

**City of Takoma Park
Reimagining Public Safety Task Force
5.18.2021 Meeting Summary**

Agenda

Welcome, Review Charge, Timeline, Public Comment Form, and Community Listening Session 5.24

Jevin Hodge (*co-facilitator*) welcomed Task Force members and the public and outlined the structure of the meeting. The Charge, Public Comment Form, and Community Listening Session to be held on 5.24 at 6:30 PM were reviewed. The extended timeline was outlined. A tentative date for the June Community Listening Session was discussed and will be finalized before the 5.25 meeting of the Task Force.

It was emphasized that the schedule through June is flexible with regard to full Task Force meetings versus Subcommittee work sessions. The goal of the Task Force is to have draft recommendations to present to the June Community Listening Session for comment before finalizing and presenting to the Takoma Park City Council.

Subcommittee Updates

Jamal Holtz (*co-facilitator*) facilitated reports from the subcommittees on their 5.11 work sessions.

#1 Community Quality of Life

Sawa Kamara reported on the subcommittee's plan to divide up the tasks they will undertake:

- Mental health and substance abuse;
- Civic participation;
- Housing and homelessness;
- Budgeting and funding.

Sawa then briefly outlined possible recommendations:

- A civic group within TP comprised of community members, non-profits, etc. that advises;
- Resource coordinator who supports the work of that civic group – all activities, groups, and neighborhoods;
- Civic association for renters;
- Resource guide for mental health and community partners;
- 24/7 non-emergency line;
- Crisis response team that answers calls without the police;

- Increase communications with the general public.

The potential impact of a 24/7 non-emergency line, a crisis response team staffed by mental health professionals and wraparound care were emphasized, as was not leading with an armed response. The subcommittee is researching what level of support or engagement Takoma Park has with area hospitals for follow-up care.

It was noted that, during the Ambassadors focus group on 5.12, how to respond to calls involving mental health issues and how to provide wraparound services were discussed. Those concerns and possible solutions merit additional dialogue.

#2 Alternative Methods and Responses

Cordell Carter (*co-facilitator*) reported on behalf of the subcommittee on the subcommittee's plan to research the following areas to support recommendations:

- Service call data as a means of understanding the volume, range, and severity of requests for service;
- Technology to refine and support responses to requests for service
- Implementation of a 311 line that residents can call to find information about services, make complaints, or report problems;
- Disposition of the K9 unit.

Disposition regarding the K9 unit was also discussed. The Takoma Park City Council has reserved decision until it received recommendations from the Task Force. Facilitators will confirm the timeframe for sending those recommendations to the City Council. It was observed out that during the focus groups with members of the Takoma Park Police Department, the K9 unit was described as one of the programs that attracted new recruits to the department.

#3 Community Engagement and Transparency

Jamal Holtz (*co-facilitator*) reported on behalf of the subcommittee and the subcommittee's focus on developing recommendations related to:

- Transparency in policies for all agencies/departments;
- Transparency around complaints and how to handle oversight;
- Bodycam policy going forward;
- Move activities not part of policing out of the police department;
- Improve communication.

Adam Braskich, subcommittee member, elaborated on the subcommittee's focus on transparency around complaints and how to handle oversight. How to implement civilian oversight of the complaint process relating to policing raises questions that prompt discussion. The feasibility of a dual system in which the police department's review of a complaint is paralleled by a civilian review is a question for a city the size of Takoma Park.

The implementation of a civilian complaint review process also raises questions about authority: the authority to investigate, subpoena records, and institute disciplinary procedures.

It was emphasized that citizens must feel both safe and confident in raising issues and expressing concerns: safe from intimidation and confident that they will be heard and appropriate action will be taken.

It was noted that the subcommittee has requested to meet with a representative from Internal Affairs. The subcommittee will continue to dig into data and review reports on these issues to inform possible recommendations.

IV. Subject Matter Expert Presentations

Claudia Tolson, Takoma Park Police Department Victim/Witness Coordinator

Jevin Hodge introduced Claudia Tolson, Takoma Park Police Department Victim/Witness Coordinator who spoke about her work and took questions.

Ms. Tolson described her role as an advocate for victims who come through the department, principally victims of violent crime. Domestic violence is a focus and Ms. Tolson can provide crucial information to police officers investigating these incidents. She wears many hats; going to court with victims; helping with filing charges; going to the hospital with victims of assault or rape.

Ms. Tolson is available when victims need additional support and wrap around services – she is a 24-hour on-call employee. Police officers may ask her to respond to a scene, especially if there is resistance or hesitancy on the part of victims to explain. Ms. Tolson works to get victims to open up to police officers so they can get victims the help they need. Ms. Tolson is bilingual Spanish/English.

Every day is different and people's needs vary – it can feel a little overwhelming, especially when Ms. Tolson may be a position where she can't help due to scarcity of resources. Ms. Tolson particularly has a role in very sensitive cases, explaining what the police are doing, what court processes are like. This is more prominent when the victim is afraid to go to court and face the offender.

Q: How many calls for service are you directly dealing with?

