

MINUTES

Juvenile Crime, Graffiti and Gang Violence Task Force Meeting

Thursday, February 5, 2009

5:30 p.m. at Loaves & Fishes Board Room

514 S. "E" Street

Harlingen, TX

Members Present:

George McShan (*arrived at 6:15 p.m.*), Dean Hall, Gabriel Gonzalez, Tom Hushen, Larry Galbreath, Jim Solis (*arrived at 5:40 p.m.*), Ernesto Carballo

Guests Present:

Rene Garza

The task force discussed the ratio of police officers to the city's population.

Rene Garza advised that he heard (thru 'hear say') that there was a gang fight last Friday of about 30 kids at Harlingen South and HPD was called. HPD found out the number of people that were fighting and held off going to the school because they didn't want to cause a big riot. They waited until everyone calmed down a little. They went in there with two officers for 30 kids and called the probation department to go pick up those kids. The probation department said they didn't have any reason to pick up those kids unless they were on probation. Tommy Ramirez (Chief Probation Officer) went down there with others and three kids were on probation. By the time he got there, they had given them tickets for disorderly conduct. Tommy picked up his three kids to be brought to Judge Murray. That has 'skewed' the entire numbers by the police force. If they are only handing out Class C violations for fights then they're not getting the gang information that they needed. He advised that was mainly what these kids do, 'rumble'. It seemed disappointing because here he was ready to prosecute people but they're not charging.

Tom Hushen stated that back in 1999 or 2000 the court allowed them to start charging Class C for assaults and theft. They never used to do that before. They used to bring them in and call their parents. That's a number that changes frequently. If you get a ticket then they just pay but you bring them in and 'mom and dad' have to miss a day of work—well that's worse. He would like to see how many tickets have not been paid by those kids.

Rene Garza stated that if they had charged them with misdemeanor A's and taken the main perpetrators into his office—then they could have done something.

Tom Hushen commented that in defense of HPD it was difficult when you don't have the manpower to 'babysit' 15 kids and wait for parents to come in. He thinks it's a rule of 1 to 1—when you arrest someone. You also have to have a detention facility that is designated for kids.

Rene Garza stated they could have just said ‘we can identify the main actors but we just need your probation officers to bring them down.’ He’s sure Tommy would have taken them down there but instead they said ‘we’re waiting back until they calm down a bit’.

Gabe Gonzalez asked if that was something they should be doing ‘waiting back until they calmed down?’

The task force agreed that was not a proactive approach.

Tom Hushen advised that there were two officers at the time already responding also school security present. Perhaps it could have been shift change and there was nobody available to come out.

Rene Garza commented that it goes back to the officers knowing who the students are so that they are not afraid to enter the campus and say, ‘hey (name of student), you need to calm down, I know your parents, etc.’ But to sit back and wait, then that gives them free range.

Gabe Gonzalez mentioned that more kids could get hurt.

Larry Galbreath asked what happened to those kids on Monday?

Rene Garza said they had the three of them up for detention.

Tom Hushen stated that if happened on a Friday, afterschooll at the mall—well then the school has no jurisdiction.

Larry Galbreath commented that was how they did it—they got off the campus to fight.

Rene Garza suggested they go see Brownsville ISD and their bootcamp program. They have impressive 30 and 90-day programs. If these kids are behind in their homework or credits—they have to be caught up in order to leave the program.

Larry Galbreath asked Gabe Gonzalez about the property where Boggus Motors used to be on Harrison. He stated there was a bunch of plywood sticking up on the corner that has graffiti on it. He thought there had been a dance or something going on recently. After the dance was over, it was spray painted the next day. It was caddy corner from Las Vegas Café.

Various members commented they had noticed that.

Jim Solis arrived at this time (5:40 p.m.) and officially opened up the meeting.

Gabe Gonzalez advised that he included the table that the task force asked be included into the narrative on page 8—the ratio of officers to population.

Tom Hushen asked to see the ratio of police officers out on the street to city population. He felt that ratio would be ‘shocking’ to see.

