

**SAFETY AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, January 11, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.

Committee Members Present:

Dawn Meyers, Chair  
Rick Dunn  
Kamau Hull  
Russell Gabriel  
Deborah Gonzalez  
Katie McFarland  
Gwen O'Looney  
Terris Thomas

Committee Members Absent:

David Beck  
John Donnelly  
B.A. Hart  
Adam Lassila  
Danny Malec

Ex Officio Members:

Blaine Williams  
T.J. Bement  
Ray Covington  
Mark Pulliam  
Elisa Zarate  
Harrison Daniel

Staff:

Sarah George

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Chair Dawn Meyers called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

Dawn Meyers reviewed the Mayor's charge for the Safety and Justice Committee. The charge includes efforts regarding prevention and criminal justice responses, including the graceful return back into the community. She also shared that, as she had reached out to the committee members individually, there was a common theme around the need for clarity around what exactly the committee is meant to do and the desire to have a little more information the committee's work in regard to timeline, external limitations regarding resources and budget, and timing of recommendations.

Manager Blaine Williams explained that the committee has been given a broad but unique mandate in relation to the criminal justice system. He shared that the criminal justice system has been forged with history as well as trial and error, and it needs change and attention just like anything else. He explained that this is not a new conversation for this community, and there have been some interventions made along the way that can be examined for effectiveness. There are also some new ideas that can also be considered. He suggested that the first thing that could be done is to understand broadly what some of the problems with the criminal justice system are generally, as well as in regards to the criminal justice system in Athens-Clarke County specifically. Then, the committee can decide some specific interventions they want to move forward with and recommend to the Mayor and Commission.

Gwen O'Looney explained that she would like to understand what staff is saying are priorities that need to be addressed. Deputy Chief Harrison Daniel shared that the two things that stand out to him, from his perspective. The first is violent crime and how we respond to violent crime in our community. Not unlike the trends across the country, we are seeing spikes in gun violence and gun-related activity on our streets, and the question is how we effectively respond to that in a way that is strategic. Secondary to that are issues with the increased homelessness in our community, which includes everything from the criminal activity that occurs tangentially as well as mental and behavioral health issues. In response to this, the co-responders have been integral to ensure that we are responding to complaints and needs

within the community but doing so while treating those individuals who are experiencing homelessness with dignity and respect and trying to connect them to the resources they need. He explained that these are the two things that stand out most to him at the moment.

Dawn Meyers also shared that, in speaking with the committee members individually, she heard that there is other work going on in other committees and working groups that are similar in nature but not identical. She explained that it might behoove them to understand the other groups that are having these conversations and what they are doing and recommending. She asked Deborah Gonzalez to share about the work around the youth violence prevention meetings.

Deborah Gonzalez shared that last year she convened a working group called Addressing Community Violence. Twenty-eight leaders of different youth organizations met every other Wednesday to discuss what was happening with our youth and to identify some ideas that fall within three areas:

- Prevention;
- Intervention; and
- Re-entry.

She explained that they came up with three projects and came up with subcommittees and three projects that they are working on this spring. The first project is to come up with a master calendar of all the different organizations that provide services to youth and families. The second project was a database of these groups including details and descriptions of the programs being offered, and contact information. The third project is a youth summit, which is scheduled for March 19<sup>th</sup>. The youth summit is by the youth for the youth and will allow them to hear from other youth about what may be needed that may be currently missing or being fulfilled by gangs. She also shared that the youth summit will provide an opportunity to celebrate youth that are doing great things.

Deborah Gonzalez also shared that a group also to make a site visit to Chatham County to learn more about the partnership between the County, the City, the District Attorney's Office, and the Juvenile Court system to create a hub outside of the court that acts like a one-stop shop for families to get the help that they need. They also made a stop in Macon-Bibb to learn more about their programs and what they are doing for youth and juvenile justice. She explained that she is following up with Judge Hull and Judge Trimble about what they can do, and she would also like to create a working group on restorative justice.

Dawn Meyers inquired about whether or not Deborah Gonzalez saw an intersection or overlap between those groups and the Safety and Justice Committee. Deborah Gonzalez explained that what these groups are doing is very different from what the Safety & Justice Committee is doing, because it does not necessitate that government steps into the kinds of activities that they are undertaking. She did share, however, another project that the Safety and Justice Committee could assist with. She explained that, similar to models in other jurisdictions, she would like to see Athens have a family justice center, which can be a place where they can focus on youth and restorative justice outside of the court system.

Gwen O'Looney expressed interest in exploring any overlap with the Public Safety Civilian Oversight Board, which is currently being formed, to ensure Safety and Justice Committee and Public Safety Civilian Oversight Board can support each other. Blaine Williams explained the ordinance for the oversight board notes that it is supposed to process and ensure investigation of complaints lodged by members of the public, so it is a little more focused on the day-to-day operations; however, the Safety and Justice Committee may be able to glean some wisdom from them as they work through the data captured while investigating complaints. The Public Safety Civilian Oversight Board also will review, evaluate, and make recommendations regarding policies and procedures, so there may be some overlap regarding policy.

Gwen O'Looney expressed interest in learning more about re-entry back into the community and the extent to which lack of money or resources may be preventing returning residents from being able to move forward. Deborah Gonzalez explained that her office has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Georgia Conflict Center to partner with them on restorative justice, and she is also hiring a Restorative Justice Assistant District Attorney this year. She also shared that her understanding based on research shows that a lot of what holds returning residents back is not necessarily just the court fines and fees but also the restitution that they owe to victims. She explained that there is a movement in this country to create victim restitution funds to address small amounts of restitution owed to victims that have been found to hold people back. She noted that victim restitution funds could be explored further. Russell Gabriel added that, traditionally and structurally, there is no part of the criminal justice system that is designed for re-entry; this is where community groups have tried to fill this gap. Dawn Meyers explained that there is also an idea of restorative community practices.

Gwen O'Looney made a motion to approve the September 1, 2021 meeting minutes. Judge Kamau Hull seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Katie McFarland made a motion to approve the October 8, 2021 meeting minutes. Rick Dunn seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Deborah Gonzalez made a motion to approve the November 16, 2021 meeting minutes. Katie McFarland seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Dawn Meyers asked the committee which area of focus they would like to discuss at the next meeting. The committee agreed to dedicate the February meeting to discussion regarding re-entry.

Deborah Gonzalez made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Judge Kamau Hull seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 10:02 a.m.