Jackson County COMBAT: Director's Report

- Joe Loudon gives a presentation from COMBAT's symposium
 - o In response to the presentation, Alfred Jordan asks to see data showing a 33% decrease in violent crime after starting the South STRIVIN Hub. Vince Ortega responds that COMBAT can provide those stats—but the new crime analyst, Shannon Bobo, will have to acquire the data from before she took her position. Shannon confirms that she'll look into pulling that old data.
 - o Vince also mentions that the South STRIVIN hub's success had been impacted by the pandemic because their outreach efforts had to stop due to social distancing. Commissioner Liz Williams, who is very active in the STRIVIN initiative, shares that "we're beginning to recoup the success we had that was disrupted by COVID."

Mark Bryant, Commissioner

- Commissioner Mark Bryant says COMBAT seems to be providing more behavioral health services—and that he fears we will not be able to measure the impact we're having on the reduction of crime or substance abuse. He suggests allocating more time and resources toward services that have an easier time quantifying results.
 - o Vince Ortega explains that the services Commissioner Bryant is referring to address trauma, one of 20 social determinants of health that COMBAT collects data on. Even though the STRIVIN initiative *will* connect referrals with mental health services as needed, the mental health piece is not COMBAT's sole focus—as there are several factors that affect violence and drug abuse. Vince later adds

that there's no one agency or service that can solve violence or drug abuse—it takes several organizations working together in a holistic manner.

- Joe Loudon adds that the National Institute of Justice did multiple COMBAT studies in the 90's and into the 2000's. A representative from the Department of Justice testified before the county legislature that measuring the success of prevention programs is especially difficult— How do you prove a program prevented something from happening?
- Commissioner Williams comments that while she still wants COMBAT to provide the data in the way the Commissioners were asking for it, she also agrees that prevention is hard to quantify because the crime hasn't happened yet.
- Deputy Chief Ortiz shares that measuring prevention is always a topic of discussion in law enforcement because it's difficult to quantify. However, he adds that he works closely with Mattie Rhodes—and when he hears stories about how their referrals' circumstances have changed because of the services they received, "...It makes it all worth it."
- In an effort to quantify success, Commissioner Bryant suggests funding reentry programs. He describes a program that provides job training, education, and other services to people who have been incarcerated-- then measuring the recidivism rate.
 - Vince Ortega responds by informing Commissioner Bryant that COMBAT funds [several agencies who specialize in reentry](#). One of the funded agencies, Full Employment Council, has expressed difficulties with getting their clients job-ready. Even if there are great job opportunities on the table, participants may be so traumatized that they can't hold down a regular job—which is a considerable barrier when the job calls for punctuality. Intensive, holistic care is required to stabilize an individual coming out of prison. There's so many factors affecting those involved in crime that it'll take a collective to stop that cycle. Vince emphasizes, again, "...it can be done, but one program is not going to do that."
- Commissioner Bryant asks how the "minority participation" section of Chapter 93 applies to funded agencies. Vince Ortega explains that 20% minority participation is a goal mark—not a requirement. The goal is to have funded programs with staff that reflects the community.

Kansas City Police Department

- As of August 10th, 2023, there were 123 homicides compared to the previous year's 99 homicides—which is an increase of 21%. Nonfatal shootings have decreased by 10%. The KCPD believes a contributing factor may be the increase of "switches", a Machinegun Conversion Device that turns a handgun into a fully automatic weapon.
- Commissioner Joseph Spalitto asks about a number of gangs in Kansas City and if there's anything the Commission can do to stop them. Captain Ortiz says that most of the gangs he mentioned have moved on to different areas, but there are issues with other gangs in South Kansas City. Partners for Peace and the Community Engagement Division of the KCPD are working together to offer resources and solutions to gang-affiliated individuals that can still be saved—all others are addressed with enforcement.

