



REPORT

TO THE

CITY COUNCIL

September 16, 2014

Mission Statement

At its inaugural meeting on July 1, 2014, members of the Mayor’s Commission on Crime adopted this simple, but ambitious, mission:

To recommend to the City Council ways to reduce crime in Fairfield.

The commission met for regular meetings on 10 evenings at various locations. In addition, subgroups conducted a variety of meetings with police administrators, experts in child services, county health officials, probation department administrators, corrections experts, business leaders and educators. Four focus groups were interviewed, two at Juvenile Hall and two at the Solano County jail on Union Avenue.

On Tuesday, July 29, the Commission held a public forum at St. Stephen’s Church at which 50 local residents came to express their opinions, suggestions and frustrations. At the forum, about 20 speakers addressed the commission. Many also expressed their views in writing after the forum, while some went online and communicated with the Commission.

The website, *StopCrimeInFairfield.com*, was established in mid-July to serve as a communication conduit between the Commission, the public and various entities involved in the creation of this report.

Commission Members

Jack Batson, Chair	Retired Educator
Samina Masood, Vice Chair	Executive Director, Heather House
Pastor Scott Mulvey	Pastor, City Church 2:42
Rev. Dr. Mervin Davis Jr.	Pastor, True Love Baptist Church
Cynthia Haynes-Epperson	Retired Dispatch Supervisor
Ivonne Malave	Juvenile Program Director
Jonathan Richardson	State Correctional Officer
Steve Huddleston	Vice President, NorthBay Healthcare
Debra Tavey	President & CEO, Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce
Walter Goodin, Alternate	Retired Insurance Salesman

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the public perception may be that we live in a community with rampant crime, the statistics reveal that Fairfield is more like many other 100,000-population cities across America. Crime, of course, is serious. Gangs are a threat because they spur waves of violence. An overt act causes overt retaliation, which causes more retaliation, all of which alarms the community. Today, more young people feel the need to carry a gun.

The Commission, through its investigations and through members' array of occupations and experiences, identified some key factors. The home environment contributes perhaps 75% of the reasons young people end up in the justice system. Single-parent families, especially those lacking a strong male role model, struggle to resist strong anti-social influences affecting children. Some commissioners assert that many single mothers fear their older, defiant teens. Other parents fail in cultivating a healthy authority over their children, which leads to a teen continually challenging authority. The greatest danger to a family is drug abuse in the home, revolving romantic relationships and a tolerance for violent behavior.

The neighborhood – where teens may “hang out with the wrong elements” – comprises the remaining 25% of the risk. Fairfield has pockets of despair which often lead to unlawful, self-destructive behavior because the disenfranchised see little chance their lives will improve.

The city will never have the fiscal resources necessary for an all-out war on crime. Police staffing has gone from 137 sworn officers in 2007 to a low of 115 in 2010. Fortunately, the department is now authorized to have 123 officers. But current staffing could decline in four years when a 1% sales tax, passed by voters and used to hire more police, expires.

On a hopeful note, the Commission was impressed with the comprehensive approach to crime fighting being employed by the police in its operations with the school district and the county. Such alliances should be extended.

Many programs and services are not well known by a wide population of potential users. “Information friction” must be addressed by comprehensive communications and marketing.

The City Council has sought more than “another report to collect dust on a shelf.” Therefore, the commission offers 16 specific recommendations, which conclude this report. All seek to accomplish the goal of “reducing crime in Fairfield.”

BACKGROUND

A thoughtful examination of the cause and effect of crime in the City of Fairfield could easily be the subject of doctoral theses and long-term inquiries by experts. The Mayor's Commission on Crime had only 10 weeks to investigate our state of affairs and return to the City Council with recommendations. As a result, this report cannot be entirely comprehensive.

We engaged in 70 days of research, interviews, focus groups, site visits and a public forum. We have prepared a list of recommendations that can strengthen a foundation for change. But much more work remains over the next months, and perhaps years, to enhance public safety.

One thing is clear: We cannot "arrest our way out of crime." Long-lasting, effective crime reduction must come from a comprehensive approach: prevention, intervention and enforcement of anti-social and self-destructive behavior. The commission's recommendations that follow reflect an endorsement of that approach.

