

Proposal for public safety committee

Charles Jow (Charlesjow@live.se)

The following is a proposal for revamping the public safety committee (PSC) in E6. It describes the public safety concerns facing the ANC, and maps out goals and objectives of the PSC, as well as a plan for activities that will be carried out in the coming year.

Background

There has been a major increase in violent crime in the city, including E6. The district of Columbia has experienced an unprecedented rise in gun-violence in the last 2 years. The increase from 166 murders in 2019 to 198 in 2020 and 227 in 2021 is a frightening trend. Besides the tragic loss of life, community members are at risk of ending up in the crossfire or being victims of senseless acts of violence. In addition, robberies and carjackings are a major concern for constituents. In our ANC there are hotspots for violent crime and shootings. For example, many shootings happen in and around metro stations.

In our ANC, there are homeless encampments on the doorstep of residential homes and businesses and close to schools and playgrounds. Homelessness is often connected to mental health and drug abuse and the unhoused population should not be seen as criminals. However, the encampments pose a major health risk with needles littering the neighborhoods they are in and lack of running water and sanitation services leads to human excrements littering the sidewalks and alleys of affected neighborhoods. A concentration of homelessness also tends to be associated with other issues in the ANC, such as drug trade, prostitution, package theft and break-ins. There have also been several murders directly connected to these encampments.

There is a growing demand for community-based policing among constituents, such as patrolling officers by foot, on bikes and scooters. Community policing helps bridge the gap between community and police and make the community members feel safer. Getting the officer out of the patrol car and to engage with community members will hopefully lead to them identifying the problems and challenges the community faces. It can also mitigate the risk of miscommunication and misidentification with respect to identifying the criminal element in the community.

In recent years, the police budget has been reduced, contributing to a reduction of the police force. For example, budget cuts in 2020 and 2021 prevented the MPD from hiring the number of police officers needed. A holistic approach to public safety and police reform means that NGOs and police need to work together. In recent years, resources have been reallocated from the police to crime preventers/NGOs. However, both NGOs and the police department play an instrumental role in crime prevention, and they need to work together to see results. It is not one or the other.

It is against this backdrop that the following proposal to revamp the PSC in E6 has come about. Public safety is the number one concern of constituents in the ANC. The PSC provides a platform for the community and businesses to engage and unite on public safety issues, which can hopefully lead to a safer community for all.

Vision

The vision of the PSC is a safer neighborhood for all residents.

Goals:

- Reduction in crime
- No homeless encampments in residential areas or close to schools
- Businesses are more involved in community engagement
- The ANC is more aware of the public safety concerns facing constituents
- More proactive policing in the ANC
- An established relationship with the metro transit police department

Objective of the PSC

The objective of the PSC is to provide a platform for constituents in the ANC to voice their concerns and engage in the public safety agenda, to connect businesses with non-profit organizations around public safety and work together with the police department and the city to improve public safety in our ANC and beyond. The PSC will also identify and advocate for public safety priorities of the ANC.

Strategies:

The strategy of the PSC is to (i) create a public safety platform in the ANC to better capture concerns and problems facing the community and help identify solutions, (ii) organize businesses, NGOs and community members in events, together with the police department and city to help draw attention to problems facing the community, (iii) advocate for public safety priorities of the ANC in broader policy discussions.

The PSC will be a platform to engage community, police and youth in positive activity throughout our ANC. For example, the PSC will leverage city wide initiatives, such as Green Team Keeping it Clean, which is an event managed by the city and the MPD and invites community members and youth to join police officers in community cleanup events. Last year, the Green Team Keeping it Clean initiative was successfully carried out in the ANC and this will be used as a blue print for future events. By bringing the community and the police together, these events can facilitate dialogue (provide an opportunity for community members to discuss issues or concerns regarding their neighborhood) and improve the relationship between the police and community (for the police to put faces on community members and vice versa). By engaging the youth in these events, it will hopefully lead to them having positive experiences with police. There will be fundraising around these events, so that lunch can be provided to participants at local restaurants. Over \$2000 was collected for last year's event in the ANC.

In the ANC, there are a lot of businesses that have public safety concerns and how this affects their tenants, patrons and guests. Business owners have shown a willingness to support initiatives that could mitigate the violence and suffering in the communities. The PSC can serve as a bridge between businesses and non-profit organizations related to public safety, such as community centers, after-school programs, homeless shelters, building blocks, etc., by facilitating communication and channeling donations. Different areas in the ANC have different problems so by getting businesses and NGOs together, problems can be discussed and highlighted, and specific solutions can be brought forward, hopefully with some financial backing. For example, the intersection of O and 8th street NW has experienced multiple shootings involving young men and businesses are very concerned and willing to contribute towards a solution. While there is no ultimate solution, increasing the presence of violence preventers and do outreach for afterschool programs in this specific area may help mitigate the

problem. This could potentially be achieved by identifying the relevant NGOs and actors and connecting them to community and businesses (facilitating the meetings, sponsoring events, collecting donations, etc.).

The PSC will collaborate with the metro transit police department. A lot of violent crime in our neighborhoods happen in and around metro stations. Since the metro transit police department is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of metro commuters, they need to be held accountable.

The PSC will work with the community to meet needs and address concerns of constituents. The PSC will collect concerns and requests from constituents. And when possible, help address issues. For example, the PSC can provide support to constituents interested in setting up a neighborhood watch. The PSC could also advocate for better access to pick up locations for packages to mitigate package theft. The latter would have wider benefits since the package theft is financing other crimes, primarily drug trade.

The PSC will advocate for public safety priorities of the ANC in broader policy discussions:

- The PSC plans to work with the city's encampment office and NGOs to ensure the safety of all our community members, unhoused and housed residents alike. The role of the PSC will be to work with businesses, communities, NGOs to identify high-risk hotspots in our ANC and advocate to the city's encampment office to allocate resources towards these areas. The unhoused residents are some of the most vulnerable groups in the ANC and should be protected.
- The PSC will advocate for a more proactive police department and for a holistic approach to public safety and police reform. This includes more community policing. In addition, the PSC will advocate for revamping the city's anti-gun units, in line with the NYC strategy to target gun violence¹, by installing neighborhood safety teams.²
- The PSC will advocate for providing the MPD with the financing and resources needed to sustain a healthy police force.

Actions (for the coming year):

- Organize Green Team Keeping it Clean community cleanup events, first one on April 23rd.
- Being out in the community talking to affected businesses and residents and identify public safety concerns and problems.
- Identify encampment hotspots³ by surveying the ANC, as well identifying and engaging with affected residents and businesses.
- Identify crime hotspots by surveying the ANC, as well identifying and engaging with affected residents and businesses.
- Map our relevant NGOs active in the ANC.
- Meet with encampment office.
- Establish a relationship with metro transit police department.

¹ <https://nypost.com/2022/03/14/first-wave-of-nypds-new-anti-gun-units-hits-the-streets/>

² The safety teams will be specialized units with a high level of training both in community engagements and de-escalation tactics. They will operate in a proactive way, by being present in high-risk areas and prevent crimes before they are committed.

³ Encampments located in residential areas or close to schools, etc.

- Coordinate activities with MPD.

Membership and organization:

The PSC hopes to get constituents involved in the committee by organizing events, like Green Team Keeping it Clean, going door-to-door and introduce the committee and the plan, and by posting on relevant platforms, such as NextDoor and setting up a twitter account. The PSC will have regular meetings with members and interested parties. The PSC will also participate in monthly ANC meetings, in which the committee will provide updates on public safety and implementation status of the PSC strategy.