Gabe Gonzalez stated this chart was the total number of officers to the total population. He can adjust the table if they wanted him to do that. He got the last of the data yesterday so it's not referenced anywhere in the narrative yet. The other handout was the proactive measure and the policy recommendations that were submitted. He received submittals from former representative Jim Solis and Gerald Gathright. He spoke with Commissioners Larry Galbreath and Tom Hushen who advised him that because they would be reviewing this later on with the Commission, they didn't want to provide input now on the rating. They would be looking at it objectively with the rest of the Commission.

Larry Galbreath said that the committee needs to stand on it's own and present the facts. He didn't want it to seem as though 'they pushed an action thru because of the Commissioners currently on the task force.' He and Tom were on the task force as the eyes and ears of the Commission to be able to respond to some of the questions when presented to the Commission.

Gabe Gonzalez prioritized the list and some of them had multiple rankings.

Larry Galbreath stated cameras have been effective when vandalism occurred as they have been able to catch the vandals. Sometimes even when it's a fake camera that has deterred vandalism. He believed that Harlingen Proud had cameras that were being used to catch illegal dumping.

Gabe Gonzalez advised that they needed to replace them with better cameras.

Tom Hushen mentioned they were good for evidencery purposes and they may serve as a deterrent. The problem now is that when there's a camera out there, people have a mind set that they are safer now and there have been several lawsuits filed. Now, they were trying to put them in hidden areas. Perhaps they could do that in the gang areas?

Larry Galbreath advised that in the known 'hot spots' such as "F" Street, Buchanan and Filmore perhaps they could put in a portable police facility. In this way, they instantly would have a police presence in that neighborhood and then it can be moved when the problem areas are fixed.

Jim Solis asked if he was talking about the kind of units at the McAllen mall or more like a substation?

Larry Galbreath advised that Chief Castillo had mentioned that Cameron County had a large trailer type facility that can be parked somewhere with cameras when needed. Hopefully, that becomes a deterrent to the graffiti or other activities. The facility would be movable. The worse thing is when someone commits graffiti and the newspaper takes a picture and publishes it in the paper. Now, the perpetrator thinks 'wow, I made the front page'.

Jim Solis commented that's gives them bragging rates.

Dean Hall asked if everyone saw the information that he sent to Gabe?

The task force confirmed they had received copies of that report.

Dean Hall asked them to turn to page 2 of the report. He had questions about the report itself. He tried to correlate that chart with the information from the back and it did not correlate.

Gabe Gonzalez advised he was comparing two different types of data.

Dean Hall commented that they needed to identify where the data came from.

Gabe Gonzalez advised it was identified as gang related violence.

Dean Hall asked what information was listed in the back then?

Gabe Gonzalez responded that was juvenile arrests. Gang related and juvenile arrests were not the same thing. Chief Castillo created that report strictly on gang activity. The data crime that they had listed was also by juvenile arrests. If you look at the task force title, it's 'Juvenile Crime, Graffiti and Gang Violence'—those are three separate issues. That is why the data doesn't match up because it's two difference sources.

Dean Hall stated what bothered him is that the fact that they use on page 4 all the data from the charts in the back—that are not crimes and he didn't see a consistency there.

Gabe Gonzalez stated the report was trying to address two issues—gang violence and juvenile crime.

Dean Hall commented they should identify them and add the Chief's information in the back.

Gabe Gonzalez stated they could do that.

Tom Hushen asked when it was talking about aggravated assaults—was it specifically gang related or just within the city?

Gabe Gonzalez responded it was gang aggravated assaults. He wasn't sure what the criteria was for them to determine when that was the case, but the information was only gang related assaults. The Chief did not write up any part of the report. He wrote it up with based on the Chief's data and information that he provided regarding gang related activity. A lot of it also came from the crime data that was on their website going back to 2002.

Dean Hall asked if the difference was an additive?

Gabe Gonzalez responded the difference between the juvenile crime and gang related violence stood on it's own. There was no correlation made in the report about those two subjects.

Dean Hall felt they should label it separately and indicate so.

Gabe Gonzalez stated when they had juvenile crime it may not necessarily be gang related activity. Those were treated separately in the report. He advised it was not cumulative data, but rather every year stands on its own.

Tom Hushen asked if in 2007 when they read there was 24 aggravated assaults and then in the back they read juveniles had 17 aggravated assaults—wouldn't that add up to 41?

Gabe Gonzalez stated 'no' because the front is only gang related violence.

Tom Hushen mentioned that if it's juvenile violence it would still come over to this other figure because it was gang related violence.

