



## Minutes

### Citizens League City of Saint Paul Community-First Public Safety Commission

Wednesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021

9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Virtual meeting via Zoom video

**Commission Members present:** Co-Chair John Marshall, Co-Chair Acooa Ellis, Councilmember Mitra Jalali, Ramsey County Board Chair Toni Carter, Ms. Sue Abderholden, Mr. Ahmed Anshur, Mr. Cedrick Baker, Mr. Sami Banat, Mr. Jason Barnett, Ms. Monica Bravo, Mr. Scott Burns, Ms. Chikamso Chijioke, Mrs. JoAnn Clark, Mr. Sam Clark, Ms. Sasha Cotton, Ms. Sierra Cumberland, Ms. Natalia Davis, Mr. Julio Fesser, Ms. Anna-Marie Foster, Ms. Simone Hardeman-Jones, Mr. David Squier Jones, Ms. Laura Jones, Ms. Clara Juneman, Ms. Alicia Lucio, Mr. Stephen Moore, Ms. Maureen Perryman, Ms. Amy Peterson, Dr. Suzanne Rivera, Mr. Mark Ross, Mr. Garaad Sahal, the Honorable Nikki Starr, Mr. Mario Stokes, Ms. LyLy Vang Yang, Mr. Teshite Wako, Mr. Jai Winston, Ms. Heather Worthington, Mr. Pheng Xiong, and Mr. Otis Zanders.

**Members not present:** Ms. Chauntyll Allen, Rev. Dr. Ron Bell, Mr. Ameen Ford, Ms. Farhio Khalif, Ms. Suwana Kirkland, Ms. Suwayda Hussein, Ms. Wintana Melekin, Mr. Amin Omar, Mr. Frank Ortiz, and Ms. Olyvia Rayne Taylor.

**Special guests:** Mr. Elizer Darris, Ms. Toshira Garraway, Ms. Angelica Klebsch, Mr. Doug Mackbee, and Mr. Damon Shoholm.

**Staff & staff support present:** Ms. Kate Cimino, Mr. Jacob Taintor, and Ms. Madeline McCue.

## **Minutes**

Co-chair Ellis called the meeting to order at 9:02 am.

### **Opening and Approval of Minutes**

Co-chair Ellis welcomed the commission and began by acknowledging the difficulty of this time and the stress of current events, including the trial of Derek Chauvin and recent mass shootings in Georgia (targeting Asian-Americans) and in Colorado. She implored members to continue to be engaged with the process and to make sure that their voices are heard, both in the course of the commission's discussions and in the final set of recommendations. She encouraged members to connect their communities with this commission's work and to seek out helpful, constructive feedback.

Co-chair Ellis reviewed the timeline for the meeting and reviewed the commission's charge, as specified by the City of Saint Paul, to make recommendations to the Mayor and the Saint Paul City Council regarding:

1. Alternative first response options to low-priority calls for service;
2. Approaches for ongoing community involvement in the City of Saint Paul's Community-First Public Safety Framework; and,
3. Consideration of the creation of a city-staffed office to integrate the initiatives and strategies of the Community-First Public Safety Framework.

Co-chair Ellis continued to the approval of the minutes of the previous meeting. A motion to approve the minutes as written passed with 26 votes.

Co-chair Ellis Marshall a commission member to lead the group in a moment of mindfulness.

### **Community Report**

Ms. Cimino thanked the members of the Commission who have been involved with planning and hosting the public Town Hall meetings. Ms. Cimino introduced one of these members to discuss the first series of completed town hall meetings.

The member shared that there had been approximately 30 attendees between two virtual town hall meetings during the previous week. The attendees appeared to be diverse in terms of age, gender, race, and location in Saint Paul. At the meetings, commission members spoke about the commission's work thus far. First in small groups and then in a single large group, attendees then discussed what made them feel more and less safe in their neighborhoods and how, if they had a magic wand, they would envision first response for non-urgent, non-violent situations.

The member shared a few take-aways from the town halls: Generally, attendees were concerned that current public safety institutions were not relieving their fears for their safety. Instead, they felt that their neighbors were what make them feel safer. Many voiced that a sense of community was the baseline for safety, and that police, who were *not* based in their neighborhoods, struggled to form connections with community members and organizations.

Many attendees felt that that armed police in uniform almost always escalate low-level situations. They generally supported alternative first responders like those in the Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) model in Eugene, OR. *Full notes from the first Town Hall series are summarized in a separate document.*

Ms. Cimino reminded the commission of the next two town hall meetings— Wednesday, April 14 at 7 pm, and Saturday, April 17 at 2 pm. She encouraged members to share the sign-up link ([citizensleague.org/saint-paul-town-hall](https://citizensleague.org/saint-paul-town-hall)) and the included flyers about the events in numerous languages. She noted that translators would be available if needed.