It is also important to note that some factors are beyond the City's control. We live on a busy interstate freeway not far from large population centers with large crime problems. We are proximate to two state prisons. We live in a state that releases prison inmates into county jails and onto the streets (AB 109). And we live in an era of budget cuts.

Money is not the answer to all our problems. More can be done with existing resources and by building partnerships with others. Nonetheless, it would be unwise to say we have now what we need to take a significant bite out of crime.

The city cannot afford to take away one more dollar from prevention, intervention and enforcement.

Limited available resources must go to programs that adopt a comprehensive approach. The council should require programs seeking funding to have an established alliance with police, social service agencies and schools. The Police Department's current forward-thinking approach in this regard is commendable. In one example, they are using social media to reach out to young people and to alert neighborhoods about criminal trends. Another is the determination at every opportunity to integrate law enforcement with educators, counselors, probation officers, mental health professionals, counselors and mentors in reaching at-risk youngsters.

The commission was created by the mayor and City Council to suggest realistic and practical tactics the city could employ. But what became clear early on was that schools are a critical part of the crime-prevention equation. Young people spend up to seven hours a day – often the best seven hours of their day – in school. What goes on there has a significant impact on personality

formation, and in some cases, a penchant for anti-social behavior. In Addendum 1, the commission respectfully, cautiously offers observations of our educational system.

The Commission looked into the homeless problem. While homelessness creates some petty crime, the major impact is blight. The Grand Jury in July 2014 addressed the challenges that homelessness in Solano County presents. The City's Quality of Life Task Force, along with the county director the Department of Health and Social Services and local homeless service providers are working to get resources channeled more efficiently to those who work at the grass-roots level providing intervention and rehabilitation services.

California communities have never recovered from the dismantling of mental health services in the 1970s. To this day, despite commendable efforts, there simply is no way the current services can keep up with a growing population of people with mental health troubles. These folks comprise a significant percentage of lawbreakers and jail inmates.

The Commission discovered an important deficiency. Juveniles and adults who have been released from lockup facilities in Fairfield have virtually no programs to help them successfully re-enter civic life. Most want to escape their previous lifestyles, but receive no help in acquiring life skills. We recognize that re-entry is not a city function, but if any of these individuals fail to break away from a criminal life, a citizen of Fairfield might be victimized. Fairfield police will make the arrest. Re-entry must be addressed.

All that said, it is important to not overlook many successes. For instance, consider:

- All of the PAL graduates who achieve highly in areas of academic and civic engagement;
- The 700 Public Safety Academy students, most of whom exceed academic expectations and are poised to make a difference in their community for decades to come;
- Mentorships created by School Resource Officers over the years;
- Success of National Night Out at 36 venues across Fairfield, building neighborhoods where neighbors know each other and where residents do not simply look the other way when a crime is committed or truancy is observed; and
- Effective partnerships with schools, churches and criminal justice and social agencies that are tackling the cause of crime.

In conclusion, the Commission learned there are some effective strategies and programs in place. There are resources for individuals and groups who want to join the fight against crime. The challenge is to find the right channels – or create them – to communicate with those who can help and to assist those who need a particular service but do not know where it is.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY AREA OF CONCERN

Prevention, Intervention & Enforcement

The traditional role of law enforcement is evolving, but an officer's central duty remains catching lawbreakers and being a deterrent by "working the streets."

In this area, the commission recommends:

- Continue a city strategy that retains public safety as the No. 1 budget priority, setting aside more funding each year for more patrol officers and more support staff.
- Expand the placement of video cameras in high-crime areas – both commercial and residential.

Education Partnerships

School time very often is the best seven hours in a day for a child from a single-parent, low-income household. Yet the same negative thoughts and emotions from home and neighborhood often make the child unable to engage constructively with the positive influences found on campus. In this area, the commission recommends:

- The city should continue to partner with the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District to create a mechanism -- community fair, new school year orientation, etc. – that highlights all the programs that city departments, police, social service agencies, private non-profits, civic clubs and youth groups deliver to keep kids in school and strengthen their educational foundation.