Gabe Gonzalez replied it was separate because if you have an aggravated assault that wasn't gang related it's not in the other number. He advised there were 24 aggravated assaults that were strictly gang related.

Dean Hall mentioned this is juvenile crime and gang violence and they should be identified differently. But they are both serious offenses.

Rene Garza commented that in the gang related crimes they were not distinguishing between juveniles and adults.

Gabe Gonzalez affirmed that was correct because sometimes they had adults in gang related activities.

Rene Garza mentioned that was why there numbers were not the same.

Gabe Gonzalez advised that when they looked at aggravated assaults in the back and it was a higher number—that's because some of those may not have been gang related.

At this time, George McShan arrived to the meeting (6:15 p.m.).

Rene Garza informed George that they've been discussing how a distinction wasn't made between juvenile gang violence and juvenile crime and instead they put juveniles and adults in the gang violence and juvenile crime figures.

Jim Solis asked if they could put a footnote somehow?

Gabe Gonzalez mentioned that the report that Chief provided was only for gang related crimes—there wasn't any differentiation in his report saying this was only juvenile gangs.

Tom Hushen mentioned he might put down 'gang related violent crimes (adults and juveniles)'.

Gabe Gonzalez confirmed he would do that.

Tom Hushen felt the number of 24 was very low.

Gabe Gonzalez advised this was for only gang related activities.

Rene Garza agreed that was quite low.

Larry Galbreath asked if these were only Misdemeanor C offenses?

Tom Hushen stated that was what they had to look out for. A lot of times they'll do a violent crime and write it down as an A and then drop it down to a C.

Rene Garza advised that the 'Class C disorderly conduct # 6 fighting' is the basic 'bar brawl' that you can't determine whose at fault. Then they would probably arrest them on something else such as intoxication but they wouldn't arrest them for fighting. He advised that they were putting them in predicaments because if they would just put it as bodily injury A, that would allow them to be more responsive in punishment. Right now, it seemed as if it was okay to 'punch' someone because they are given a C.

Larry Galbreath asked if there was some type of an educational readjustment that the Police Chief needed to tell the officers?

Both Rene Garza and Tom Hushen confirmed that was so.

Rene Garza commented he thought why they would put it down as a C was because in that case they wouldn't have to put a victim's name down. That means that somebody has to witness 'juvenile 1' hitting 'juvenile 2' and causing some sort of bodily contact. If they don't want to interview witnesses and get statements then the easy thing to do was charge them with a C and let it go.

Tom Hushen said there's a lot of paperwork that goes with a Class A. It'll take a lot of time from the officer—he needs to get statements and get witness accounts. Then, that Class A goes to Detectives who in turn need to work-up a statement and send it out to the DA's Office. The majority of those cases are dropped.

Dean Hall asked if they could clean-up the exhibits to know which were which. If these are the recommendations coming out of the town hall meetings then it should so state and not state that these were recommendations from the task force.

Gabe Gonzalez advised these recommendations were made at the Town Hall meetings and at meetings of task force.

Dean Hall suggested they put in that these recommendations were a combination of meetings of the task force and also from the community. He had some problems with some of the recommendations. For instance junked vehicles. If they were referring to junked vehicles, how many junked vehicles did they have laying on the street that were owned by juveniles? Probably none. He said these recommendations should be targeted towards juvenile crime and gang violence—not cleaning up the city.

Tom Hushen mentioned it went hand in hand for some of the recommendations. If you had a dilapidated house with junked vehicles in front of it then it could become a hang out for

juveniles. If you clean-up the neighborhood and show pride then it makes the people feel like it's there's and they feel ownership enough to eliminate the gangs. If you have a run down area and you have buildings that are falling down and junked vehicles that's when you have problems with gangs. It goes hand in hand that if you clean up the neighborhood then you probably clean up the gangs.

Jim Solis stated he saw Dean's emailed comments.

Gabe Gonzalez advised Dean that Chief Castillo forwarded his comments on Dean's report to him and the task force because he (Chief) wouldn't be present at the meeting.

Dean Hall replied he read Chief's comments and thanked him for those. He also attached an independent report that he would like to see incorporated into the recommendations or put in as a separate attachment. He asked if anyone had seen that or read it?

