

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, August 30, 2023, 5:30 P.M.

**video recording and meeting transcript available*

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Small called the special meeting to order at 5:30 P.M.

B. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: S. Bischoff, M. Cantú, D. Gosney, R. Joseph, K. Kilian-Lobos, J. Pursell, B. Therriault, T. Walker, L. Whitmore, B.K. Williams, and Chair D. Small

ABSENT: H. Burks, L. Chacon, A. Lee, L. Murray, M. Njissang, and J. Schlemmer

ABSENT: None

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 Alison Flowers

C. AGENDA REVIEW AND ADOPTION

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 comment had previously been submitted; however, each speaker may raise their hand once to make one oral public comment per each agenda item. She added that an announcement would identify the time to make public comment for each item.

E. CITY STAFF REPORTS

Deputy City Manager-Community Services Director LaShonda White had no report at this time.

F. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Randy Joseph invited everyone to the RYSE Center's free 8th Annual La Feria de Septiembre, De Colores – In LaK'ech: You Are My Other Me on Friday, September 15, 2023, from 4:00 to 7:00 P.M. at 3939 Bissell Avenue, Richmond, with good food, games, performances, music and resources to read and receive.

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G. PRESENTATIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND ACTION ITEMS

1. DISCUSS the Draft Report on the Community Crisis Response Program and APPROVE Recommendations

Chair Small confirmed with Task Force members that they had reviewed the Reimagining Public Safety Community Task Force proposal that had been approved by the City Council and which had been the basis for the work by Urban Strategies Council, and had also reviewed Urban Strategies Council's draft Report on the Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP).

Taskforce Member Gosney identified three concerns he had with the proposal, concerns he would provide independently to the City Council with respect to the issue of wages employees would be receiving along with the cost to the City and whether unionized workers would be involved. He did not support farming out good union jobs from the City to anyone else even though it would increase costs to the City. He was also concerned with items that had been recommended to be addressed by the response teams that he suggested might not be appropriate and worth the time and effort, such as public urination, found syringes, camping in vehicles or camping outside, disorderly juveniles, incorrigible juveniles, family disputes, or neighbor disputes. He recognized that crisis response team members would not be quite as well qualified as police officers and might not be in a position to address some issues. He was also not comfortable with the survey results on outreach.

Anne Jenks, Urban Strategies Council, referred to the scenarios referenced by Taskforce Member Gosney and explained that Richmond Police Chief French had indicated early on that it was the Richmond Police Department's (RPD's) policy to respond to everything, if possible. With respect to public camping, she noted that whether a valid concern or not there would be an escalation of that activity and that dispatch would prioritize and address safety issues. With respect to family disputes, she stated that was different from domestic violence, and when dispatchers received a call and made a safety assessment based on a series of questions, the dispatcher could determine whether a police officer or a response team would be more appropriate. She added that whether or not there were calls appropriate for a non-police response, every police officer Urban Strategies Council had spoken to and the list of calls those officers wanted the CCRP to take would more appropriately be handled by the CCRP.

Ms. Jenks added that she did not think that supporting CCRP was anti-police in that she had similar responses from people at the Richmond Country Club, which responses were not that dissimilar from the responses from one of the City's encampments.

Further with respect to surveys, Deputy City Manager White noted that most surveys would not represent all of a city, and with a population of 115,000, the 415 responses from Richmond were not a bad survey response. She described the steps that had been taken throughout the community in coordination with community organizations. She added that the timeline for the survey had also been extended to get a good representative sample.

Taskforce Member Joseph asked about the timeline to set up the CCRP as an existing City Department versus a new City Department.

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Deputy City Manager White suggested that the timeline might not be that different between the two, although the biggest issue would be what it would take to create the classifications and recruit, hire, onboard, and train the positions, which would take the most time.

Ms. Jenks suggested there would always be delays of some sort and it could take some time to set up the CCRP, although the lessons learned elsewhere would be employed to make the process as efficient as possible.

Taskforce Member Pursell suggested that mental health responses had not been listed and represented the majority of 9-1-1 calls, and Ms. Jenks explained that incidents would be described based on what was happening and those incidents might not initially be identified as mental health calls, for instance.