Assisting At-Risk Youth

A criminal life begins an early age and becomes well defined by the middle teen years. Its most certain seedbeds are the home and the neighborhood. School is often a young person's last chance of preventing the turn to criminal behavior.

In this area, the commission recommends:

- Revive and expand programs aimed at intervening with troubled youth before they become lifelong lawbreakers, such as:
 - The Sullivan Interagency Youth Services Center, which could build upon current partnerships and welcome others to create new synergies;
 - School resource officers for all comprehensive secondary schools;
 - Police Activities League programs and its Matt Garcia Center;
 - The Public Safety Academy;
 - The Parent Project; and
 - Summer recreation programs.

- Revive a vigorous, large summer sports program for youngsters in impacted neighborhoods to be run by adult volunteers.
- Consider formation of a citywide Youth Roundtable, assisted by city staff, that brings together service providers, police, educators, parents, the faith-based community and other stakeholders who can collaborate to make existing programs more effective and to find ways to fill existing gaps in services. For example, participants would include, but would not be limited to, church leaders, family resource centers already on school campuses, The Leaven, Heather House, Child Haven, Mission Solano, library literacy programs, Children’s Nurturing Project, the Kroc Center, PAL, Matt Garcia Foundation, Boy and Girl Scouts, Family Justice Center, Dream Team, SafeQuest, Children’s Network, First Five Solano, the YIPEE Foundation, Fun on the Run, and all other youth-related programs of the county and city.

Bolstering Social Services

Those who live in a community without hope of getting an education, a decent job and a safe place to live often make that tragic turn to criminal behavior. But nearly all social services are provided by county programs and providers outside the realm of city government. However, the City Council can influence others to come to the table to seek collaborative solutions.

In this area, the commission recommends:

- The council must be a leading voice that brings to the table various agencies, non-profits, churches and others which are trying to close the gap in services for those in need who could benefit from a more coordinated and collaborative approach to solving these issues:
 - Rebuilding mental health services in Solano County;
 - Adding more affordable housing;
 - Offering vocational rehabilitation of former offenders;
 - Ensuring that transitional living facilities offer wrap-around services including parenting skills, vocational assistance, substance abuse counseling and youth mentorship programs; and
 - Methods to prevent family violence and violence against women and children.

Homelessness and Crime

Currently, the city partners with a few local homeless shelters. But the number of homeless has doubled over the past few years. Collaboration appears under way that comprises city, county, law enforcement and community agencies that aim to reduce homelessness and increase efforts to aggressively intervene with the growing homeless in Fairfield.

In this area, the commission recommends:

- Accelerate permits to service providers that offer transitional living and which offer wrap-around services, including parenting skills, vocational assistance, substance abuse counseling and youth mentorship; and
- Provide sustainable core funding, consistent with inflation, to homeless programs that prove effective under city sponsorship.

Building the Local Economy

Cities with a vibrant, growing economy are communities that generate tax revenue to support robust public safety departments and crime prevention programs. They typically have jobs for those who need a livable wage who otherwise might turn to unlawful means of financial subsistence.

In this area, the commission recommends:

- Continue business attraction efforts by being a contributing partner with the Solano Economic Development Corp., the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce, the Workforce Investment Board and the Small Business Development Corp.
- At every opportunity, improve the low-cost city transit services that would enable those without transportation to get to and from work, city and county services, youth programs and summer activities for youngsters.

Marshaling Volunteer Resources

There is in Fairfield a large faith-based community, a significant retirement presence and many individuals who have demonstrated an interest in helping families and neighborhoods in trouble. The city should make strenuous efforts to marshal its potential voluntary, caring base.

In this area, the commission recommends:

- Establish a city Volunteer Desk as the clearinghouse for community members seeking to do meaningful volunteer work to reduce crime. Provide a web-based directory of agencies, churches, youth groups, service clubs, non-profit organizations and city volunteer programs.
- City officials should be visible in meeting and in neighborhoods where service providers and volunteer organizations are putting “boots on the ground.”
- City officials should encourage apartment owners and the schools to open their doors to community groups like The Leaven and faith-based groups that will provide after-school programs and mentoring programs.

Communicate!