Tom Hushen advised he read some of it yesterday.

George McShan asked Gabe if he had additional copies of the report?

Gabe Gonzalez replied he did and passed out copies to those that needed one. He mentioned they emailed the information to the task force members with the exception of Ernesto Carballo because staff had a wrong email address for him. That email has since been corrected.

Dean Hall advised there was tons and tons of research information out there. This came to light to him when it was brought out at the last meeting that a lot of this violence occurs after school hours. Basically that's happening throughout the nation. The US Department of Justice points out that between 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. a lot of this violence occurs after school. His point is they should target what kind of activities could they provide in the communities or in the schools between 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. For example, if you have good gamers out there getting in trouble they should turn that into a good thing. TSTC has programs that teach how to develop video games. Bring them into a computer lab and have an instructor teach them how to develop their own games. This will keep them off the streets. Maybe this will lead to a career for them. There may be some things that were overlooked.

Larry Galbreath asked if he was saying that some of the violence is due to the violent video games?

Dean Hall replied that's what the studies showed.

Larry Galbreath asked if he thought the people that do paintballs eventually get tired of that and go out and kill somebody?

Dean Hall replied he didn't know but there were numerous studies from every state and the federal government on those issues.

Tom Hushen mentioned a lot of these activities do desensitize the youths so they don't notice the violence.

Dean Hall mentioned they were talking about kids that see violence on TV starting from 4, 5 and 6 years old. It's hard to turn that around. Obviously, they could never turn off violence totally from the media.

Gabe Gonzalez stated that he didn't feel this task force should put out a report that says 'violent video games will turn out violent kids'. Then they would offend half the population of this community. There are a lot of kids in the community that may play violent video games and they don't go out and shoot people.

Ernesto Carballo stated that he did agree with Dean's viewpoint. He has worked for the Boys Scouts for 25 years starting his first position in an inner city in Miami and they realized that those kids had too much extra time. There was a correlation between the kids getting in trouble and when they get off of school. The Boys Scouts, the Boys & Girls Club, other organizations and everyone could do something to help.

Gabe Gonzalez stated he agreed with them. But there was a difference in saying 'a number of crimes occur between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.' and saying 'kids that play violent video games are going to go out and beat up people'.

Tom Hushen advised could understand what they were saying. They can advertise it so they can say 'come here after school etc' and give them activities to do afterschool. He asked if they had an afterschool program a few years back?

George McShan replied they had the 21st Century Program and other afterschool programs. He thought what Dean was referring to was being able to organized programs like the Boys & Girls Club to provide activities afterschool.

Ernesto Carballo advised they didn't have any Boys Scouts or Cub Scouts in this community. He would love to expand their programs but their resources were limited.

Larry Galbreath advised that at Jefferson and Crockett School they had the Girls Scouts go in and they found out that the girls that got in there were thrilled to be there. The problem was that they could only do it during the school time and a lot of them could not stay after school.

Ernesto Carballo advised that busing was always an issue with afterschool programs. Getting them back after hours would be tough and it all revolved around funding.

Rene Garza stated they were talking about permanent staffing with permanent funds. What has happened with previous administrations is that they started to cut funding to organizations after their second year. They wanted these organizations to raise their own funds and go to the City or County and ask for help with the funding. There has to be some sort of alternate way to maintain that staff. Perhaps it involved that if you're at full funding after the first year then you can get the police, teacher or parents involved and they can take over.

Ernesto Carballo stated they did that with some of their programs.

George McShan said with the stimulus package in the works he was hoping some funding would flow this way. He said they could recommend to the City Commission that as a task force they wanted an 'X' amount of dollars to be set aside for this.

Gabe Gonzalez advised that was probably what they needed to do. State which programs needed funding and maybe assign dollar amounts. He asked them not to worry about where it's coming from but allow the Commission to do that.

Ernesto Carballo mentioned it could be a multiple approach as they had to consider afterschool programs, policing and other issues. Tearing down the dilapidated structures and such.

Rene Garza appreciated Dean Hall providing page 7 of his report—this was the study that he had quoted from at the last meeting where it mentioned that right after school is when most juvenile crime occurs. This is the hard proof that we need to get the schools, city, teachers and the parents involved.

Dean Hall mentioned he fully concurred that something had to continue on an ongoing basis. Integrating various programs to assist with the long-term causes.

