

City of Richmond – Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force
Meeting held in Person: Bermuda Room, Richmond Memorial Auditorium
403 Civic Center Plaza, Richmond, CA 94804

Minutes*
Wednesday, May 24, 2023, 5:30 P.M.

**video recording and meeting transcript available*

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Small called the meeting to order at 5:38 P.M.

B. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: S. Bischoff, H. Burks, M. Cantú*, L. Chacon*, D. Gosney, K. Kilian-Lobos, A. Lee, L. Murray, J. Pursell, B. Therriault, T. Walker, L. Whitmore, B.K. Williams, and Chair D. Small

*Arrived after Roll Call

EXCUSED

ABSENCE: J. Schlemmer

ABSENT: E. Chacon, R. Joseph, M. Njissang

STAFF PRESENT: Deputy City Manager-Community Services Director (Staff Liaison to the Task Force) LaShonda White, Assistant Administrative Analyst Guadalupe Morales, Associate Administrative Analyst Stephanie Ny, and City Attorney Heather McLaughlin.

C. AGENDA REVIEW AND ADOPTION

There were no recommended changes to the agenda and the agenda was adopted as presented.

D. MEETING PROCEDURES

Guadalupe Morales, staff to the Task Force, identified the meeting procedures and the public's ability to speak during the meeting. She announced that anyone may make an oral comment even if a written one had previously been submitted; however, each speaker may raise their hand once to make one oral public comment per each agenda item.

E. MINUTES APPROVAL

1. APPROVE the Minutes of the April 26, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force

An email with respect to the minutes was read into the record at this time from Lea Murray.

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Lea Murray: “I was present at the last Task Force meeting but I was late. I also asked a question and voted. I came in when Jesus Morales was speaking. Can you please change the minutes to reflect my presence. Thank you.”

Motion by Taskforce Member Bischoff, seconded by Taskforce Member Burks to adopt the minutes of the April 26, 2023 meeting, as amended to reflect Taskforce Member Murray’s email, carried by the following Roll Call vote:

AYES: S. Bischoff, H. Burks, M. Cantú, L. Chacon, D. Gosney, K. Kilian-Lobos, A. Lee, L. Murray, J. Pursell, B. Therriault, T. Walker, L. Whitmore, B.K. Williams, and Chair D. Small
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: None
ABSENT: E. Chacon, R. Joseph, M. Njissang and J. Schlemmer

F. CITY STAFF REPORTS

Staff Liaison LaShonda White announced a Caltrans Bay Area Career Fair on May 31, 2023 from 9:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. at the Oakland District 4 Office for those seeking employment. Calls could be made to Richmond Works at (510) 307-8014. In addition, a series of City Council meetings had been scheduled to accommodate the budget and goal setting season. There would be a special City Council meeting on May 31, 2023 from 4:00 to 7:00 P.M. in the Bermuda Room. The budget would also be considered at the June 6, June 20 and June 27 meetings of the City Council.

G. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Marisol Cantú commented on the City staff reports and Monday’s priority budget meeting, which had been scheduled during the middle of the day, a difficult time for members of the community to be able to attend. She encouraged the public to attend the meeting on May 31. She also noted that the Community Police Review Commission (CPRC) had not been the top priority of the consultant and she wanted to make sure that the CPRC would be prioritized.

Deborah Small spoke to the upcoming Kehinde Wiley Exhibit at the De Young museum. She explained that Mr. Wiley was the African American artist who had painted the portrait of President Barack Obama and there was a special exhibit of his work “Architecture of Sorrow” at the De Young Museum during the summer, free to Bay Area residents on Saturdays.

H. PRESENTATIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND ACTION ITEMS

1. RECEIVE Update from Safe Organized Spaces (SOS) Richmond on Unhoused Interventions

Oneal Fernandez, a Health Ambassador with Life Long and lead of outreach for SOS with five years lived experience in encampments from El Sobrante and North Richmond, in tents and cars, stated he was 16 months sober and had been able to put a roof over his and his family’s heads.

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Mr. Fernandez explained that he had changed his life and had progressed into his career in Outreach. He presented pictures and pointed out individual ex-encampment residents who had also progressed from being unhoused.

Daniel Barth, Executive Director of SOS, noted that up to 30 individuals had been employed by SOS each week in the process of empowering individuals to move beyond being unhoused. He explained that SOS Richmond had started in October 2021. He introduced the members of SOS present in the Bermuda Room and stated that homelessness could be addressed through a community of care to ensure equity empowerment. He commended Mr. Fernandez and his progress as well as that of many others in building a community of care, with housed and unhoused neighbors working together on outreach, encampment services, jobs and safe living spaces by building trust one minute at a time.

