

**JACKSONVILLE CITY COUNCIL**

**RESEARCH DIVISION**

**Task Force on Safety and Crime Reduction**

**Education and Youth Development Subcommittee Meeting Minutes- Twice Amended**

**April 24, 2019**

**6:00 pm**

**Bob Hayes Sports Complex and Legends Center**

**5130 Soutel Dr**

Chair: W.C. Gentry

Betty Burney

Amy Donofrio

Constance Hall- Excused

Timothy Sloan

Ceil Pillsbury-Schellenberg

Warren Jones, DCPS Subject Matter Expert- Excused

Brandon Griggs, Youth Subject Matter Expert- Excused

Denise Marzullo -Excused

**Topic:** Task Force on Safety and Crime Reduction –Education and Youth Development Subcommittee

**Attendance:** Colleen Hampsey- Council Research; Carol Owens and Ladayija Nichols - Legislative Services

For all other attendees please see the sign in sheet

**Meeting Convened:** 6:08 pm

Chairperson Gentry convened the meeting and welcomed the group. This was the fifth meeting for the Education and Youth Development subcommittee and it was held at the Legends Center to have a dialogue with youth and the community. Mr. Gentry reviewed the subcommittee charge, which is to focus on services to youth to prevent criminal activity and association; youth engagement; youth issues; educational issues; inventory of existing programs. Mr. Gentry explained that the subcommittee needs public input, particularly from teens, about youth after school programs, as well as perceptions of safety on neighborhoods and at school. Betty Burney served as the moderator and provided the five teens in attendance with prepared questions and microphone.

Neighborhood safety: The teens had differing perspectives about neighborhood safety. One said he never feels safe, frequently hears gunshots and witnessed a death in his front yard last year. He went on to say that he did not get counseling after the incident (which remains unsolved by law enforcement) and that the trauma from that death has continued and added to his level of neighborhood insecurity. The four other teens said that while they do live on the Northside of town, they feel relatively safe in their neighborhoods. One girl added that she feels unsafe when she visits her grandmother’s house in a different neighborhood. One teen’s father was in attendance and he said that he does not feel comfortable with his son walking a few streets over from where they live, as is required to reach the school bus. Councilman Newby said he would look into the possibility of making changes to the bus routes, to decrease the walking distance.

School safety: The teens attend different schools: Ribault Middle, Ribault High School, Paxson High School, and Robert E. Lee Hogh School. Overall, they said they do not always feel safe at school. They mentioned students who bring weapons on campus, fights, and repeated lockdowns due to bomb threats or criminal activity near their schools. One teen talked about the scariness of lockdowns, as the students do not know if they are real or not. They said that there are safety measures on campus, such as metal detecting wands, bag searches and some security guards on staff. Several of the teens said that fears about safety distract them from their academic work.

Trauma: There was a discussion about the effect of trauma (from neighborhood violence, bullying, family dynamics, and poverty) on behavior. One woman in attendance spoke about how trauma perpetuates destructive behavior, which can lead to school discipline issues. Those who constantly fear for their safety may react aggressively to others as a defense mechanism.

Public comment: The members of the audience were given time for public comment. They spoke about the effect of overaged students (2 or 3 grades behind) being in the same classroom with younger students; stipends for single moms so they wouldn’t have to work multiple jobs and could spend more time with their children; career pathways for kids getting released from residential confinement and for those who can’t complete high school; workforce training and apprenticeships; the need for a system of coordinated care for children in the juvenile justice system. One woman spoke about culinary apprenticeships and the café she is opening that will be fully staffed with teens (the location will be on the Southside because the rent and utility hook up charges were twice as high on the Northside). Councilman Newby said he would look into why the utility charges would be higher in one area than another.