Taskforce Member Pursell requested better clarity on the mental health issue and the assumption of domestic violence. He sought much greater clarity on the relation of the dispatches with the police.

Ms. Jenks emphasized that it was a dispatch choice and she offered several scenarios to describe what could occur.

Deputy City Manager White advised that there was no intent to duplicate the mental health services provided by Contra Costa County's A3 Program.

Taskforce Member Williams noted that last year 1,200 people had been killed by police and she was reminded that the process was being undertaken for safety and to provide a service to the community. She understood that the cost per case under the proposal was generally lower than the cost per case for a police response to a call. She sought a projection of what might happen in terms of cost for Year 1 and Year 2, and when the program was monitored in the future, she stated there had to be something to monitor against and she asked how that might be done. In addition, she referred to the programs in the cities of Antioch and Redwood City, which were both pilot programs and she asked if the CCRP program was a pilot or an ongoing program. She also asked about the benefits of each and noted that the Task Force recommendation was to use 3-1-1 instead of 9-1-1.

Ms. Jenks questioned how workable 3-1-1 would be and reported that Urban Strategies Council's recommendation was to go through 9-1-1 through the non-emergency line and create an alternative number that could be answered as well by dispatch.

Taskforce Member Williams suggested that 3-1-1 consideration was important. In terms of the response, she noted that mental health response calls were not intended for the CCRP center that was being created and she did not see a clear way of how the calls would be dispatched.

Ms. Jenks explained that 3-1-1 was not a 24-hour service and 3-1-1 did not dispatch. An entire new situation would have to be built in that respect, although there was a current structure in place with 9-1-1 dispatch that had been uniquely designed to do what had to be done. She would rather train the professionals than attempt to train all the residents to do something new and build a new structure around 3-1-1 to make it 24-hour and make it a dispatch. She clarified that calls were not always coming from the person in crisis and most of the calls would still go through 9-1-1.

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Deputy City Manager White stated with respect to a pilot program versus an on-going program that the idea of a pilot had been of interest given the new program for the City, which would allow the City to know where it wanted to focus and determine the amount of funding involved. She added that performance metrics could be set and monitored to allow the City to continue to learn as it implemented the program. The City was also required to do a Workforce Analysis in response to the California State Audit and a consultant had been hired to determine appropriate staffing levels to maintain current and future service levels, assess ongoing needs for existing vacant positions and ensure succession planning was being maintained. Allowing for a pilot program allowed the City to also meet the requirements of the audit and go through the Workforce Analysis while learning more about the CCRP implementation. She had no information as to a cost per incident at this time.

Ms. Jenks added that there were so many things that had yet to be decided that it was very difficult to identify a cost per incident and there were too many factors to come up with credible numbers at this point.

Taskforce Member Williams encouraged some projections for some type of outcome the Task Force was interested in to identify some point of measurement.

Taskforce Member Kilian-Lobos noted with respect to 9-1-1 that it would be great if the RPD had been trained as one access point to the community but she supported another way with a more direct number. She commented with respect to the County A3 Program that there were many times when a team did not need to be dispatched and when an incident could be addressed over the phone. There were also a number of calls that were information calls. She added that in the original design of the CCRP there was to always be a way to access the CCRP besides calling 9-1-1, which she stated was important.

Deputy City Manager White noted her understanding that there would be a separate number besides dispatch 9-1-1 and whether a City Department or a non-profit there would be a general information number.

In response to an unidentified member of the Task Force, Ms. Jenks stated that the City of Oakland's CCRP was part of the Oakland Fire Department. She also commented that if the program was embedded in a City Department there would be more political challenges and inter-departmental issues than there would be with a non-profit. She added that the City of Antioch program was a non-profit. When asked about a hybrid non-profit that could eventually be brought into a city, she stated she was not aware of any program like that at this point.

Chair Small emphasized some of the comments that had previously been offered such as the intention behind the establishment of the program to be an alternative to the police as a first responder with an emphasis on having a number other than 9-1-1 to buttress and reinforce that it was an alternative to the police. She did not see anything in the proposal in response to that concern.

With respect to timeline, Chair Small stated the proposal the Task Force had put forth was a three-year timeline to implementation while the Urban Strategies Council proposal was for eighteen months and not more than two years.