George McShan said the 'bad guys' recruit kids when these kids have extra time on their hands. That's when violence occurs—when people have extra time.

Dean Hall asked if they could integrate this in the front portion to be added as an attachment?

Rene Garza agreed it should be added on. He mentioned that even though he was not officially on the committee but this backed up their comments with solid data.

Gabe Gonzalez asked what they should tell the Commission as far as 'what should we do between 3 and 6 p.m.'?

Dean Hall commented that they didn't necessarily have to decide anything between 3 and 6 p.m. All that has been suggested is they have to look at the root causes.

Ernesto Carballo commented this would get them closer to the solution.

George McShan mentioned they needed to have strategic programs for all their teens. Most teens were from a supportive family and were involved in athletics or doing something else. Those kids that are not involved in anything—those are the ones the needed to get involved in an activity.

Larry Galbreath advised this committee can identify the problem and the timeframe that they are concerned with. This committee can bring up the recommendations as a whole as what they saw as being important. Also, come up with some dollar figures. Some would not cost anything—

some would cost more money. By doing so, he felt this committee would have fulfilled the Mayor's request.

Gabe Gonzalez asked if there was an age group that they wanted to target?

Rene Garza suggested they say that teens right now were getting into trouble during this time period. But they should also consider preventive measure for elementary children and start integrating them into some sort of program.

George McShan advised that they have a marathon for kids (1st and 5th graders). That means that every child will run a marathon during the school year. That program can help every elementary child with fitness and wellness. Maybe college kids could help with those programs. Also, coaches could help out maybe after their season was over or get peace officers involved.

Larry Galbreath advised that the Valley Morning Star was getting ready to kick-off a program called 'Slim Time'. They were going to be taking applications from individuals and chose certain ones for a 6 months membership enrollment to a gym and provide a dietician and personal trainer for them. They're were going to be running stories on these people for 6 months going over the situation. That was trying to teach people to eat right and to exercise. If they bring this up to the forefront at the same time while the Valley Morning Star is doing there's then that would promote more benefits.

Tom Hushen stated that for short-term they had to look at some of things that were for immediate action. 'Trying to get additional officers'—perhaps they should look at relocating some of the officers they currently have instead. This wouldn't cost the city a cent and was simple to do. They already talked as a Commission about utilizing 4B funds to demolish buildings. That was already in the planning stages but if they came up with those recommendations as a board—the Commission would be more apt to doing so. If the citizens see the city demolishing buildings or changing burned out bulbs, the citizens would say 'look the city's doing something.' He felt that that problem of junked vehicles has always existed. That was not on top of his priority but once they had enough Code Enforcement personnel that would be taken care of.

Rene Garza commented they could take care of junked vehicles thru city ordinances.

Tom Hushen advised they have those in place already but lack the manpower to enforce it more effectively.

Jim Solis asked what they did with the junked vehicles that were picked up?

Tom Hushen advised the wrecker service puts a lien on the vehicle and then it gets auctioned off.

Jim Solis commented that there is a company down here that will contact the city who will pay the city to allow them to go and pick up these vehicles.

Tom Hushen advised he spoke with those individuals earlier (a new company from Brownsville). He advised that policemen know the gang members and vice versa. If they start getting the police youth involved where they have boxing and things of that sort—the police could recruit them for these programs. No matter what afterschool program you have, the gang members won't show up. But if their 'buddy' the policeman says 'hey come on, join us for free boxing lessons or a tournament' then they would show up because they have that connection with the kids.

Rene Garza advised that when they asked juveniles 'what do you want to be in life?' They all invariably say 'policemen'.

Tom Hushen stated most of the gang members know the policemen.

Rene Garza commented Tom was right in getting police officers to offer youths an alternative outside of the neighborhood. He mentioned the CYC has determined that these gang members don't know how to relax as the only thing they know is how to hang out with their gangs. They don't know how to barbeque, how to fish or play the normal board games with their families. In CYC they're giving classes on that. They're teaching mechanics, how to barbeque, or other things.

Tom Hushen commented if you offer officers pay to get involved with the youth—they would come out to take the different shifts. This gives the policemen intell because they'd be out on the street. Right now, they could probably get a few volunteers for free of charge. Maybe they could get the Sherriff's Office involved too. He doesn't want the board to end either because they still need to get the afterschool programs.