- Jean Peters-Baker shares that The Prosecutor's Office is in "the beginning stages of trying to figure out what enforcement strategy...[they] can do jointly to address this specific problem."
- Deputy Chief Ortiz also mentions that while gangs are a serious issue, the majority of homicides in Kansas City can be attributed to a lack of conflict resolution skills among random civilians. When asked what percentage of homicides are a result of gang violence, Deputy Chief Ortiz estimates around 15-20%.
- Commissioner Spalitto inquires about new technology that can rapidly screen for drug use and if/when such tests will be viable in court. Jean Peters-Baker responds that once the new tech has been fully developed and is determined to be scientifically sound, there's a process The Prosecutor's Office has to go through before the courts will accept the tests' results as evidence. For now, we'll have to wait for that technology to become readily available.

Jackson County Drug Task Force

- Chief Bob Muenz reviews the Drug Task Force report: There's still on continued emphasis on drugs and the violence associated with the drugs. The Drug Task Force has several large operations ongoing and many of them are involved with Federal Nexus. The Task Force remains focused on fentanyl issues as well.

Alfred Jordan, Commissioner

- Commissioner Jordan asks how funded justice programs are held accountable for the money they receive. Vince Ortega says law enforcement agencies have to abide by a County contract that describes specific enforcement strategies they are performing.

NEW BUSINESS:

Regarding the structure and scheduling of Commission meetings

- Commission meetings haven't taken place in the past few months due to Vince Ortega's shoulder surgery. This was followed by COMBAT's symposium, which required a lot of work to coordinate the attending agencies.
- The Commission has expressed a desire to meet more frequently because they feel that there has been a breakdown in communication between the Commission and COMBAT.
 - It was decided amongst the group that Commission meetings will take place monthly from here on out.
- Vince Ortega suggests holding future Commission meetings in-person at each of the five STRIVIN hubs so the Commissioners can see for themselves what the hubs are working on, how they serve the public, and the impact their work has had on the community.
 - Commissioner Bryant does not approve of the suggestion, as he does not want to figure out where he's going month to month and add travel time to meeting time. He says he would like one meeting place and hybrid capabilities (i.e. the option to attend either in-person or online).

- Commissioner Larry Beaty suggests meeting at either the Independence Courthouse or the Independence Police Department. Commissioner Mark Bryant adds that there is a community room at the South Patrol division.

Regarding the reviewing process as it relates to the Commissioners

- Commissioner Spalitto says it was his understanding that the Commissioners' main goal was to review and understand who COMBAT is giving tax dollars to and what is the benefit of doing so. He says he didn't receive the budget until the day of the review meeting--and he suggests having a meeting or two meetings prior to the budget to review each funded agency, the amount of funding they are requesting, and the reasoning behind their funding.
 - Vince Ortega confirms that Commissioner Spalitto was sent the budget 3 weeks in advance last year. He also informs Spalitto of the option to schedule a Zoom meeting with COMBAT staff to review individual funding recommendations that he has questions about. If any Commissioners are interested in meeting to discuss funding, please contact Dawna Shumate, Tammie Jordan, Vince Ortega, or all three.
- Commissioner Bryant says he had difficulty opening the funding recommendations documents last year. He also says while he appreciates that the booklet was released sooner than usual last year, even that doesn't leave enough time for the Commissioners to review the documents—as some Commissioners are employed or have other responsibilities. He adds that reviewing the funding recommendations alone doesn't give the Commissioners the benefit of staff input. He requests holding a separate meeting for each type of funding—prevention, treatment, and enforcement—and reviewing every application one by one.
 - Vince Ortega emphasizes that there is a timeline we must adhere to. This year's funding was already delayed because new legislators needed to learn the process before making decisions about the funding. This has caused some agencies to work without pay for some time. Subsequently, this year's application process is being expedited.
 - Vince Ortega extends another offer to meeting with any Commissioners who have questions for only about 5-6 agencies and their applications. He adds that most agencies have been receiving funding for over 25 years—and they've become consistent with their applications and performance. COMBAT has been working closely with recurring funded agencies and monitoring their progress on a monthly basis, which Ortega says is an administrative job and function of COMBAT and should not be the main focus of the Commission.

MOTION:

Meeting adjourned at 11:56 AM.

ANNOUNCEMENT:

Next meeting is September 19th, 2023