Ms. Cimino reviewed feedback from the community. One community member had written to express their support for the commission hearing more from members of the community whose lives have been heavily impacted by policing. This individual favored community training models to support alternative response. They proposed the creation of a cabinet of community members to guide Saint Paul's further efforts to improve public safety.

Another community member wrote because they were concerned about police involvement in the creation of an alternative first response model. He encouraged the commission to hear from community members who regularly practice de-escalation techniques.

The commission also received a letter from the Business Review Council, a Mayoral-appointed group of local business leaders that serves a bridge between the business community and city staff, particularly on regulatory issues. The Business Review Council, having requested and received a presentation about the commission's work from the Citizens League, wrote to express their belief that the current allocation of public safety resources is not effective in keeping the community safe, as evidenced by the rise of public safety issues that are affecting business corridors. They would like to contribute to public safety solutions that foster a healthy business climate.

Ms. Cimino encouraged members to continue sharing the links to provide feedback.

Co-chair Marshall thanked Ms. Cimino and the members of the Town Hall planning group.

### **Commitment to values & problem solving**

Co-chair Marshall invited Ms. Cimino to present the recent work of the Citizens League to identify the values most important to the commission and the problems that the commission is most committed to solving. This collection of priorities was distilled from the commission's discussions during the previous meeting and from survey results.

Ms. Cimino presented the following collection of priorities or "problems we [the Commission] are trying to solve," in no particular order:

- More appropriate responders for each situation who can best assist those in need;
- Decriminalize behavior & response, particularly for people & communities of color;
- More efficient deployment of law enforcement—reserve & focus police resources for where they are most needed;

- Focus on prevention and community safety; and
- Improve systems & increase accessibility.

She noted that the most frequent survey response was a desire for more appropriate responders for varying situations.

Ms. Cimino asked the commission for their thoughts and reactions. She asked members to share any ideas that they felt were missing.

Multiple commission members voiced their support for the collection of priorities as presented.

A member suggested that the commission should also prioritize data collection and analysis to better understand how communities and individuals are disparately impacted by policing and which parts of current and future structures are working well and which are not. Eight others voiced their support for this proposal. A member suggested that if the commission is to recommend the creation of a comprehensive inter-agency data collection system, the commission should also recommend the creation of another commission comprising community members and data professionals to oversee its creation and direction.

A commission member inquired as to what “prevention” means in this context. Ms. Cimino cited some of the responses from the survey that fell into this category, including ‘rebuilding community trust,’ ‘building community safety,’ ‘reducing reasons individuals would need to call the police,’ and ‘having better relationships between communities and emergency response teams.’

A member noted that historical reforms to the justice and public safety systems have tended to disproportionately benefit white people and suggested that an equitable response would have to be proactively designed with cultural competency in mind. Communities of color should benefit not just from harm-reduction strategies, but also from additive and supportive services. Multiple commission members voiced their support; a member offered Ramsey County’s [Diversion Program](#) for juvenile offenders.

A member suggested that the commission consider recommending changes to the Ramsey County Emergency Communications Center (RCECC). Ms. Cimino noted that the Commission has expressed many learnings and ideas on this topic that will be incorporated into the final recommendations. Ideas include different types of resources available to telecommunicators and dispatchers, and in-house counsellors to assist with calls before dispatch.

A member suggested increasing public education about appropriate use of 911 and alternative resources.

A member suggested that the commission prioritize the enhancement of accountability and transparency.

Ms. Cimino invited Co-chair Ellis to introduce the next speakers.

## Community Voices and Stories

Co-chair Ellis introduced the next speakers, a group of community leaders who would be speaking about their lens as representatives of those most impacted by policing. She acknowledged that the commission's process had been weighted toward institutional perspectives in order to provide the commission with an understanding of current systems, but that as the commission moves toward making recommendations, it was essential to have input from those most affected by policing.

Co-chair Ellis welcomed Ms. Toshira Garraway, a founder of Families Supporting Families Against Police Violence, Mr. Elizer Darris, an executive director of the Minnesota Freedom Fund, and Mr. Douglas Mackbee, a housing program manager at Catholic Charities of Saint Paul & Minneapolis. The conversation was moderated by Mr. Damon Shoholm, the president of Socratic Consulting and a board member of the Citizens League.

Mr. Shoholm welcomed the speakers and thanked them for their time. He acknowledged the importance of their perspective and the role it is playing in the broader reckoning about the role of police in public safety. He asked the speakers to introduce themselves, their work, their response to the commission's collection of priorities, and what given them a sense of possibilities.

Mr. Darris introduced himself as formerly with the ACLU and now an executive director of the Minnesota Freedom Fund. His work is to involve community voices in government work and he is very appreciative of this commission's work to include non-institutional perspectives in institutional reform.

