

City of Richmond – Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force
Meeting held via Zoom: https://richmond.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=38

Minutes*
Wednesday, February 22, 2023, 5:30 P.M.

**video recording and meeting transcript available*

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Small called the meeting to order at 5:32 P.M.

B. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: S. Bischoff, M. Cantú, E. Chacon, L. Chacon, D. Gosney, A. Lee, L. Murray, J. Schlemmer, B. Therriault, L. Whitmore, and Chair D. Small

EXCUSED

ABSENCE: H. Burks, K. Kilian-Lobos, and B.K. Williams

ABSENT: R. Joseph, L. Mangels, M. Njissang, T. Walker

STAFF PRESENT: Deputy City Manager-Community Services LaShonda White, Assistant Administrative Analyst Guadalupe Morales, Associate Administrative Analyst Stephanie Ny, and City Attorney Alison Flowers; Police Chief Bisa French, Richmond Police Lieutenant John Lopez, City of Richmond Housing Manager Jesus Morales, and YouthWorks Program Manager Bouakhay Phongboupha

C. AGENDA REVIEW AND ADOPTION

Chair Small recommended that Item 3 be moved to Item 2 on the agenda, although Task Force Member Schlemmer recommended it be moved to Item 1. The subsequent discussion explained why the Comprehensive Study of Emergency Services to Richmond led by Matrix Consulting, which had been presented at the last meeting and with Task Force comments and public comments yet to occur, should remain as Item 1. The agenda was approved with Item 3 moved to Item 2.

D. MEETING PROCEDURES

Guadalupe Morales, staff to the Taskforce, identified the meeting procedures, the format of the web-based meeting and the public's ability to speak during the meeting.

E. MINUTES APPROVAL

1. APPROVE the minutes of the January 25, 2023, regular meeting of the Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force

Motion by Taskforce Member Schlemmer, seconded by Taskforce Member Bischoff to adopt the minutes of the January 25, 2023, meeting, as submitted, carried by the following Roll Call vote:

City of Richmond – Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force

Meeting held via Zoom: https://richmond.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=38

AYES: S. Bischoff, M. Cantú, E. Chacon, L. Chacon, D. Gosney, A. Lee, L. Murray,
J. Schlemmer, B. Therriault, L. Whitmore, and Chair D. Small

NOES: None

ABSENT: H. Burks, R. Joseph, K. Kilian-Lobos, L. Mangels, M. Njissang, T. Walker and B.K. Williams

F. CITY STAFF REPORTS

Deputy City Manager-Community Services Director LaShonda White encouraged everyone to be aware of the City Manager’s Weekly Report which included a lot of good information. She reported that on February 23, the Richmond Library would be celebrating Black History Month at the City Council Chambers, 440 Civic Center Plaza, with a tribute to Richmond’s Recreation and Sports Leaders. Those interested in attending were asked to RSVP at Eventbrite. In addition, the Westside Branch of the Library in Port Richmond would work with local artists to create designs on river rock. On March 11, the City would celebrate International Women’s Day from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. at the Richmond Memorial Civic Center, which would be the 16th International Women’s Day celebration in the City with the theme of embracing equity.

Jesus Morales, City of Richmond Housing Manager, reported he had sent a copy of the City of Richmond Homeless Strategic Plan, which would be discussed with the City Council in Study Session on March 28. He sought input from the Task Force, asked it to review the plan, attend the City Council study session, and provide input.

G. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Associate Administrative Analyst Stephanie Ny identified the public’s ability to speak during the meeting.

Joey Schlemmer reported that a Richmond dispatcher and a couple of Richmond police officers had saved a life at Miller/Knox Regional Park due to a cardiac episode and having the Dispatch Center offer medical help was extremely important and there was only one other city that offered that service.

Police Chief Bisa French confirmed that the Richmond Police Department (RPD) had responded this date to a citizen on scene with a man who was not breathing and through the CPR from the Dispatch Center, a Sergeant and an Officer, the man had been revived and taken to the hospital where he was receiving continuing care.

H. PRESENTATIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND ACTION ITEMS

1. DISCUSS the Comprehensive Study of Emergency Services to Richmond Led by Matrix Consulting

Richard Brady, Matrix Consulting, stated the presentation had been made at the last Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force meeting but due to a lack of time the public comments had not been taken at that time. He highlighted that presentation and explained the purpose of the study was to evaluate police and fire workloads and the service delivery system and to develop an analysis with options of the number of personnel needed to provide a wide variety of public safety services.

City of Richmond – Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force

Meeting held via Zoom: https://richmond.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=38

Mr. Brady explained that for both the RPD and the Richmond Fire Department (RFD), the Matrix Consulting findings had demonstrated that over the years staffing levels had declined to a point that it was starting to impact public safety services; both the ability to respond to lower priority calls for service and to do things other than to respond to calls. For the RPD, its ability to work positively and proactively with the community in problem solving and its ability to have any specialized capability as related to traffic and recurring problems in the City. In the RFD, the vacancy and open positions had led to extraordinary high levels of overtime in order to fill the basic positions to be able to provide an effective response to the community for fires and other type of calls for service.

