

Roll Call

The Kalamazoo City Commission met as a Committee of the Whole on Monday, May 3, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. This meeting was held as an electronic meeting under the authority of the Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976) as amended by PA 254 of 2020.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Mayor David Anderson
Vice Mayor Patrese Griffin
Eric Cunningham
Jeanne Hess
Erin Knott
Chris Praedel
Jack Urban

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

None

All members present indicated they were physically located in the City of Kalamazoo.

Also present were City Manager Jim Ritsema, Deputy City Manager Jeff Chamberlain, City Attorney Clyde Robinson, and City Clerk Scott Borling.

Public Comments

Next, an opportunity was given for general public comments, but no comments were offered.

Review of Items on
Upcoming City
Commission Agendas

Deputy City Manager Chamberlain reviewed items for upcoming City Commission meeting agendas, including items on the agenda for the 7:00 business meeting and the following topics for future Committee of the Whole meetings: elections; diversity, equity, and inclusion; the use of federal stimulus funds; and the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety (KDPS).

2021-00

Presentation re: Group
Violence Intervention

City Manager Ritsema provided introductory remarks for a presentation and discussion on Group Violence Intervention and ongoing gun.

Deputy Public Safety Chief David Boysen and Group Violence Intervention (GVI) Coordinator Michael Wilder delivered a presentation entitled *Public Safety Gun Violence Presentation*. A copy of the slides from this presentation was filed with the papers for this meeting.

GVI participants Jordan Watts, Dquarion Sterling, and Montene Wiley described the impact of GVI on their lives.

When an opportunity was given for Commissioner questions, staff and the GVI participants provided the following information and observations:

- there was no formal training for people who did street outreach. What the outreach workers did could not be taught, as it had to come from the heart.
- all new KDPS officers receive training on GVI from Mr. Wilder. The officers needed to “buy in” to GVI.
- training was provided in the area of social services.

- a program called Women Who Love Victims of Gun Violence was being developed. Melanie Coleman and Wendy Fields went on interventions to provide motherly love.
- counselors were available through Urban Alliance to help people deal with trauma.
- GVI had been operating on a “shoestring” budget. Grant funds from the Gilmore Foundation supported the social service component of GVI, a Project Safe Neighborhood grant supported Mr. Wilder’s position, and additional funding came from ISAAC and the City’s General Fund. To be legitimate and credible GVI needed to be able to help participants financially with tangible needs like work boots and hot water heaters.

Commissioner Cunningham stated he knew people who were fresh out of incarceration who understood that trauma and are were looking for opportunities to keep people out of it. Commissioner Cunningham remarked that GVI needed people like that.

Vice Mayor Griffin spoke about the need to reach young people before they became violent and to address related areas like homelessness.

Commissioner Praedel thanked the presenters and stated this was the work that needed to be done: reduce the trauma, reduce the shootings, and give people a second chance.

Commissioner Urban thanked the presenters for conveying the importance of authentic interactions.

Commissioner Hess thanked the presenters and stated GVI was as important as any K-12 or college program.

Commissioner Cunningham stated his biggest failure had been his inability to figure out how to solve gun violence. Commissioner Cunningham spoke about the importance of love and expressed appreciation for this aspect of GVI. Commissioner Cunningham indicated he had talked with 15-, 16-, 17-year-olds and had told them to “not let people to take up real estate in your head.” Commissioner Cunningham noted there were things the City could do to address gun violence and things that needed to be done at the state and federal level. Commissioner Cunningham remarked on the failure of prosecution to solve gun violence and the fact that African Americans, and especially African American youth, had been prosecuted at higher rates than other groups. Commissioner Cunningham stated the number of guns in the community was unnecessary. Commissioner Cunningham indicated solutions like getting guns off the street and allocating more funding for mental health had been discussed but not implemented. Commissioner Cunningham stated there needed to be discussions with the judicial system and elected representatives regarding solutions, but it was a shame that it took the death of George Floyd to open the doors to those conversations. Commissioner Cunningham encouraged people who were in trouble or who were experiencing trauma to seek support. Commissioner Cunningham stated elected officials were responsible for many of these issues, and he spoke of the need to change the standard and make people accountable.

2021-00

Presentation re: Group
Violence Intervention
(cont’d)

2021-00

Presentation re: Group
Violence Intervention
(cont'd)

Mr. Wilder spoke about the need to change the narrative by looking at black men who had never been incarcerated and asking, "What did they do? How did they stay out?"

Mayor Anderson thanked the presenters and thanked Public Safety Chief Vernon Coakley for leading the GVI effort. Mayor Anderson remarked on the seriousness of this work and the need to build on it with the 2022 budget. Mayor Anderson expressed agreement with Vice Mayor Griffin and stated the City needed to look at many areas through the GVI lens.

Deputy City Manager Lam reviewed the work that had been accomplished in the four areas of the gun violence pilot program the City Commission approved and funded in December. Deputy City Manager Lam noted a written update was sent to Commissioners in the most recent Friday email, a copy of which was filed with the papers for this meeting.

Vice Mayor Griffin asked if there was a timeline for the mental health services component. Vice Mayor Griffin state she was very concerned about this issue, and she questioned whether there would be counselors who were able to handle a variety of issues and whether the counselors would be as diverse as the people they were helping.

Deputy City Manager Lam stated the City Administration knew that cultural competence and diversity were important. Deputy City Manager Lam indicated the mental health services program would be a pilot program and would need to leverage existing resources, based on the funding allocated in December. Deputy City Manager Lam remarked that Chief Coakley and City Manager Ritsema wanted to incorporate social services into KDPS.

Chief Coakley indicated one of his major goals was to get counseling services for victims of gun violence.

Deputy City Manager Lam expressed hope that the Request for Proposal (RFP) for mental health services would go still go out in the second quarter of 2021.

Commissioner
Comments

Next an opportunity was given for comments from City Commissioners, but no comments were offered.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott A. Borling
City Clerk

For City Commission approval on September 7, 2021

Approved by:

David F. Anderson, Mayor
Dated: September 7, 2021

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