Mr. Barth introduced several individuals including Junior Salvador, Flea, Joel, Michael, and others who each described their own success story in rebuilding their lives and securing jobs with SOS, Life Long and other employers and then being able to secure permanent housing after spending time in Richmond encampments. All had worked with SOS as part of its outreach program, with mobile showers, and providing other SOS services such as food, healthcare, laundry, lodging, Social Security and other available resources. Those present explained that they wanted to tell their stories to inspire others to want to do better and they thanked SOS for the opportunities it had provided to help them do better.

Mr. Fernandez reported that since its inception, SOS had removed 540 tons of trash, provided over 3,000 showers, moved 27 employees into housing, employees worked 19 average hours per week and unhoused employees had worked 23,000 hours. There had been a 30 percent increase in new funding, 27 unhoused neighbors had been employed, 3,800 gallons of water had been delivered each month, there were 150 laundry participants each month, and 10 portable toilets had been placed at encampments.

Mr. Barth stated that SOS had been working to build up the help and they would also try to understand how many months in work experience and employment it would take for folks to graduate to the next level and how many employees and non-employees secured entitlement incomes, medical, jobs, and interim and permanent housing in that the outreach was getting other individuals supported. He described an eight-week pilot curriculum, now with a trained facilitator that would be done in a community starting in one location and hopefully several locations neighborhood by neighborhood with care management. A system would be built to track that process. He added that SOS was working seven days a week.

Mr. Fernandez clarified that the City of Richmond had funded an additional three quarters of a million dollars and he commented that Youth Works, Richmond Works and others would be bringing in an income by having a work experience program that would allow work experience paid for by institutional sources beyond what the City had provided, and allow on-the-job-training. Eventually, SOS would hire a Fund Development Manager to conduct the necessary fundraising and in partnership with the City and others be able to reach into communities and deliver participants to the career services that Richmond Works and Youth Works provided, with the hope to eventually expand beyond Richmond into other nearby areas.

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Mr. Fernandez clarified that he was now employed by Life Long and could expand into different areas with the resources provided in Richmond to reach the homeless surrounding the area.

Members of the unhoused described SOS's four strategies. The first was outreach and there was a four-member Outreach Team with crisis intervention, a well-being assessment, income, health and housing goals, a personal vision curriculum and 30 or so of SOS employees were unhoused with the goal of getting people into better jobs like Life Long. The second strategy was Encampment Services that were in Richmond, Pinole, San Pablo, Hilltop and other areas of the Iron Triangle, with an attempt by SOS to get out as far as possible to provide showers, laundry services, shuttle services and everything the unhoused needed at no cost. The third strategy was Job Strategy where work force empowerment, local stores, team members and team leaders graduated to full-time jobs outside of SOS. Local stewards started out with 9 hours a week and Shower Power (mobile showers) Team members got a bit more hours doing showers, trash pickup, outreach and laundry. Team Leaders helped to supervise what was going on and getting direction and then graduate to full-time jobs after SOS.

The fourth strategy was about creating environments like the SOS family in communities that needed to be developed beyond the existing encampments, which was the case in every jurisdiction, with the need to create safe spaces and the funding sources to support the individuals who had initially been put into the safe spaces. It was noted that micro villages could be created, a tiny home pilot had been proposed and there was the need for leadership to fund that pilot on a 24/7 basis. Empowerment villages could also be built to offer a sense of community with residents to then transition into permanent housing.

In summary, Mr. Barth stated every two weeks SOS had a large staff meeting to take care of serious business with empowerment actions planned that were constituent designed to build equity. He added that in 20 months, SOS had shaped an organization that was worthy of being a model proven concept.

In response to Taskforce Member Burks with respect to the use of funds and the number of employees at each of the different positions, Mr. Barth and Mr. Fernandez explained that the base rate was \$18/hour and there were six or seven local Stewards, four Outreach and each area had a Team Leader paid at a higher rate (up to \$21/hour) along with a Logistics Manager. Showers had two to three people on each shift four days a week; two people were in charge of water; three to four people provided trash pickup; mobile trash operated three days a week with a team of four at the Castro Encampment along with a couple of other days where communities were cleaned up. Some people worked three, four and five hours, so the 19 hours earlier referenced was an average from the 30 to 40 SOS participants.