Mr. Mackbee introduced himself as program manager at the Dorothy Day Place in Downtown Saint Paul, serving approximately a thousand people who have experienced homelessness, trauma, and loss every day. He highlighted the importance of hearing the voices of the people he serves because these most marginalized people are often heard only during situations involving the criminal justice system. He discussed the importance of communication—having all parties on the same page, using the same language—in his work and in the commission's work.

Ms. Garraway introduced herself as a founder of Families Supporting Families Against Police Violence (FSFAPV), which works with families in Minnesota whose loved ones have been killed by law enforcement officers. She explained that state services supporting the families of victims of violent crime are not available to the families of people who are considered perpetrators, so FSFAPV seeks to support those families who are neglected by state support. Ms. Garraway is the fiancée of Justin Teigen, a Black man who died during an encounter with SPPD in 2009, and the mother of his son. She agreed that it is important to include the voices of those who are most impacted by police because they have paid and continue to pay the highest price for problems with policing.

Mr. Darris agreed, pointing out that Ms. Garraway's participation in this very conversation was an excellent example of the value of including those voices. Mr. Mackbee also agreed.

Mr. Shoholm asked the speakers for their ideas about feasible changes to the public safety system that would improve emergency response.

Ms. Garraway suggested the involvement of peer support specialists for calls regarding persons in crisis. As a former case manager, she believes that someone who can talk to someone as a peer can help de-escalate a situation. She noted that for many people—*especially* people in the middle of a mental health crisis—police can be perceived as a threat and their presence alone can escalate a situation. Multiple commission members agreed.

Mr. Mackbee shared his own experience of having police perceive victims and callers as suspects. He recommended that police have better protocols for listening to people on the scene who are behaving rationally and calmly.

Mr. Darris shared a few of his thoughts on the commission's collection of priorities. He expressed his belief in the benefits of a co-responder program, in which police respond to calls regarding persons in crisis alongside a mental health professional. He agreed that the CAHOOTs model is excellent and proposed seeking assistance from the CAHOOTs team to set up a similar program in Saint Paul. He also agreed that reforms to the RCECC were needed. He suggested cultural competency training for telecommunicators and dispatchers, additional support resources, and giving dispatchers more options for dispatching calls.

Mr. Darris expressed his hesitations about creating a centralized data collection system. He cautioned the commission about how big data can be used for predictive policing.

He also advised increasing online reporting by making it user friendly and launching an awareness campaign. Mr. Shoholm asked whether such a campaign be carried out by the city, through trusted messengers, rather than by the SPPD. Mr. Darris said yes.

Responding to a question from Mr. Shoholm, Ms. Garraway stated that she wanted the commission to remember that communities have experienced decades of accumulated trauma from police violence, and that people will respond to police accordingly. Those communities need support and need for the voices to be part of institutional change.

Mr. Darris, responding to the same question, hoped that the commission will continue to centralize the voices of those most impacted throughout this process. Doing so is not part of the status quo and will require continued effort.

Mr. Mackbee, responding to the same question, asked that the commission remember the humanity of people experiencing homelessness; their humanity is often detached from them, both by the criminal justice system and just through their interactions with other people.

Mr. Shoholm thanked the speakers again and invited Co-chair Ellis to speak.

Co-chair Ellis noted the value of the speakers' perspectives in shaping the next part of the meeting, in which the commission would start to shape their recommendations. Co-chair Ellis dismissed the commission for a break at 10:29 am.

## **Final Report Framework**

Co-chair Marshall reconvened the commission at 10:36 am.

Co-chair Marshall invited Ms. Cimino to discuss the proposed framework for the commission's final report and to review some key aspects of existing alternative response models in other jurisdictions.

Ms. Cimino presented the framework for the final report:

1. The commission's charge, structure and process
2. The current environment and realities
3. The content the commission covered and learned
4. The commission's desired impact and the problems the commission aims to address
5. The commission's recommendations and considerations
6. The commission's consideration of an Office of Violence Prevention (or otherwise named city office) and community advisory options with their degrees of support
7. The commission's proposals regarding the timeline for fulfilling their recommendations
8. The ideas that were outside of the scope of the commission but that the commission determined were important for further consideration

Ms. Cimino clarified that the recommendations sections of the report would be a robust capture of the commission's work—it thus would not represent a perfect consensus of the commission and would not exclude minority ideas or viewpoints. The Citizens League would be regularly assessing the degree of support for proposals as the report was being crafted.

A commission member suggested the inclusion of a section in the report about the human impact of these recommendations. Commission members agreed that framing recommendations in terms of their human impact would be wise. Co-chair Marshall suggested including this frame in the opening narrative of the report.

