St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission
Quarterly Commission Meeting

April 23, 2021 | 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm | Virtual

**Mission:** The St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission (VPC) works to reduce violent crime in the region by promoting and advocating a coordinated, well – resourced support system, policies, and interventions among area governments, institutions and agencies that serve individuals and families most at risk of violent crime.

**Vision:** VPC envisions a St. Louis region where communities enjoy quiet nights and the sounds of children playing during the days. St. Louis is a safe and desirable destination for businesses and residents. All community members feel protected and served by law enforcement and empowered to have a voice in important regional issues.

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**AGENDA:**


![Support Victims. Build Trust. Engage Communities.]

**SUPPORT VICTIMS. BUILD TRUST. ENGAGE COMMUNITIES.**

![National Crime Victims’ Rights Week](Image) | April 18–24, 2021

2. Comments from Mayor Tishaura Jones’s Chief of Staff, Jared Boyd
3. VPC/Wash U Study of Vacancy & Crime- Cardiff Committee
   a) Link to paper:
      https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0734016821996795
   b) Abstract: This study employs risk terrain modeling to identify the spatial
correlates of aggravated assault and homicide in St. Louis, MO. We build upon
the empirical literature by (1) replicating recent research examining the role of
vacancy in the concentration of criminal violence and (2) examining whether
the environmental correlates of violence vary between north and south St.
Louis, a boundary that has long divided the city along racial and
socioeconomic lines. Our results indicate that vacancy presents a strong,
consistent risk for both homicide and aggravated assault and that this pattern
emerges most clearly in the northern part of the city which is majority African
American and has suffered chronic disinvestment. The concentration of
criminal violence in South City is driven primarily by public hubs including
housing, transportation, and schools. Our results underscore the importance
of vacancy as a driver of the spatial concentration of violent crime and point
to potential heterogeneity in risk terrain modeling results when applied to
large metropolitan areas. Situational crime prevention strategies would be
well served to consider such spatial contingencies as the risk factors driving
violent crime are neither uniformly distributed across space nor uniform in
their impact on criminal violence.
   c) Important notes:
      ○ This is about community-based violence prevention strategies, not law
        enforcement strategies
      ○ We support a strategic approach to vacancy remediation and
        abatement that includes mandatory plans for how vacant lots will be
        maintained after demolitions
      ○ Cleaning, mowing, and mainaining vacant lots is a scalable violence
        prevention strategy. It also allows residents to turn neighborhood risk
        factors in to neighborhood assets.
      ○ In one study out of Philadelphia, they found “Participants living near
        treated vacant lots reported significantly reduced perceptions of crime
        (−36.8%, P < 0.05), vandalism (−39.3%, P < 0.05), and safety concerns
        when going outside their homes (−57.8%, P < 0.05), as well as
        significantly increased use of outside spaces for relaxing and socializing
        (75.7%, P < 0.01). Significant reductions in crime overall (−13.3%, P <
        0.01), gun violence (−29.1%, P < 0.001), burglary (−21.9%, P < 0.001), and
        nuisances (−30.3%, P < 0.05) were also found after the treatment of
        vacant lots in neighborhoods below the poverty line. Blighted and
        vacant urban land affects people’s perceptions of safety, and their
        actual, physical safety.” https://www.pnas.org/content/115/12/2946

4. Policy Updates- Policy & Systems Change Committee
   a) Mayoral Priorities Update- We plan to follow up with the Mayor’s office about
      how VPC can align our strategies with the mayor's priorities and vice versa.
   b) Collective Bargaining Update-
The St. Louis Police Officer Association Collective Bargaining Agreement has been removed! It interfered with police discipline and diversity.

To every citizen, organization, and officer that fought to remove the CBA never think your voice is not powerful.

- The Union disputes this. (https://labortribune.com/st-louis-police-union-challenges-citys-effort-to-invalidate-contract/)
- The City Personnel Department has also moved to repeal Civil Service Rule XIX (https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/personnel/documents/rules/upload/CIVIL-SERVICE-RULE-XIX-ADPT-01-08-15.pdf) which allows officers facing a disciplinary suspension of less than 15 days to appeal to a Summary Hearing Board of fellow officers, rather than the same process as other City employees go through. The Union would likely challenge this
- They have scheduled a hearing for May 4 at 4:30pm on this matter (https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/events/eventdetails.cfm?Event_ID=28343)

c) SB57

- Creates the Economic Distress Fund to support nonprofits working to combat crime in high-crime areas.
- Establishes the Critical Incident Stress Management Program through the Department of Public Safety. This program will provide services to police officers dealing with stress and potential psychological trauma resulting from serving on the job... also requires all peace officers to meet with a program service provider once every three to five years for a mental health check-in.
- Aligns with VPC Statement on Policing & Violence Prevention and CBA Public Input Report
Dear Chairman Roberts and Members of the Crime Prevention Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present this informational testimony on Senate Bill 57. The St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission (VPC) conducted more than 18 months of community engagement on issues of policing in the region. We convened 4 listening sessions with community members, interviewed law enforcement stakeholders, conducted an online police legitimacy survey, convened a virtual collective bargaining agreement (CBA) town hall, and conducted an online CBA survey. Together, these engagement opportunities collected the voice of more than 1,500 St. Louis region residents.

The listening sessions involved asking community members:
- What is working in policing?
- What is not working in policing?
- What parts of community policing would you like to see more of?