There are effective programs in place now to prevent and to combat crime in Fairfield. But a large portion of the community simply does not know enough about them. Current and new initiatives require public awareness if they are to succeed.

In this area, the commission recommends:

- The city reach out to more citizens about what is now available related to crime prevention and intervention – from anonymous tip lines, to the VIPS program, to graffiti abatement and the emergency dispatch number, 428-7373, among others. The channels would include, but not be limited to, traditional media like newspapers and radio, free or donated billboard space, advertising on city buses, texting, Facebook, and other social media, city websites, city water bills, police officers working their “beats,” Neighborhood Watch teams and National Night Out.

Addendum #1

The Education System and Crime

The Commission understands it was created by the mayor and Fairfield City Council with no connection to the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District or its Governing Board. The Commission nevertheless recognizes that young people spend the better part of their day and of their formative years in school. Indeed, what goes on in school has a great effect on young people at an age at which personality formation occurs, and too often occurs in a criminal way.

We note that the school district has lost approximately \$33 million in the recent and severe recession. The Commission is impressed and appreciative of the efforts the school district has made to continue to support programs that help at-risk children during these difficult times.

We respectfully, cautiously offer these observations on public safety and the school district:

1. We note that the district, like all in California and perhaps beyond, has no major anti-drug program. Considering the huge concern young people have about drugs, and the huge impact drugs have on school work, attendance and lifestyle – now and years into the future – this omission is startling. The Commission encourages the school district to explore how to empower students to “just say no,” to effectively instill in them that “drugs are not cool.”

2. We note that many students, both in California and perhaps the nation, are not prepared for ordinary life. They may understand academics. They are advised about how to graduate and how to continue their education in college. But sooner or later most will encounter the complexities of life for which they are unprepared. These facts will have a large determination in their overall success in life. Perhaps in conjunction with the city and its “Alive and Free” life-skills program, we could better prepare young people to understand:

- ✓ Costs and obligations of child-raising;
- ✓ Costs and obligations of apartment rentals;
- ✓ Opportunities for enriched family life;
- ✓ The costs of a criminal life – crime doesn’t pay;
- ✓ Basics of successful employment;
- ✓ Post-high school education: academic or vocational;
- ✓ Costs and obligations of auto purchases (new and used);
- ✓ Costs and obligations of use of a credit card;
- ✓ Appropriateness of different insurances: renter’s, house, auto, life, health, disability;
- ✓ Retirement plans: Social Security, defined contribution/benefit, IRA, 401(k), etc.;
- ✓ Basics of investing, saving, money management, including balancing a checkbook; and
- ✓ Costs and obligations of purchasing a house.

Addendum #2

Highlights of Interviews with Juvenile and Adult Offenders

Interviewers sought to discover if “children having children” increased the likelihood of the incarceration of older juveniles and adults. All groups were asked the mother’s age at their birth. It turned out most mothers were not teens when they gave birth.

We tested whether young people knew the meager government support for single mothers – in California, only four years, lifetime. The teens had no knowledge of how long government support is provided, guessing mostly at around 16 to 18 years. They were shocked at the truth. Of the adults, only three of the men knew eligibility had been shortened, but not by how much. Most of the women knew eligibility had been shortened, but only three know by how much.

Almost all of the interviewees had some good experiences in childhood, including school, indicating their parent(s) attempted to be a good parent in some regard.

Most had been raised by a single mother. Most had good relationships with their mothers; few had good relationships with their fathers.

Most of the adults, especially males, had not graduated from high school.

Most had seen significant drug use in their homes and a significant minority had seen violence.

All reported that “money and drugs” was the prime cause of their crime.

Almost all were or are using drugs. The adult group’s first drug use had occurred between ages 11 to 15. Juveniles reported first use between 5 and 10 years of age.

Most youth had been suspended “many times” for disruption or fighting. Most felt that they had deserved suspension.

Most had carried a weapon, including all the youth. Many of the youth had shot at someone. All had witnessed a violent crime.

All testified that Solano County was not easier in sentencing or parole and probation than surrounding counties.

All adult prisoners expressed a strong desire to mentor young people in order to prevent them from assuming a life of crime.

All the groups expressed hope that upon release they could “make it” straight. They strongly expressed a need for some program support after release.