Mr. Brady stated the recommendations were clear that there were many needs both within the RPD and the RFD that could only be filled by adding staff. He recommended something in the area of eight community services officers to handle 12 percent of the diverted calls for service with a new type of capability dealing with behavioral health and mental health calls and issues. An alternative response unit of mental health technicians had been recommended from late morning into early evening with two units as a start, each with two non-police personnel.

Task Force Member Therriault asked about the mental health aspect, the order of operations and the details of what would occur for the RPD and the RFD in response to mental health, and whether the final report would go to the City Council. He also asked if there were any recommendations on staffing, which had been an ongoing issue for some time.

Mr. Brady could not speak to the exact order of operations which had yet to be determined but he stated that comments had been received from the RPD about edits that needed to be made, and Matrix was in the middle of that process with the RFD. As to the order of operations, he stated the report would be public and he could not speak to the City's role to determine the order of operations but Task Force members would have an opportunity to review and comment on the report. He described the report as extremely detailed in support of the analyses, conclusions and recommendations on a position-by-position basis. Some of the analyses related to not just prevailing practice in law enforcement but emerging practice in law enforcement, including deployment alternatives in time and space and operations management. Both the RPD and the RFD were severely understaffed.

Task Force Member Gosney stated that he had emailed a number of questions to Mr. Brady after the last meeting and had received no response. Some of his questions related to the meaning of "proactivity," a clarification of the term "unwanted" persons, and the use of the term "benign," and he had asserted that crime in Richmond had not gone down although reported crimes had gone down.

In response to Task Force Member Gosney's multiple questions, Mr. Brady described the meaning of proactivity that if police officers spent all their time just responding to problems there was no time to address what had caused those problems and the RPD needed at least an equal amount of time to work with the community, make them feel comfortable and safe, work with them to solve the problems, if there were recurring problems to investigate the causes of those problems, and to deploy themselves in an area where those problems tended to occur. His reference in his initial presentation to calls about "unwanted" persons was a classification of a term in the data used in the dispatch system and usually related to trespassing and things like that.

City of Richmond – Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force

Meeting held via Zoom: https://richmond.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=38

Task Force Member Gosney offered additional comments at this time but was asked to avoid editorializing and form his comments into a question. He objected to being shut down and did not continue with his questions.

Task Force Member Bischoff was interested in learning more about crises workers, which would have an impact on the Richmond Community Crises Response Program suggestions and a real contribution to the overall City functions.

Mr. Brady stated there was an extensive analyses of both of those kinds of alternative responses in the report. He stated it was important to make the RPD and the community feel comfortable that there was enough workload to have those different kinds of resources in place, would be a good use of time and funds, and dedicate different kinds of resources in terms of behavioral health staff and also para-professionals with a positive impact by getting police officers away from things they did not need to be involved in.

As staff liaison to the Task Force, Deputy City Manager-Community Services Director White reminded everyone that the Chair had been elected to run the meeting, the Vice Chair would run the meeting in the absence of the Chair, and she asked members who were not the Chair to refrain from interrupting other members when speaking.

When Task Force Member Gosney was asked if he had questions that had not been answered that he could share with Mr. Brady with a response via email, Task Force Member Gosney reiterated he had done that on January 25, 2023 and had gotten no response.

Chair Small asked Task Force Member Gosney if he had additional questions. There was no response.

Task Force Member Luis Chacon asked about the recommended alternatives and whether the final report would include detailed information on how the alternatives would be implemented.

Mr. Brady stated the report had referenced the national literature and case studies like CAHOOTS in Eugene, Oregon and other similar programs on the behavioral and mental health side, and Matrix had worked with hundreds of communities that had community services officers for lower priority calls for service, and some of the results of the work that had been done in other agencies had been shown to identify that between 5 and over 20 percent of the calls for service could be safely diverted to those kinds of resources.

Task Force Member Marisol Cantú asked about the date of release of the final report to the City Council, asked if Mr. Brady would be meeting with the City Consultant Urban Strategies to better inform the Richmond Community Crises Response Program, urged Mr. Brady to work with Task Force Member Bischoff's working group, recognized the need for alternative responses and verified with Mr. Brady that the diversion approaches had been considered in line with other models in California and elsewhere.

In response, Mr. Brady stated they were close to getting the final reviews with the two departments and the City Manager's office and a few weeks would be required to get the final report.

