

**Community-First Public Safety Commission
Summary of Public Town Hall meetings
Series 1: March 16 and 20, 2021**

Approximately 30 people attended the first series of meetings.

When you think about public safety, what about your neighborhood makes you feel safe?

A very common theme was that people felt most safe when they had a deep connection to the people and organizations in their neighborhoods. These individuals valued their communities' recreation centers, libraries, and other public gathering places, as well as neighborhood revitalization initiatives and community gatherings.

Additional comments reflected that the physical design of their neighborhoods — such as biking and walking paths, as well as street lighting — made them feel safe.

Another additional comment was that living in a multi-family building led to a sense of safety. This individual went on to say that renting has made them feel safe, countering the narrative of renters being transient and not engaging in community.

And what about your neighborhood makes you feel less safe?

A frequent comment throughout the town halls was that increases in car-jackings and gun violence in neighborhoods has made individuals feel less safe. Seeing a number of youths lose their lives to gun violence and fear of being caught in crossfires were noted as contributing to those feelings.

Another very common theme was that neighborhood websites—such as Nextdoor—and neighborhood groups on social media can actually make members of the community feel less safe, and can characterize or drive a narrative of certain neighborhoods as unsafe.

Individuals also commented throughout the town halls that police presence in their neighborhoods made them feel less safe. They noted that an increased police presence of helicopters, lights and sirens, and drives-bys, leads to anxiety and a feeling of being surveilled. There were also concerns that neighbors often call the police for the wrong reasons (including bias against people of color) and that police officers are incapable of de-escalating when they respond.

Additional comments included:

- A lack of community makes people feel less safe.
- A lack of stable housing opportunities for community members makes them feel less safe.
- The perception that the police are not successful at preventing crime makes people feel less safe.
- A lack of programming for youth makes people feel less safe.

If you had a “magic wand,” what would you like to see for on-call responses to situations that are not urgent or violent, but need attention? (Examples – noise complaint, welfare check, young person, etc.)

The most common desire was for better responses to mental health and crisis calls. These comments were split between calling for a CAHOOTS-styled response team, for the use of mental health clinicians, and general calls for improved mental health responses.

Another common theme was working to improve community-relations with police officers responding to these situations. Most common was the desire to either not have officers wear uniforms any longer, or, if they do, to de-militarize them. A number of other individuals commented that they would like to see more police officers of color, as well as more officers who live in the neighborhoods that they patrol, responding to situations in general.

Many individuals also want to remove the fear that the public has of the officers who respond. Individuals commented that many community members only see officers when they drive through the neighborhood in their squad cars. It was commented that a few ways to alleviate the fear and mistrust of officers are as follows:

- To have community education to re-set “what you call the police for.”
- To have wrap around supports and models for those who interact with the police multiple times.
- To have community building between the police department and the neighborhood, possibly through connecting a community resource person with the fire department and police department.

Some additional comments represented a desire for no police officers to be involved in responses to non-violent, non-urgent situations. These comments expressed the desire to have community organizations, not the police, respond to Priority 4 and 5 calls. A few comments added that they not only desired someone entirely different than to police to respond, but that whoever responds in their place not carry any weapons.

Other additional comments addressed a desire to somehow involve community spaces and members in these responses—such as better use of community resources like libraries, recreation centers, and youth programs. One idea was to train community members in things like NARCAN administrations, first-aid, and even gun-shot wound stabilization.

A final additional comment recommended an Office of Violence Prevention that would scale up programs that are already working, such as efforts by the City Attorney’s Office and Common Justice.

What aspects of this commission make you most hopeful?

Attendees appreciated that the commission is getting input from a diverse community. Some also appreciate and feel hopeful that the city is working with the community to explore different

approaches to public safety. Lastly, a number of attendees found it hopeful that the commission has a desire for accountability.

Concerns

A number of attendees expressed concerns about where the budget will come from to fund additional trained responders.

A few also were concerned about whether the commission is seeking targeted feedback from the people who are affected most by the current system.

Additional comments of concern were:

- That there is no hope in changing the police department for the better until someone is held accountable.
- Expectations may have been raised too high for the outcomes of the commission because it is unclear whether change is a true possibility.