George McShan asked about the neighborhood watch program in this area.

Gabe Gonzalez advised that there was a neighborhood watch party that was held following the week after the Town Hall meeting held in Jefferson.

Tom Hushen stated it's died down by now but he wishes they would continue to do something. He doesn't know if it's because they don't have the manpower to concentrate on that right now or what the reason is.

George McShan stated that would be a goal to identify a captain and the faith-based community could help them with that. He suggested they have a block party maybe once a month for the kids to have fun. He commented that Jim Solis has property out there that perhaps they could organize an activity on. He asked why they had to wait until National Night Out to have this type of activity.

Rene Garza commented that was a really good idea but it would require a lot of police presence there. He suggested they have juvenile probation officers out there also.

Gabe Gonzalez asked if the portable station was still a recommendation?

Tom Hushen commented that it was great for a 'right away' fix but it seemed to 'die out' after a while. This happened with the Sherriff's unit and with their substation at La Placita.

Jim Solis asked what the portable station consisted of?

Tom Hushen said it consisted of a command center. It had cameras and you could walk in and write reports.

Gabe Gonzalez mentioned the one in San Antonio used to have a small holding cell in the back.

Jim Solis made reference to the different committees that Mayor set-up for the Harlingen 100 Plan a while back. At that time, Mayor assigned him as Chairman to the economic development committee and there were other committees. Once everyone made their report as a committee to the Mayor, the committees picked individuals to head-up their committee and continue their efforts. He recommended they use the school district or the city to head-up those recommendations pertaining to them from this task force.

Gabe Gonzalez stated they had discussed #'s 1, 2 and 3. He felt that they should hire new police officers. He mentioned he would get with them later to get some wording for that recommendation.

George McShan mentioned they needed to change the culture in the police department. The young people are on a different page now and they must reinvent themselves.

Tom Hushen commented on the graffiti abatement program. He felt they already had one with those juvenile that are assigned to it, but they just needed to utilize it better.

Rene Garza commented that San Antonio gives their recycled paint to the neighborhoods to paint over graffiti.

Tom Hushen commented on 'provide additional basketball court to the community'—he felt they had basketball courts that they didn't utilize enough. Perhaps they could utilize school gyms with lighting available.

Rene Garza advised there were midnight basketball tournaments that have been organized and they go onto a national level.

Tom Hushen stated they could have police presence there and set it up. 'Leadership Harlingen for troubled youth in the community—both Chambers should assist'—that was a 'no cost' that could be done quickly. 'Increase police officer patrol in neighborhoods'—that was the same as one of the previous ones and they could get rid of that one.

Rene Garza stated that going back to Leadership Harlingen—they should add teen court as well. That was a very successful one in Brownsville.

Dean Hall commented that was one things that the study did recommend, that Teen Court has been very successful in other cities.

Tom Hushen mentioned the judges are already giving out maximum sentences. What they should do is encourage their officers to give out maximum sentences.

Gabe Gonzalez asked if he should change that to encourage 'judges and officers' or just 'officers'?

Tom Hushen mentioned he would keep it as both so as not to 'attack' just one group.

George McShan stated they should probably recommend they hire an officer to head-up a juvenile division at the police department.

Tom Hushen felt confident it could be done with the officers they currently had. He mentioned that at times these officers get overwhelmed with these and other duties.

George McShan recommended they hire someone for the juvenile division.

Gabe Gonzalez added it could read 'create a juvenile division and staff it.'

Rene Garza stated that person could train the other officers. A lot of what the officers are afraid of is that they don't know what the juvenile laws are. He does trainings on how to magistrate kids and take statements. That training was provided at 'no cost' from the DA's Office.

Dean Hall asked if they were talking about replacing # 1, instead of saying 'replace additional officers'?

Gabe Gonzalez stated he felt those were two different things.

Tom Hushen felt they could eliminate the 'additional officers' because the Commission could talk to the Chief and ask him to restructure the department.

Larry Galbreath commented they needed to fill in Chief Castillo on a lot of what was discussed at this meeting.

Rene Garza said the point is that they are not telling the Commissioners they have to hire additional officers but rather they are asking them to reallocate existing ones.

