

Work Group on Gang-Related Violence August 23-24, 2007

The Work Group on Gang-Related Violence held its second meeting on August 23rd and 24th in Bellingham, Washington. Below is a summary of the business meeting, Bellingham police presentation, and community hearing.

In attendance: Representative Christopher Hurst, Senator Jim Clements, Representative Charlie Ross, Senator Adam Kline, Chris Johnson, Darryl Roosendaal, Ken Irwin, Brad Blackburn, Ron Wilson, Terry Hayes, Janice O'Mahony, Tanya Kim, Gabe Morales, and Bob Hicks.

Business Meeting

The business meeting began with Bellingham Police Chief, Randy Carroll, welcoming the work group to the City. Chief Carroll provided incredible hospitality, including locating facilities, setting up teleconferencing, and providing members with maps to recommended restaurants.

His welcome was followed by the introduction of two new work group members: Tanya Kim and Gabe Morales. Ms. Kim works for Powerful Voices, a nonprofit organization that works on gang-related issues. Mr. Morales is a concerned citizen who has been affected by gangs his entire life.

Sub-committee appointments were released and discussed. The breakdown is listed below.

Prevention and Intervention –

Janice O'Mahony – GJJAC (Co-Chair)
Sheriff Ken Irwin – Yakima (Co-Chair)
Tim Thrasher – DOC
Sen Jim Clements
Chris Johnson – ATG
Lt. Ron Wilson – Seattle
Prosecutor Steve Lowe – Franklin
Bob Hicks – Skagit Co Juv Det Services
Bonnie Glenn – King Co Prosecutor's Office
Rep. Christopher Hurst
Tanya Kim – Powerful Voices

Suppression & Civil/Criminal Penalties –

Dan Fessler – WACDL (Co-Chair)
Darryl Roosendaal – ATG (Co-Chair)
Don Wilbrecht – DOC
Rick Beghtol – WSP
Kathy Jo Kristoff – Sno Co Prosecutors Office
Sen Adam Kline
Rep. Charles Ross

Chief Brad Blackburn – Fife
 Terry Hayes – Seattle Human Services
 Gabriel Morales

The discussion for the group began with a discussion of definitions. From that discussion, it was suggested that a possible three definitions would serve the needs of the group:

- ◇ A definition to be used for prevention and intervention. This perhaps could be an assessment tool, as opposed to an exact definition.
- ◇ A definition for a statewide database. A discussion about putting a limit on how long someone can remain in the database ensued. A limit of 5 years was suggested and discussed but no final decision was made. Furthermore, there was a suggestion that the work group collect additional information on the federal citation for a database.
- ◇ A definition to use for sentencing and criminal code. It was queried as to how this works with conspiracy law, and whether conspiracy law fulfills the need that additional sanctions on gangs would accomplish

It was suggested that perhaps the group start by looking at the California gang bill definition, as it is tightly written and time-tested. There was a consensus to further consult the Washington Prosecutors Office on definitions.

There was also discussion on whether or not a definition was necessary. There is already one in Washington statutes (found in the definitions packet) but it is not used for enforcement. It was decided that the groups should delay this conversation.

Working Lunch - Bellingham Police Presentation

Work group members heard from the hosting Bellingham City Police Department and Whatcom County Police. They explained the gang-related violence located in Bellingham and the surrounding Whatcom County and the increasing severity of the problem. The largest gang-related problem in Bellingham is with motorcycle gangs, graffiti, and the trafficking of drugs and guns across the Canadian border.

Business Meeting Continued

After lunch, the group reconvened to break into subcommittee groups. Janice O’Mahony suggested that the subcommittees attack the difficult subject matter with the following matrix:

Criminal Involvement	The draw of gangs	Characteristics Definitions	Investigations Intelligence	Enforcement Prosecution	Sentencing Enhancements	Programs	\$
No Low Medium High							

The groups discussed until convening for the community hearing.

Community Hearing

The Bellingham Community Hearing was held in the City Council chambers at the Municipal Court Building. There were seven people who testified at the community hearing. Here is a summary of their testimony and a list of those people who testified.

Summary

It was generally agreed that the gang problem in Bellingham is not yet a serious concern. However, members of the community expressed a strong desire to prevent the problem from coming to the area. The largest suggestion to keep gangs out of Bellingham was more funding for police officers and community organizations. Members said they noticed some graffiti around the town, but that gangs had not inflicted a great deal of violence on community members.

The Bellingham community also seemed to be an especially collaborative community, working together to address violence and criminals. There were multiple groups, from the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center to “small but simple grants” to neighborhood block watch that help mobilize neighborhoods.

Community Hearing Testifiers

Calhan Ring – Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center

Richard J. Maneual – Concerned and active citizen

Arlene Feld – Concerned citizen (from L.A.)

Mayor Tim Douglas

Chief Randy Carroll

Sheriff Bill Elfo

State Representative Dave Quall

Interpreter Taos Sawyer

Business Meeting Reconvened (Friday Morning)

The group reconvened Friday morning and reported the activities of their subcommittees from the day before. The subcommittees then reconvened. Below is a summary of the progress made by each group during the entirety of the meeting

Intervention & Prevention

Right now, all the efforts to stop gangs are going in different directions. A statewide directive should be to collaborate all of these efforts into one cohesive direction. This solution also needs to appeal to law enforcement and the community, both in the immediacy and long term. The subcommittee also put an emphasis on not excluding adults and re-entry in the prevention and intervention discussions, and intends to look holistically.

Co-location efforts are an example of how communities and law enforcement can both be included. These efforts have worked very well when used by the Department of Corrections. They are a possible consideration.

The subcommittee also agreed that 3 pilot programs around the state that include both law enforcement and community components would be an excellent place to start. In the initial discussions, these pilot programs could be set up via grants. But, this would need to be a much more involved grant process. Local governments/agencies would need to apply for the grant, then sit down and understand the expectations of the grant, which would be very specific and laid out in the legislation. Then, the grant recipient would report back frequently on short-term goals.

Suppression

In the suppression subcommittee, there was discussion on what exactly suppression means, coupled with a robust conversation on penalties. There was agreement among the subcommittee that more officers would be needed in particular areas, focusing on the particular problem of gangs. This seems to be the best way to address the growing gang problem.

There was also agreement that increased penalties for recruiting minors into gang activity would help discourage gang recruitment. The specifics of this, including exact penalties, need to be worked out. The subcommittee plans to have draft bill language for the next meeting.

The subcommittee recognizes the need for a database and is looking forward to vendor demonstrations and discussing control and access to that database. This includes a more in-depth discussion of how long someone might remain in the database.

The sub-committee remains undecided on civil injunctions and expressed a need for the issue to be further researched. Perhaps at the Spokane meeting, someone knowledgeable in civil injunctions could present/answer questions.

Both subcommittees intend to converse via phone and e-mail before the next meeting in Spokane.

Next Meeting in Spokane

There will be a presentation from different community prevention and intervention organizations as well as a presentation from different database vendors. The meeting will be September 10th and 11th, more information will follow.