City of Richmond – Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force

Meeting held via Zoom: https://richmond.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=38

Mr. Brady noted that Matrix had only recently learned of the Urban Strategies work, had shared some of his data to support their conclusion about the size and functionality of the alternative response unit, and supported a meeting between Matrix Consulting and Urban Strategies. He agreed with the need to work with the Task Force working group, and he clarified that Matrix Consulting had gone through reviews with the RPD and expected final comments from the RFD after which the final report would be submitted to the City Manager.

Chair Small referred to the comments from Mr. Brady that non-sworn officers would address quality of life issues and asked of the possibility of deprioritizing certain types of responses that would not require a police response at all such as noise complaints, drug possession, minor traffic violations and street level sex work. She referred to the City of Baltimore that had experimented with deprioritizing those types of offenses or making them just violations, with no significant increases of crime and a reduction of pressure on local police and the ability to provide better service to people.

Mr. Brady stated that Matrix had not only looked at the kinds of events police officers traditionally responded to but had made a determination about the kinds of incidents or events appropriate for non-police officers to respond to and had outlined a process for emergency communications to make those decisions based on established priorities. That reclassification of calls was necessary in order to implement the kind of program proposed for both large and small communities.

Chair Small clarified that she was not referring to having those types of incidents be addressed by non-sworn officers as responders but that there would be no response at all to those types of incidents, and Mr. Brady explained that Matrix had not addressed it like that in that many of the things would be reportable offenses anyway, but under certain criteria a non-sworn officer should respond in that for those types of incidents it was best to have a police response, although other kinds of calls such as expanded animal control types of calls such as barking dogs could be taken out of the RPD, and behavioral mental health types of things could be taken out of a primary police response.

Chair Small noted that the City of Berkeley was developing a separate traffic department to handle what used to be police-related traffic violations. She suggested the issue around staffing was a national issue and the RPD would be looking at operating with a reduced staff for a while. She suggested part of the role of the Task Force was to think about the things currently being handled under the umbrella of the RPD, which could be handled another way to allow the RPD to devote its time and resources to what needed to be done.

Mr. Brady commented that what Berkeley was doing was leading edge and there were very few departments implementing something like that, although it was expected to be more common in the future. Matrix was looking at the workload that needed to be handled and the alternative ways that could be pursued to provide a better service and a quicker more effective response.

Chair Small noted that Matrix had been focused on analyzing data and the use of current resources, but commented that a lot of what happened around the way the community responded and the way police were utilized was driven by public conversation and perception about crime and how to respond to crime. She asked Matrix if recommendations would be made about the type of public education that would be needed to shift public attitudes around certain types of crimes and about the use of police as responders in terms of serious crime.

City of Richmond – Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force

Meeting held via Zoom: https://richmond.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=38

Mr. Brady stated that was central to the concept of proactivity and RPD had little time or ability to define the problems that needed to be addressed such as what was making some members of the community feel unsafe, and strategies to use to communicate better and make the RPD aware of what needed to be done, which was fundamental to the process.

Chair Small clarified that she was talking about the City Council and not the public to help shift attitude to support the kinds of changes that had been proposed, and Mr. Brady stated their scope of work was to look at the resource needs.

Task Force Member Bischoff noted that in order for Berkeley to assume any traffic enforcement from the Police Department would require a change to state law.

Task Force Member Schlemmer asked if the Chair was suggesting that the crimes she had noted would not be addressed by the RPD. He stated that quality of life issues were different for everyone. Some were concerned for the illegal sideshows while others were concerned for prostitution in front of their home or for noise complaints, especially at night. He suggested those functions belonged in the RPD.

Associate Administrative Analyst Stephanie Ny identified the public's ability to speak to the item.

Michelle Milam explained that she had participated early on in the Matrix process and she urged the Task Force to talk to the civilian staff, noted that some had been doing that for a long time, and commented that there might be some suggestions from them to consider going forward.

Ben Therriault was interested in what the final report would say. He stated what the RPD had been able to accomplish in the past compared to what it could do now was tragic and the resources that had been provided to previous Police Chiefs to what had been provided to the current Police Chief was tragic. As a result, people were angry. While he supported the alternative responses that had been proposed, he stated all those things should be provided and done at the same time without the cost of police staffing, which was the major failure of defund. He stated that alternative responses and professional law enforcement with good training and good staffing were both needed.

Sara Canter responded to the comments about the impacts of defunding nationwide and noted it had been shown that there was no relationship to the problems being faced by police departments around the country and whether their budgets had been cut in that the problems that were happening nationwide were also happening where there had increases in police budgets similar to the RPD, where the budget had gone up every fiscal year. She asked the Task Force to look into the statistics and the connections as opposed to hearing anecdotal stories about what was happening.

The next item was previously taken out of agenda order.

2. DISCUSS the Return to In-person Meetings Beginning March 2023

City Attorney Alison Flowers reported that in November 2022 the law had changed with the end of the Governor's State of Emergency where the remote options for Brown Act bodies was ending and the City of Richmond had determined that with few exceptions commissions would be returning to in-person meetings. She stated there were few exceptions to commission members attending remotely.