Tom Hushen mentioned perhaps they could restructure the police department to be able to create a juvenile division.

Gabe Gonzalez mentioned that the City of Corpus Christi just went into a major restructuring to address juvenile crime and violence.

George McShan asked if they hired someone?

Gabe Gonzalez replied they had not and that they just restructured the department.

George McShan mentioned that they needed to say ‘create a juvenile division’ and ‘hire someone’. They were talking about putting some money into this and making an investment in people.

Tom Hushen said it was difficult because in their minds when you run a juvenile division, they are dealing with juvenile gangs and runaways but also sexual assaults on kids and such. One person could not do all that work. They were so many cases on juveniles.

The task force agreed that should be their number one recommendation—to create a juvenile division.

Rene Garza suggested they hire someone that not only does juvenile investigations but also trains others on how to conduct investigations.

Tom Hushen asked if a civilian employee could come in to overview the cases and help with interviews or if it had to be a peace officer? Because if it had to be peace officer, it would be hard to hire someone with that training.

Rene Garza stated if he was talking about training and overseeing—that could be a civilian. But if they were talking about someone that goes out and arrests kids—then they’re talking about a peace officer.

George McShan felt it should be a peace officer.

Tom Hushen mentioned he thought it was possible to do that with the existing manpower.

Larry Galbreath recommended they look at Corpus Christi as a model.

George McShan mentioned that they needed to be specific in asking for a new division to be created and then see if new officers were needed.

Tom Hushen mentioned they could make their recommendations but ultimately it was up to the Chief on how he runs the department.

Larry Galbreath said the way it works is the Commission gives the City Manager direction and he would be the one to approach staff and ask them to implement the goals they wanted.

George McShan felt that should be their number one.

Rene Garza said the police department needed more community input from the people that are affected by crime.

Tom Hushen felt they had cut the list in half already. The policy recommendations—they agreed to remove #14. ‘Establish DARE...’—that would be long-term because they have to look at the budgets.

George McShan recommended they have Phase I and Phase II.

Tom Hushen agreed that was a good idea. ‘Clean up the graffiti...’—that’s already there.

Rene Garza stated it wasn’t utilized very well because he gives out community service and he doesn’t see anyone doing community service hours. He wanted to see more accountability in those areas.

Dean Hall stated he wanted to change number 5 where it read ‘utilize church groups’. He would like to see ‘utilize community groups to assists in long-term crime prevention’.

George McShan agreed that was a good idea as churches were also included in the phrase community.

Tom Hushen stated ‘Overlay District’ was a nice idea although it might be tough to pass. They should put that on a long-term plan. They needed to talk to the business owners on “F” Street and it would take a long time. Perhaps that could be on Phase II or III. ‘Establish coordinator position to assist in implementation...’—they already have that and it was just a matter of utilizing it correctly. On item number 4 ‘the police department should develop a computerized gang geomapping and tracking system’ –they were going to have that with the new CAD system that’s already been purchased.

Gabe Gonzalez said maybe it should ready ‘make sure the system is utilized.’

Rene Garza said there were certain laws that they must follow such as the gang member must volunteer by coming in and saying ‘I’m in a gang’ or they have to be found by the court as being in a gang.

Tom Hushen felt they were already using the RICO laws.

Rene Garza said they do utilize them.

Gabe Gonzalez mentioned they also wanted to utilize ‘file injunctions on gangs.’

Rene Garza advised that all goes to the data collection from the gangs.

Larry Galbreath asked how they know what particular gang a person belongs to?

Rene Garza said the kids tell them and volunteer that information. They need to put that into a computer and keep it up. Once a crime is committed, then they use the RICO laws to say ‘if you don’t pay restitution’ then we will take your house or your meeting location associated with the gang, etc’.

Tom Hushen said number 6 would probably be long-term. Number 7 and 8 they would probably have to get rid of because those were ordinances that could be passed later on.

The task force agreed that was a good idea.

Rene Garza said number 4 and 5 go together—that included curfew, truancy, RICO and engaged in criminal activity and also ‘utilize the laws that come off that database to a better extent.’ He mentioned the Sheriff’s Department had an 16-hour training session on recognizing gang activities. They were getting that training at his office to start inputting that information into their computers when the juveniles come in. That might be a good idea for their police officers also.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.