We posed those same questions to 15 police officers of varying ranks in stakeholder interview. The officers were also asked what support VPC could offer to help them make the case for more community policing in their department. This allowed us to compare the impressions of the general public and the officers who police them.

We heard from both officers and the general public that they are concerned about the health and wellness of police officers who protect and serve our region. Police officers routinely encounter traumatic situations. Specifically from police officers, we heard that they feel like it’s not ok to not be ok. They don’t have the time or tools necessary to identify and heal from the vicarious trauma they experience from witnessing the worst that people do to each other on a daily basis. This exposure puts them at risk for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Symptoms of PTSD include:
- Reliving the traumatic event as if it were happening again (flashbacks)
- Avoiding places, activities or people that remind you of the traumatic event
- Hopelessness about the future
- Memory problems, including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event
- Being easily startled or frightened
- Always being on guard for danger
- Self-destructive behavior, such as drinking too much or driving too fast
- Trouble sleeping
- Trouble concentrating
- Irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behavior

All of these together have the potential to compromise an officer’s ability to safely perform their job and to have positive interactions with community residents. They may not, however, be readily recognized in all situations. As one participant in our survey said, “If we truly value the mental health of our officers (and the potential negative effects of poor mental health in the community) then we need to comprehensively re-evaluate how we look at mental health of our officers.”

The majority of people (67%) who responded to our survey believe that police officers should be getting preventative mental health evaluation on a yearly cycle, if not more often. Additionally, 40% believe there

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should be a mandatory psychological evaluation after a traumatic event like the death of a partner or unit member or being involved in an officer-involved shooting. When asked about who should conduct the evaluations, most participants stated it should be someone external to the Department (82%) who has a high level of skill recognizing symptoms of trauma (92%). We believe this shows that protecting the mental health of those who protect and serve is vital to the interests of both the community and the police departments. For more information on VPC or our recommendations, please visit stlareavpc.org.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jessica Meyers
Project Director
St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission

5. MU Extension Infographics- Community Engagement Committee
   a) In a COVID-related pivot, VPC is working with MU Extension to turn some of the capacity-building workshops into digital content.
   b) They have created infographics on Community Engagement and Asset Mapping. How can we disseminate these?
      o Will be hosted on the VPC website and MU Extension
      o Co-responders
      o Community Safety Dashboard/Think Health
6. Youth Safe Spaces Taskforce Update
   a) If you want to join, email Lisa (lpotts@stlmhb.com)
   b) 2 Priority Areas
       o Identifying Criteria & Building Capacity for Safe Spaces for Youth Age 16-24
       o Covid-Safe Pop Up Events
           1. FOCUS Impact Fellows are working on a toolkit for agencies who want to host events in Summer/Fall 2021. Should be ready by June.
           2. Goal is to have youth input in planning projects.
           3. Doesn’t need to have programming. Can be as simple as a block party! The simpler the better.
           4. If you want to host an event with financial assistance from VPC, email Lisa (lpotts@stlmhb.com)

7. Municipal Engagement Taskforce Update
   a) If you want to join, email Jessica (jessica@stlareavpc.org)
   b) To increase participation from municipal police, governments, and residents in VPC

8. Service Delivery Committee Home Repair Program
   a) Home Repair is one of the greatest unmet needs for victims of violence
   b) Designing the program and how we will recruit contractors to do the repairs and bill VPC- NOT AVAILABLE YET

9. Communications & Cobranding Committee Update
   a) If you want to join, email Jessica (jessica@stlareavpc.org)
   b) To communicate the work of VPC including special projects like the Gun Violence Response Network and MU Extension Infographics

10. Cure Violence Update
    a) Cure Violence has been added to the VPC website as a temporary home because VPC staffs the Steering Committee (https://www.stlareavpc.org/cure-violence)

11. Partner Announcements
    a) Story Stitches- “Our youth are always looking for adults to participate in their podcasts - StitchCast Studio. If you would like to be on their list for consideration please send me your name and email. susanc@storystitches.org”
c) Poli Rijos- “Update on HB1141: Hi Friends, Missouri really needs your help right now! MO House Bill 952 and Amendment 23 attached to MO House Bill 1141 seek to ban any curriculum that explores race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc. in public and private schools, specifically through the use of resources such as the New York Times 1619 Project, We Stories, Learning for Justice, Teaching Tolerance, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and Educational Equity Consultants. Can you please contact your legislators (<https://house.mo.gov/legislatorlookup.aspx>) and demand that they oppose these two dangerous and unconstitutional pieces of legislation? Sample script:” My name is ___ and I am from _____. I am writing to demand that you oppose Missouri House Bill 952 and Amendment 23 attached to House Bill 1141. These pieces of legislation are inherently unconstitutional and trample on our First Amendment rights. All students have the right and responsibility to explore their identities, the identities of others, and multiple perspectives. A plethora of research shows that exploring identities in classrooms builds understanding, empathy, respect, and peace. The bill also denies the very benchmark of our educational system predicated on privileging local control. Banning resources from schools is dangerous and sets a disconcerting precedent. Please oppose this overreaching bill and amendment! Respectfully, NAME ADDRESS”

d) Eboni Hooper-Boateng- “The St. Louis ReCAST Amplify Your Voice Webinar series will be wrapping up tomorrow, April 24th with the After The Vote: Engaging Your Elected Official Webinar at 2pm. You can watch via the ReCAST Facebook page or register in advance at: https://bit.ly/3rAaxDy”

12. Quarterly Meeting Evaluation

Next Quarterly Meeting: July 23, 2021