City of Richmond – Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force

Meeting held via Zoom: https://richmond.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=38

City Attorney Flowers stated one exception was just cause if there was an illness involved and just cause could happen twice in a year. The other exception was some other emergency. She explained that it was complicated to comply for a just cause exception. Given the strict parameters around appearing remotely, Task Force Members should assume the need to appear in-person going forward.

Deputy City Manager-Community Services Director White stated that an adequate space was being researched to allow the Task Force meetings to occur in-person. An email would be sent to confirm where the in-person location would be for the March 22, 2023 meeting. She clarified that right now the public would only be able to participate in-person.

Chair Small suggested that the meeting schedule should be reconsidered to ensure the ability for everyone to be able to meet in-person. She took a poll on those members who would be able to meet in-person on the regular fourth Wednesday of each month at 5:30 P.M. and had an affirmative response from seven members. She verified with staff that the community forums did not have to be in-person.

Task Force Member Therriault asked if there could be a hybrid format to allow the public to participate remotely to allow increased participation, and Ms. White explained staff was looking to provide the capacity to be able to conduct hybrid meetings, which involved extra technology and other factors to allow that to occur. She hoped that might be possible by the beginning of the fiscal year and would keep the Task Force informed throughout the process.

In response to Task Force Member Bischoff as to why in-person meetings were required, Ms. Flowers stated that was the law. Under the Brown Act pre-pandemic, there was and continued to be the ability to attend telephonically, although that came with restrictions where every location someone would attend remotely would be on the agenda and the public would have to have access to that location. The only other option would be to attend in-person with two narrow exceptions to attend remotely. Whether the public could attend remotely now was more an issue of whether the City could accommodate that at this point.

Task Force Member Schlemmer clarified with staff why the City Council Chambers and multi-purpose room could not be used for Task Force meetings given that the 21-member Task Force was too large for the City Council Chambers to be able to accommodate the public and socially distance; and the Design Review Board's use of the multi-purpose room would conflict with the fourth Wednesday of the month when the Task Force would meet. It was clarified that the City Council, the Richmond Housing Authority Board and the Planning Commission would continue to meet in the City Council Chambers that had been broadcast by KCRT prior to the pandemic and would continue to have hybrid meetings where all members of the City Council, the Housing Authority Board (comprised of members of the City Council) and Planning Commission would have to attend in-person.

Task Force Member Schlemmer suggested the use of the Bermuda Room in the Auditorium and urged care with respect to being vaccinated.

Chair Small asked if there would be any objection to members being masked during the meeting, asked about the personal security of members at the meetings, requested a budget and recommended child care capabilities for members who were parents to allow them to participate, and suggested that coffee and light refreshments be provided.

City of Richmond – Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force

Meeting held via Zoom: https://richmond.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=38

Deputy City Manager-Community Services Director White stated that a clear policy around masking would be provided and masks would be encouraged. She clarified that there was security at both 440 and 450 Civic Center. She would pass the other requests on to City staff.

Task Force Member Schlemmer suggested that child care capabilities and refreshments were noble but could be problematic in that it would set a precedent for all City boards, commissions and committees.

Chair Small took exception to Task Force Member Schlemmer's comments, stated it was directed at her personally, and requested that be reflected in the record.

Task Force Member Therriault stated with respect to security that he was personally responsible as a Richmond employee and Richmond police officer to make sure that nothing would happen to someone and people were a radio call away. He suggested that face-to-face in-person meetings would likely be more civil than Zoom meetings.

Associate Administrative Analyst Stephanie Ny identified the public's ability to speak to the item.

No written comments were submitted or oral comments made by any member of the public.

At this point in the meeting, Ms. Flowers advised that there was no longer a quorum of Task Force Members present to be able to continue the meeting.

Task Force Member Whitmore recommended that future agendas include a specific time allowed for each item on the agenda to ensure being able to get through the items on each agenda.

The meeting adjourned and the remaining items on the agenda were continued to the next meeting.

3. **DISCUSS and APPROVE the Schedule for Upcoming Community Forums on Traffic Safety; Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention; Police Policies & Practices; Youth Employment, Training & Safety; and Poverty Reduction Strategies**
4. **RECEIVE a Presentation from Safe Organized Spaces Richmond Regarding Status of Contract Services for Unhoused Populations in Richmond and Future Plans**
5. **RECEIVE a FY 2022-2023 First and Second Quarter Report Regarding Allocations for Unhoused Interventions, YouthWorks, Office of Neighborhood Safety, and the Community Crises Response Program**

I. ACTION ITEM RECAP

J. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:00 P.M. to the next meeting on Wednesday, March 22, 2023, location to be determined.