Activities: When asked about what type of after school or summer activities they would enjoy, the teens said that there are very few places where they can spend their free time. One girl suggested repurposing abandoned properties into teen centers and hiring youth to staff the centers. It was said that there are not many entertainment venues on the Northside of town. The teens all said they had experienced intense harassment from the security guards at the Orange Park Mall, making them not want to spend time there. They talked about overzealous security measures in other locations, where they are subject to repeated personal and property searches and made to feel like criminals. One teen said that he used to go to the Legends Center all the time to play basketball, but sometimes he had trouble paying the $2.00 admission fee and then he was banned from the center for a year for getting into a fight.

Suggestions: Councilman Newby asked how the teens would allocate money for activities or projects, if they were in his position to do so. They suggested: eliminating the fees at community centers, free computer centers with printing available, more classes offered using the EVAC format, city incentives to open businesses on the Northside even for businesses with leases, life skills classes, kids jobs programs, centers with peer to peer mentoring and less intrusive security, a way to connect teens with the existing services they may not be aware of.

With no further business, Chairperson Gentry thanked all who attended and adjourned the meeting. The next Education and Youth Development subcommittee meeting date has yet to be scheduled.

**Meeting Adjourned:** 8:05 pm

**TASK FORCE ON SAFETY AND CRIME REDUCTION**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

TO: SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS

FROM: W. C. GENTRY

RE: meeting held at the legends on April 24, 2019

We had a “Community Engagement” meeting at The Legends which was noticed through numerous sources in addition to the usual city outlets. Other than members of the subcommittee, there were about nine attendees, of which four came with Ms. Burney who was facilitating the program and two came with other subcommittee members. Of the remaining three, which were adults, one advised she came to the wrong meeting, but was glad she had. Notwithstanding the small turnout, a number of ideas were generated by the young people in attendance. The following are my notes of some of the takeaways that directly fall within the purview of the committee:

1. One of the two young men in attendance said he came to The Legends on a regular basis because it was one of the few places where he could feel safe and enjoy himself, but he noted he had to pay a $2.00 fee to play basketball. This raises the question of why a fee is being charged to kids to use the facilities which should be as open and accessible as possible. Councilman Newby indicated he would look into the matter.
2. All the young people noted there were very few places to “hang out” in the northwest section of Jacksonville and that they have to travel to Arlington or other area of town for a place that has age appropriate activities where they can do things with friends. They want and need a safe place in or near their neighborhoods where they can congregate with their friends and “hang out” and engage in fun activities. In addition to physical activities such as skating, trampoline, basketball, etc., they also would like to have facilities such as (a) a computer lab with a free printer so they can do their school work, (b) reading/writing laboratories with leaders, (c) “free speech zones” with a young (near-peer) facilitator, (d) etc.
3. Jobs. The point was made that it would be great if the city would actually employ students whenever it could. For example, to work in community centers doing check-in, checking out equipment, light cleanup, etc. This would be particularly true in the summer when, hopefully, activities are greatly ramped up. They would much rather interact with a well-trained (and supervised) older teen or young adult than an older person who may or may not be interested in what they are doing.
4. Although several of the adults in the room disagreed, the students seemed unanimous that they wanted less security than more, and were primarily concerned about intrusive security or measures that seem disrespectful of them. The point was made that in other areas of town, they do not encounter the sort of security measures they tend to encounter whenever activities are held in their area of town. On the other hand, most of them do not feel safe all the time in and around their schools even though there is security. They recognize the need to have some sort of measures to assure people do not have weapons and to assure reasonable order and safety whenever young people are gathering. Things like encouraging carrying a transparent pocketbook or making them available for use on admission instead of rummaging through students pocketbooks and high tolerance metal detectors (that scan for heavy objects such as guns, etc.) together with discreet security on site would be more than palatable to these young people. However, they do not want to be treated like “criminals” or disrespected by an intrusive security system.

The foregoing are some of the main ideas I captured. I request committee members to email Crystal with any additional thoughts regarding programs, activities or resources that arose out of this meeting or other interaction with the youth we are trying to serve.

Minutes: Colleen Hampsey, Council Research

CHampsey @coj.net (904) 630-1498

Posted 4.26.19 5:00 pm

Tape: Task Force on Safety and Crime Reduction Education and Youth Development Subcommittee -Legislative Services Division 4.24.19