Taskforce Member Burks expressed the need for a greater focus on how the money was being spent and understood that some things could not be quantified. While the narrative shared by the unhoused was powerful and she recognized the good work being done by SOS, she stated that the funding that had been provided should be specifically identified. She added that comments to expand the work beyond Richmond was not the purview of the Task Force and she suggested that some of the presentation was not aligned with what the Task Force had expected.

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Mr. Barth clarified that the six objectives outlined in the SOS contract with the City were to provide mobile showers, clean-up trash, and deploy encampment services, many of which had been done although wastewater disposal and solar power remained a work in progress. Developing work force and leadership from the ground up was also being done, as was responding to local situations with outreach. Problem solving was SOS's outreach, which had resulted in increased requests to respond to problems and increased cooperation that had been developed by building new relationships.

With respect to safe living spaces, Mr. Barth stated while it was in the contract there had been pushback from members of the City Administration that was not an eligible activity. As a result, when developing the Scattered Sites Program, some of it was not in the eligible activity and in the scope of the contract. Efforts had been pursued to establish that program in the parking lot of churches, although it remained a work in progress because people did not want to have safe sanctioned spaces in their parking lots let alone in their neighborhoods. He pointed out that the RPAL [Richmond Police Activities League] project was a consequence of their steady discussions since 2017 to help make that happen.

Taskforce Member Burks commented that she had sought specific outcomes of what the funding through the Task Force had produced and the accountability for that funding.

Taskforce Member Whitmore sought a breakdown of the monetary expenses for different things and referred to the reported \$10,000 spent weekly for salaries. She asked if the City had asked for a breakdown of the funds provided by the City and she wanted to see in the presentation the different services that were being provided and the cost of each of those services. While she was pleased to see what had been done, she wanted to see how the money had been spent.

Mr. Barth stated that if looking to the contract for the new round of funding approved on March 28, 2023 by the Richmond City Council (\$738,000), the budget in that contract and how it had been packaged was a matter of public record. He stated they had just gotten a Financial Manager this year and the SOS budget that the City had accepted had identified specific funding for specific tasks. On the 19-hour average, he noted that some individuals were working a few hours a week all the way up to the Logistics Manager at \$23/Hour for a 40-hour week and everything in between. He stated it took about 15 hours a week for someone to commit and show up and do the work. He noted that those who showed up little were paid little while those who were committed were able to make more. He emphasized that the records were clear.

Taskforce Member Cantú thanked the SOS team and asked Mr. Barth how the different job descriptions and hours had been broken down, where the funds for the tiny homes had been reallocated and what they were actually used for.

Mr. Barth continued to hope that the development of safe living spaces and the Scattered Sites Program would still occur and be successful. He stated it was not part of the original budget, which could be provided to the Task Force.

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Taskforce Member Cantú sought transparency on all the components of the SOS contract since the Task Force was being held accountable for those proposals. She was pleased to know that calls were being taken 24/7 and she asked about those calls.

Mr. Fernandez referred to the SOS call line that had been active for six months and reported SOS was getting calls related to suicides, trash, donations, mental health and others, and there had been responses to all the calls. He noted that a random community member had called the number due to a mental health crisis, which had been addressed, and calls were being taken not just from the encampments.

Taskforce Member Cantú referred to outreach and bridging the gap between housed and unhoused residents, and another member of the SOS team described some of the reactions from the housed and explained that SOS had a strong relationship with the Neighborhood Councils and was building relationships day by day and neighborhood by neighborhood.

Taskforce Member Gosney applauded the success stories and asked when individuals were paid whether they had access to bank accounts or banks and how the payment was being handled to allow them to access cash.

Mr. Barth explained that folks needed money management support and while those systems were not available, the SOS organization because it was small had the ability to make sure that when someone became employed that individual had a bank account through Mechanics Bank with direct deposits and could hopefully then model some kind of saving/planning process. When SOS had become bigger and had been absorbed by another organization, a lot of their systems did not fully develop. SOS could improve on that and with its Director of Operations and an Administrative Systems person would build more support for those individuals, for the systems, and for money management that would be pursued in the coming year.

Taskforce Member Gosney referred to the hoped for expansion of efforts beyond Richmond and asked SOS how it could verify that no Richmond funding was being used for services provided beyond Richmond, and Mr. Fernandez stated that SOS had not expanded beyond Richmond but since he was employed by Life Long he represented all of West County, and in fact had an outreach event in Pinole last week.