A commission member suggested also emphasizing the "community first" frame and making sure that the commission's recommendations made sure to put whatever power it was able to allocate into the hands of the community. They noted that communities were right to fear new changes and technological developments when those changes put power over the community into the hands of outsiders. Commission members agreed.

A commission member brought up their work on a [resolution](#) passed by the Saint Paul City Council that, among other things, recommends the creation of this commission. The resolution establishes that the Saint Paul City Council is working from a worldview that, *a*) starts with the question, "what makes people safe?" and *b*) acknowledges that systemic disinvestment has created instability in communities that has put Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color into disproportionate contact with the police. The commission member noted that the

commission should have a consistent analysis of what creates safety and that the commission should not take police as the given answer to that question. The commission, they argued, should act with the understanding that police are just one entity in a much larger, problematic system that is in need of restructuring. Some members suggested that instead of “tinkering at the edges” of the Saint Paul Police Department, the commission should aim to make Saint Paul residents safer by reducing people’s interactions with policing, which was described as a racist and harmful institution, and creating a system that addresses the structural problems with public safety rather than just reacting to existing issues with policing. Numerous commission members voiced their support.

A commission member suggested reframing “the commission’s desired impact and the problems the commission aims to address” as “the world the commission would like to see.” They also suggested that commission’s recommendations include a model budget proposal and that the commission’s recommendations be weighted in terms of financial investment.

A commission member shared a story about their father having to talk to the member’s young Black brother about how to interact with police. They emphasized the importance of the human impact of this work and expressed their gratitude for the commission’s attention to human stories as a part of this process. Commission members voiced their support.

In response to a question about whether the Citizens League’s work would continue with the City into the budget cycle, Ms. Cimino clarified that the Citizens League’s contract for this work ends with the final report in early May, but that they would be open to considering further work growing out of the commission’s recommendations.

Ms. Cimino next reviewed some alternative response models currently employed by jurisdictions around the country:

- the Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) model in Eugene, OR;
- the Community Warmline model in Ann Arundel County, MD;
- the Virtual Mobile Crisis Intervention (V-MCI) model in Springfield, MO;
- the Community Response Team model in Colorado Springs, CO; and
- the 9-1-1 Crisis Call Diversion Program model in Houston and Harris County, TX.

*See meeting materials for further information about these programs and others.*

### **Visioning activity on our set of top-priority situations**

Co-chair Marshall introduced Ms. Angelica Klebsch to lead the commission in the use of a virtual whiteboard to begin to shape the commission’s recommendations. Co-chair Marshall encouraged all members to participate vigorously in this process so that the resultant recommendations might fully reflect the views and perspectives of the commission.

Ms. Klebsch showed members how to use the Mural platform to collectively brainstorm responses to two questions—‘What should an interaction in this situation feel like (to all those involved), when a response is necessary?’ and ‘What skills, behaviors, or resources would help us get there?’—for each of eight Priority 4 or 5 call types: *juvenile, person in crisis, vehicles and parking, welfare check, disorderly conduct, general assistance, child abuse, and civil problem.*



Ms. Klebsch sent commission members into breakout rooms at 11:11 am.

Ms. Klebsch reconvened the commission at 11:46 am.

A commission member commented that their group was able to brainstorm first responders other than armed police for every situation.

Ms. Klebsch noted that multiple groups suggested non-uniformed officers for many situations.

A commission member shared their experience of the exercise being a reality check on their personal desire for alternative first responders; the member had a police officer in their group who was able to speak on the complexities and possible escalations of each of these situations. The member added that while the police uniform is indeed problematic, a uniform does convey that that person is present at a scene for a specific purpose and is trained to be a neutral party capable of handling a potentially dangerous situation.

Various commission members pointed out that police are not neutral and that the uniform itself can negatively escalate an otherwise peaceful situation. The commission member agreed, and adding that a different uniform, one that is trusted by the community, could serve as an effective marker of neutrality in the sense of someone who is not a party to a conflict. A commission member suggested the green t-shirts of the [Saint Paul Community Ambassadors](#) as an example of a trusted uniform that inspires connection.

A commission member added that their group also discussed this issue and that a member had suggested that alternative first responders should have a police officer nearby, as a backup, should a situation escalate and become dangerous.

A commission member noted that the public would likely expect an immediate level of effectiveness from any new entity that would be taking on responsibilities formerly held by police.

A commission member added that such an entity should be staffed by people who are trained in cultural competency and who understand communities of color and how they interact with public safety. Commission members agreed.

Co-chair Marshall thanked the commission for their participation and noted that the Citizens League would be using this information to build a comprehensive capture of the commission's initial proposals for recommendations.

## **Questions and Close**

Co-chair Ellis thanked the commission and concluded the meeting at 11:58 a.m.