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In order to establish the data metrics and good evaluation, Chair Small suggested a limited timeline would be problematic. She agreed that having the program in the City would make it take longer but it would be better for the long term. She recommended that the Office of Neighborhood Safety be expanded to the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Health and that the CCRP be the first program of a health component to begin to see pro issues that had been addressed as criminal justice issues as more pro health issues and provide the kinds of services that were consistent with that and move away from criminalizing health issues.

Ms. Jenks noted there were a lot of calls that already existed and while she supported another number, there was already a set of calls and calls to dispatch still had to be tracked, which should be done with all City Departments touching the program whether with the City or for a non-profit. She emphasized there needed to be ongoing discussions with dispatch about the calls received which would be an ongoing process.

Chair Small asked about a model to have calls coming into one place that would over time be moved to another place given the intention to move in that direction for calls to a number other than 9-1-1. She added that her vision in terms of reimagining public safety was to transform away from the current system that was over reliant on law enforcement to respond to things that law enforcement was not the best first responders to address, and everything done should move in that direction.

Chair Small noted that the original proposal included a staff person whose principal job would be doing community outreach to educate the community, identify services and work with marginalized groups, among other things, although she did not see that in the model for the program design and she asked about the status of that element.

Ms. Jenks stated with respect to community outreach that she was concerned with the numbers of immigrant communities that had barriers to engage with the City and that Richmond's program would need very special attention in that area.

Chair Small suggested that a Mental Health Clinician's role would be completely different from a position that would do community outreach, organizing, and help support the rest of the team. She asked for a clarification of the classifications within the City and the specific tasks and duties associated with those classifications to be able to compare them with what had been proposed by the Task Force for the CCRP.

Deputy City Manager White clarified that an Administrative/Data Analyst position in the City of Richmond was a general classification for someone who could do everything from hitting the streets and knocking on doors to analyzing budgets.

Ms. Jenks commented that the Mental Health Clinician role would do a lot to support the team and the program and would end up performing a broad set of services.

Chair Small explained that part of the analysis looking into the proposal related to the number of calls that RPD was taking with respect to mental health with the intent to reduce that number, which would reduce police overtime every year and find ways to more efficiently use current police resources.

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As a result, in terms of metrics and the success and projection of the cost of the program, Chair Small suggested it should be juxtaposed against the reduction of overtime of police responders, to be done in an alternative way.

Taskforce Member Therriault explained that some of the national police issues could not be compared with Richmond since it was not realistic. He wanted to see some calls be deferred from police but he commented that there were a lot of bureaucratic things that had to happen and people had to be realistic about that in that it would take time to staff up, dispatch would have to be staffed up, and there were a number of things that had to happen. There was a lot of support for an alternative response, especially in the RPD, and as a law enforcement officer he stated there was a lot that people did not realize that police had to do such as being on site for an ambulance to respond when called. If some things could be utilized by other folks that would be the thing to do but he did not see the need to reinvent the wheel. He commented that more people now called 9-1-1 than when he had started with the City 15 years ago. He wanted people to understand not to get frustrated or give up on the proposal since it would take some time to approve and implement.

Ms. Jenks stated in terms of dispatch that it would have to be staffed up unrelated to the CCRP given that dispatchers would answer the calls just like they did now but what they did with those calls would have to be worked out. Aside from that there would be no additional work and dispatchers would follow the same function.

Taskforce Member Walker recognized the steps that would be required to pursue and implement the CCRP, which could take months. Referring to the Office of Neighborhood Safety, she explained it had originally been a public/private partnership that was grant funded, had been under threat of being defunded since its establishment, and even with a proven record of success and advocacy from the community was still looked at with data and credible information as something that was in opposition to traditional policing, which was not true. She stated Richmond had been able to get gun violence to an all-time low through an incorporation of community participation and engagement through other means and with a common goal of public safety in the community.

With respect to law enforcement responses, Taskforce Member Walker commented that residents called 9-1-1 even if they did not trust the police because that was the only resource available to respond to emergencies. She added that an individual could be suffering a mental health crisis, there could be a dependency situation as well as a threat to someone's safety at the same time when a law enforcement response would be required.