Mr. Barth offered an example of the situation with respect to jurisdictional lines and referred to a recent situation where showers had been placed on Richmond land adjacent to San Pablo and unincorporated El Sobrante. With the community will to see some activity in El Sobrante that had not yet been addressed, the showers, outreach and trash pickup had been parked in Richmond and had provided those services. In responding to El Sobrante's desire and given that Councilmember Bana had gotten the City Council to acknowledge the need to serve El Sobrante unincorporated, he stated that had been approved 18 months ago and eventually other sources for Pinole and San Pablo would be secured, which was being addressed right now given strong relationships with the elected, administrators and police of San Pablo and Pinole.

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Taskforce Member Gosney referred to some public comments at City Council meetings that asserted that none of the money dedicated by the City to SOS was going towards the unhoused, and Mr. Barth offered examples of several former Rydin Road residents who were given “homework” to qualify for housing, which was one way that the funds were providing homes - - living on the street, emergency housing, a job, to permanent housing.

Taskforce Member Pursell referred to accountability of people showing up and doing the things they said they were going to do. He was supportive of the SOS program but needed accountability related to the funding and success rates. When looking at the SOS website, he did not see the public documents such as the SOS production plan and accountability with respect to the accounts, and while names were not needed he stated titles would be helpful with an identification of the individual positions and what they were being paid to be able to identify the cash flow in clean, clear, plain language to make the public understand all the work that SOS was doing in a quantifiable way. He added that the challenges faced by SOS, such as the cost of trash removal, should also be identified so that the Task Force could help, if possible, along with the production schedules on solar power for example.

Taskforce Member Walker asked SOS if it had been asked to present a detailed budget at this time. Mr. Barth’s response was no, not at the time.

Chair Small thanked SOS for its work, for doing the work that society was not doing, and for taking on the continual criticism for not being able to solve a problem it did not create and that society had not been able to solve. The problem of an unsheltered population was not new and was not specific to Richmond in that it was a national problem. Noting that she had started work as a harm reductionist working with drug users establishing needle exchange programs in New York at the height of the AIDS crisis, she stated that situation was similar to the unhoused, a population of people marginalized, discarded, stigmatized, ignored, and often left to die. Referring to complaints at City Council meetings from local residents about an unsheltered person on the street, “naked, aggressive and acting in a way that was scary to people and they wanted something to be done about it,” she stated that was often how it was presented. She suggested that untreated mental health problems were conflated with the problems of unsheltered people. Whenever people saw a person in mental health distress acting out who they believed to be unsheltered, whether they were or not, had become representative of the entire population in the same way that when people saw someone who was overdosed on the street had become representative of all drug users.

Chair Small emphasized the need to recognize that and incorporate it into the outreach and acknowledge the difficulties that people had, which should remind everyone of why it was so important to develop the community alternative mental health issue. She urged the Task Force to do everything possible to not have to rely on SOS having a health line to do the work that the Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP) should be doing. Doing that and doing it right would help reduce the ways in which as a community folks continued to conflate mental health crises with the crises of unsheltered people, which were different and required different interventions and different solutions.

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Chair Small added that the design for the CCRP should include a collaborative work with organizations like SOS and others that were serving folks in encampments so that when they got calls about things that were happening those calls would get transferred to the CCRP to better serve the community. She asked SOS if it was willing to work with the Task Force and the CCRP to collaborate and educate those in the encampments about the existence of the CCRP program.

Mr. Barth affirmed that SOS would do that.

Taskforce Member Burks wanted to see specifics as to the dollars spent and asked what SOS needed in response to what it was seeing, and Mr. Barth stated SOS would do the work in Year 2 that it did not do in Year 1 as to forward thinking.

On the discussion of when the specific breakdown of line-item expenditures could be provided to the Task Force, Mr. Barth advised that SOS would be discussing its strategic planning process with the Management Team in July and he would get back to the Task Force ideally by August but no later than September 2023.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Don Gosney requested that the written presentation be provided to the Task Force and be made available to the public.

LaShonda White, Staff Liaison to the Task Force, stated for the good of the order the slide deck would be shared with the Task Force and with the public.

2. RECEIVE Updates from the Community Summit Planning Subgroup and DISCUSS and APPROVE Any Recommended Changes to the Community Summit

Taskforce Member Burks stated there had not been as many hands planning the event as hoped. She invited everyone to the Community Summit on Saturday, June 3 at Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School at 4022 Florida Avenue. She reported that sign-ups for attendance had been low, at this time 28 in total, and there was a need to get the word out. As a result, the planning subgroup comprised of Taskforce Members Burks, Lee and Pursell wanted to streamline and condense the event with three workshops instead of five, with sessions for Youth Employment, Training & Safety, Poverty Reduction Strategies and Traffic Safety. No one had signed up for Police Policies & Practices and Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention. In addition, the time of the event would be shortened to end at 1:00 P.M. instead of 2:00 P.M.