A: I'm in touch with 80% of victims that come through whether that's through email, phone, in-person meetings. I always try and contact victims when I am able to provide some kind of assistance.

Q: Do you find there's sufficient staffing for this or would you like to see more in this area?

A: I'd like to think I have a handle on the volume of calls that we get. A lot of victims we get are self-sufficient and don't need as much help, but in some cases, there needs to be a much more involved approach.

Q: Would you want more support if you had an unlimited budget?

A: People's problems almost always have some kind of roots in financial issues, so the budget would be a huge help for that.

Q: Do you work with state agencies as well?

A: I can't say that I have regular contact with state agencies, but I do point victims towards those resources to help them. The state and county have lots of good resources.

Q: Does TP have a mandatory arrest policy for domestic violence cases? Where there's no discretion based on sufficient evidence?

A: In certain situations, it's not possible to arrest based on a variety of factors. They may not be on the scene, or the perpetrator is not easily discerned. We have policies for that but it is usually hard to tell.

A: Capt. Frishkorn noted that the Takoma Park Police have a pro-arrest policy in domestic violence cases.

Q: Are you a liaison for legal cases where victims want to press charges, can you provide resources?

A: I remind victims they have the right to pursue whatever decision they want to make and what's best for their situation. I do work with the state's attorney's office regularly about evidence and other things.

Simone Walton, DSW, LMSW, *Mental Health Subcommittee Lead, Montgomery County Task Force*

Jamal Holtz introduced Dr. Simone Walton, Mental Health Subcommittee Lead on the Montgomery County Task Force, who spoke about her subcommittee's work as part of reimagining public safety in Montgomery County.

Dr. Walton noted that she grew up in Takoma Park and lived on Hodges Lane, and now lives in Silver Spring. Dr. Walton has lived and worked all over the world, working with survivors of trauma and with vulnerable and marginalized populations. Dr. Walton led Group 5 of the Montgomery County Task Force and noted that group members were tasked to reimagine, and reimagining does not take place within the existing paradigm.

The charge to Group 5 was to identify the best and most promising practices regarding mental health and social services. Group 5 members had very uncomfortable conversations as they worked. The group noted that public safety is the ability of every family in every neighborhood to have access to housing, food, jobs; poverty and inequity are at the core of the community's need for systems that support and sustain its well-being. Group 5 met nine times – the most of any subcommittee.

Group 5 outlined their recommendations along a continuum of care: prevention, intervention, and crisis response. Key recommendations were seen as the backbone of a strengthened infrastructure.

Prevention

- Think in terms of an ecosystem of public safety.
- Expand and enhance the ability and opportunity for people who need to be talking to each other to talk to each other.
- Get back to community policing; know who lives and works in the community, who can help with communication and de-escalation; recognize that rapport comes from familiarity.
- Eliminate School Resource Officers (SRO) – a program which came out of Zero Tolerance policies – and replace SROs with trained mental health professionals.

Intervention and Crisis Response

- Implement Crisis Now
- Expand the number of mobile response teams with mental health professionals working alongside EMTs.
- Use an evidence-based approach based on national standards developed by SAMHSA.

[The National Guidelines for Crisis Care – A Best Practice Toolkit advances national guidelines in crisis care within a toolkit that supports program design, development, implementation, and continuous quality improvement efforts. It is intended to help mental health authorities, agency administrators, service providers, state and local leaders think through and develop the structure of crisis systems that meet community needs.]

This document was produced for the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#), and the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\)](#).]

Q: Did budgeting come up at all during your analysis?

A: There was another group that was tasked with budgeting. When we got the charge, we were told not to think about the limits. I always say if we start to think about the roadblocks, we won't be able to move forward. The purpose is to reimagine!

Q: In terms of continuity of care, what kind of resources did you find were missing that were needed for a prevention model?

A: There are people missing from the county task force – youth, the homeless, faith leaders, business leaders. We need more than police representation. We need to stop operating in silos. We need more integration and communication.

Q: Is the best model the Crisis Now model? Under this model, who would be dispatched when someone is unarmed and not threatening anyone but is experiencing a mental health crisis?

A: As part of the Crisis Now model, we like the idea of street teams. There is a mobile response team that is the first responder to a crisis. The other responders are police if needed, but there

needs to be those hooks in so that they are working together. Street teams know what's happening in the community, but still prevention first.

Q: How was community policing received by the department?

A: It's important to say that it's not about more police involvement but about having a legitimate connection to the community and building on that legitimacy. The police department needs to utilize problem-solving tactics and eliminate processes that target Black and Brown populations. We had a lot of back and forth, wrestling with the idea. Overall, the people we were talking to that were represented by the police wanted this to happen. They got it and wanted it to happen.

End Meeting

The co-facilitators thanked the Task Force, attendees, and guest speakers for their participation. Questions for the speakers and Task Force may be submitted via the Public Comment Form and email.

The meeting ended a bit past 7 PM.

Meeting Recording

The full recording of the Task Force meeting and the presentations is available at:
<https://reingoldlink.egnyte.com/dl/GYhVj4hlqR>