Taskforce Member Walker asked how to reduce police response times where a police call would not have been necessary had there not been an alternative, which she understood would have to be assessed by dispatch when training would be required. She urged the Task Force to make a decision on the elements of the proposal that it supported and wanted the City Council to consider.

Deputy City Manager White clarified the situation with respect to the Office of Neighborhood Safety where the program from vision concept in 2005 to having nine neighborhood change agents in 2009 had taken four years to implement.

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Ms. Jenks commented that the subject of calls for response was not always the person calling which created challenges. If the CCRP were to become a non-profit, she urged that the Request for Proposal (RFP) reflect the salaries the Task Force expected would be paid and that the non-profit be asked to do a card check, which could lead to unionization. She emphasized that the jobs had to be good jobs for the program to be successful and that those employed should be allowed to have a voice in their work.

Taskforce Member Kilian-Lobos emphasized the importance that a Community Advisory Committee be part of the CCRP with multiple pathways and collaboration with the RPD.

Taskforce Member Pursell asked for more information on the role and powers of a Community Advisory Committee. He did not want to create a political battleground similar to the Community Police Review Commission and he emphasized the importance of a community buy-in.

Chair Small asked which of the five structural options the City should prioritize: 1) a Non-profit; 2) an Existing City Office; 3) a New City Department; 4) a Nonprofit Hybrid Model; or 5) a Richmond Partnership with Contra Costa County. She advised that the budget would be determined, in part, by the length of the program. She also requested some recommendation from the Task Force regarding a Community Advisory Board that would be more explicitly identified than it had been in Urban Strategies Council's draft report.

Taskforce Member Joseph added that more well-trained dispatchers were needed now and he asked for an update on the status of that effort at the next meeting.

Chair Small reminded the Task Force that it had approved additional dispatchers for RPD in its first year of the Task Force in recognition of the importance and need for dispatchers.

Taskforce Member Cantú verified with the Chair the requested action to be taken by the Task Force to identify its preference for one of the five options listed in the report, the length of time of the program and the issue of the Community Advisory Board and what that should look like, keeping in mind that the structure and the length of time would determine the budget. She commented that because there was no detailed information about times and budget it would be difficult for her to make a recommendation.

Deputy City Manager White clarified that the same numbers had been shown for a non-profit structure versus a City structure broken down by what it would cost annually versus what it would cost for six months.

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

Motion by Taskforce Member Pursell, seconded by Taskforce Member Walker the Task Force recommended either Option 2 or Option 3 with no recommendation with respect to a timeline

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Offering a substitute motion, Taskforce Member Bischoff recommended the CCRP start with Option 2, an Existing City Office for a program to run a minimum of eighteen months. There was no second to the motion and the motion died.

Taskforce Member Whitmore urged some consideration for a non-profit structure.

Taskforce Member Walker clarified that regardless of what the Task Force recommended the five options would be submitted to the City Council, which could select a non-profit.

On the original motion by Taskforce Member Pursell, seconded by Taskforce Member Walker the Task Force recommended either Option 2 (Existing City Office) or Option 3 (New City Department) with no recommendation with respect to a timeline, carried by the following Roll Call vote:

AYES: M. Cantú, R. Joseph, K. Kilian-Lobos, J. Pursell, B. K. Williams, and Chair D. Small
NOES: S. Bischoff, D. Gosney and L. Whitmore
ABSTAIN: B. Therriault and T. Walker
ABSENT: H. Burks, L. Chacon, A. Lee, L. Murray, M. Njissang, and J. Schlemmer

A motion by Taskforce Member Therriault, seconded by Taskforce Member Walker to establish a Community Advisory Board as part of the Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP) was withdrawn by the maker of the motion prior to a vote given that the Chair had advised the proposal to be considered by the City Council already included the recommendation to establish a Community Advisory Board, although with the questions as to the role and powers of such a board being unanswered at this point, Chair Small recommended that issue be continued as an agenda item for the September Task Force meeting.

H. ACTION ITEM RECAP

I. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:29 P.M. to a regular meeting on Wednesday, September 27, 2023 in the Bermuda Room, Richmond Memorial Auditorium, 403 Civic Center Plaza, Richmond, CA 94804.