Taskforce Member Lee agreed with the need to promote the event and encourage members of the Task Force to attend. He reported that facilitators had been secured and confirmed to attend, identified as Cynthia Hernandez facilitator for Youth Employment, Training & Safety; Jessica Traveneia for Poverty Reduction Strategies; and Michelle Milam for Traffic Safety. The committee was still working to provide food for the event.

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Motion by Taskforce Member Burks, seconded by Taskforce Member Pursell to streamline and condense the event with three workshops instead of five, and to shorten the time of the event to close at 1:00 P.M. instead of 2:00 P.M.

On the motion, Taskforce Member Pursell clarified that the goal was to have an expert allocated to each room as well as a member of the Task Force to facilitate conversations and take notes to report back on the findings and results of the sessions.

Taskforce Member Gosney expressed concern that the gathering, which would be split into three breakout rooms for smaller conversations going on at the same time with people rotating in and out of the rooms, would mean that members of the public could not attend all sessions.

Given the hour and the need to extend the meeting, Motion by Taskforce Member Pursell, second by Taskforce Member Whitmore to extend the meeting to the end of the subject item, carried by the following Roll Call vote:

AYES: S. Bischoff, H. Burks, M. Cantú, K. Kilian-Lobos, A. Lee, L. Murray, J. Pursell,
B. Therriault, L. Whitmore, B.K. Williams, and Chair D. Small
NOES: L. Chacon, D. Gosney, and T. Walker
ABSTAIN: None
ABSENT: E. Chacon, R. Joseph, M. Njissang and J. Schlemmer

Taskforce Member Whitmore recommended that the report from the Task Force return with a presentation on the July meeting agenda rather than June to offer sufficient time to respond.

Taskforce Member Bischoff recommended that the Community Summit be restructured given the low rate of participation so that all three sessions could be held together in one general session.

Taskforce Member Burks preferred to wait to see what the assignments looked like closer to the event, and Taskforce Member Lee concurred in that many folks might not have RSVP'd.

Taskforce Member Pursell offered a friendly amendment to the motion that with a certain capacity the format would continue with the three breakout sessions and below that capacity there could be a larger shared room. He added that there would be shared materials to help frame each discussion. He recommended an amended capacity, single or triple. Taskforce Member Burks accepted the amendment to her motion.

Chair Small provided clarity to the original motion to change the overall time of the event from 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. to 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M., to eliminate Police Policies & Practices and Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention from the topics to be discussed, with an amendment to the motion around whether or not to continue three separate breakout sessions that would repeat three times, each 45 minutes in length, or schedule one large session for everyone, with the additional amendment that if a specified capacity was reached the original format would be retained and if less than that capacity the format would be changed to a general session.

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Chair Small recommended the capacity be identified as 55 participants to retain the original format, and if less than 55 there would be one general session for everyone, which would occur the day of the Community Summit.

On the Motion by Taskforce Member Burks, second by Taskforce Member Pursell, to streamline and condense the event with three workshops instead of five by eliminating Police Policies & Practices and Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention, and to shorten the time of the event to close at 1:00 P.M. instead of 2:00 P.M., with two amendments to the motion from Taskforce Members Bischoff and Pursell to continue with the original format of three separate breakout sessions that would repeat three times, each 45 minutes in length if there were 55 participants, or to produce one large session for everyone if there were less than 55 participants, which would occur the day of the Community Summit, carried by the following Roll Call vote:

AYES: S. Bischoff, H. Burks, M. Cantú, K. Kilian-Lobos, A. Lee, L. Murray, J. Pursell,
B. Therriault, L. Whitmore, B.K. Williams, and Chair D. Small
NOES: None
ABSTAIN: D. Gosney (did not vote)
ABSENT: E. Chacon, L. Chacon, R. Joseph, M. Njissang, J. Schlemmer and T. Walker

The meeting adjourned at this time. The remainder of the agenda was continued to the next meeting.

3. DISCUSS a General Outreach Plan to Increase Public Awareness of and Participation in Taskforce Meetings and APPROVE Recommendations

I. ACTION ITEM RECAP

J. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:39 P.M. to the next meeting on Wednesday, June 28, 2023, in the Bermuda Room, Richmond Memorial Auditorium, 403 Civic Center Plaza, Richmond, CA 94804.