

COMBAT Commission Meeting
September 19th, 2023 10:00 AM – 11:59 AM
Zoom Meeting
Minutes

Present: Elizabeth Williams, Mark Bryant, Alfred Jordan, Arimeta DuPree, Larry Beaty, Lanna Ultican, Joseph Spalitto

Also Present: Vince Ortega, Dawna Shumate, Joe Loudon, Keron Hopkins, Shannon Bobo, J. Loomis, Courtney Crespo, Luis Ortiz, Jean Peters Baker, Jamie Brown, Jennifer Dameron, Jennifer Ware, Bob Muenz, Ryan Taylor, Jim Giles

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM.

Minutes Approved:

Larry Beaty makes a motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Mark Bryant seconds. The minutes are unanimously approved.

DISCUSSION:

Jackson County COMBAT: Director's Report

- Review of COMBAT's Purpose: COMBAT, as defined in Chapter 93, is dedicated to promoting and ensuring public safety. It's important to understand that COMBAT was not designed to be a panacea-- Instead, it serves as a vital resource for Jackson County in addressing problems associated with drug abuse and violence.
- The COMBAT Commission is responsible for:
 - o Establishing goals related to COMBAT funding.
 - o Making recommendations concerning all funding requests tied to COMBAT initiatives.
- Vince Ortega has been invited to be a co-presenter this November at the National Research Conference for Prevention and Firearms Related Harm. He plans to speak about Jackson County COMBAT and the STRIVIN program.

Kansas City Police Department

- Deputy Chief Ortiz reports on homicide statistics: By 9/19/23, there were 141 homicides. At this time the previous year, there were 118. In 2020, there were 144.
- Deputy Chief Ortiz confirms that these shootings are on the decline: Only 7 known fatal shootings occurred the previous week, indicating a downward trend.
 - o Larry Beaty asks for clarification about the motives behind shootings. Deputy Chief Ortiz explains that people rely on weapons and violence to settle arguments—they lack conflict resolution skills. However, he acknowledges that drugs, gang affiliation, or a combination of other factors can contribute to the issue as well.

- Ortiz says the availability of gun modifications, like automatic switches, contributes to shootings. Mark Bryant raises concerns about the accessibility of firearms potentially contributing to high crime rates. Deputy Chief Ortiz acknowledges the challenges but emphasizes efforts to engage with families and individuals to diffuse conflicts and altercations.
- Vince Ortega notes the absence of strict gun laws in Missouri: He mentions the legality of concealed carry as long as the gun isn't stolen.
 - Deputy Chief Ortiz confirms that firearms can only be confiscated from individuals under 18. However, if a parent claims the firearm, they have to give it back. The only other circumstances in which a police officer can confiscate a firearm is if they can prove it was already used in a crime or is stolen.

Jackson County Drug Task Force

- Bob Muenz from the Blue Springs Police Department references the report shared by the Drug Task Force:
 - Two ongoing operations, Operation Pony Express and Operation Bad Cookies, are mentioned-- these operations are still making arrests and executing search warrants.
 - The report also described a case involving a search warrant at a Jackson County hotel.
 - The most notable detail is the discovery of an "old school methamphetamine lab." The "old school" methamphetamine is highlighted as extremely dangerous.

Larry Beaty, COMBAT Commissioner

- Larry Beaty inquires about the impact of the legalization of marijuana on Jackson County. Vince Ortega responds that we could utilize data from Colorado—as they legalized marijuana much earlier than Missouri and they'd have more data on the subject matter.

Shannon Bobo, Crime Analyst, Jackson County COMBAT

- Shannon Bobo presents COMBAT's impact in the neighborhoods since the STRIVIN hubs were established. Her presentation focused solely on data from the hotspots (as opposed to the whole city or a whole town), since those were the areas that the STRIVIN initiative was active in.
 - Mark Bryant expresses difficulty in assessing the impact in Raytown due to the small number of reported incidents—and that some cases go unreported. Shannon Bobo responds that the STRIVIN initiative is still relatively new and while the numbers from the concentrated area are small, there is still some measurable impact. Vince Ortega asks if Mark Bryant has another solution—Bryant responds that he could answer if the meeting wasn't being held over Zoom.
- Mark Bryant asks if referrals consist of individuals who call COMBAT for food. Vince Ortega explains that most referrals come from school districts and police departments—and then clarifies that referrals indicating a need for services outside the realm of

COMBAT funding are fulfilled using outside connections. COMBAT does not spend funds on food or income.

- Mark Bryant questions whether social services could prevent crimes of passion, and Vince Ortega highlights the need to help people using a number of different resources.
 - o The Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR) is mentioned as part of the efforts to prevent such incidents, as some individuals try to “handle issues themselves” i.e. retaliation.

Mark Bryant, COMBAT Commissioner

- After asking a question about the reentry programs that COMBAT funds, Mark Bryant expresses dissatisfaction with COMBAT’s demo on how to find funding information on the department’s website. The question was: “What is the total amount of money COMBAT is spending on reentry programs? How many people is COMBAT serving [in reentry programs?] What is the service area?” Joe Loudon provided him the following information: “The total amount spent on re-entry programs is \$640,000. They're serving 730 people among the 6 programs...”
- Mark Bryant emphasizes the importance of focusing on ex-offenders, who he says are prone to committing crimes or engaging in substance abuse, and believes quantifiable results are achievable in doing so.
 - o Vince Ortega mentions discussions with Clyde McQueen and efforts to involve more serious offenders in the program. He explains that many individuals coming out of prison are suffering from trauma and other social determinants of health to address, making it challenging for them to be stabilized and maintain employment. Vince Ortega acknowledges the complexity of the reentry process and the need for long-term support to help individuals successfully reintegrate into society.

NEW BUSINESS:

Regarding the Structure and Frequency of Commission Meetings

- Elizabeth Williams presents the survey results regarding meeting frequency preferences: A majority of the respondents indicated a preference for monthly, hybrid meetings.
 - o Mark Bryant questions why the meeting is being conducted on Zoom when a majority preferred hybrid meetings. Vince Ortega explains that COMBAT staff attempted to hold the meeting at Sisters in Christ—but ran into logistical challenges of setting up a hybrid meeting.
 - o Mark Bryant asks why Sisters in Christ was even considered. Vince Ortega explains that the church streams their services every Sunday—but since there wouldn’t be enough microphones or cameras for everyone, the meeting had to take place over Zoom instead. Joe Loudon adds that the goal of setting the meeting at a STRIVIN hub was so the Commissioners could get an up-close look at what the hub agencies are doing on site.
 - o Joseph Loudon explains that booking the County legislative chamber on Thursdays is a challenge and that there’s always the possibility the meeting

getting cancelled for special legislative meetings. However, he will look into the chamber's availability for the next Commission meeting.

- Joseph Spalitto mentions that according to Chapter 93 of the anti-drug tax law, the COMBAT Commission was originally intended to meet quarterly. He emphasizes that the main purpose of the Commission is to establish goals for COMBAT funding and make recommendations for funding requests related to COMBAT initiatives.
 - o Commissioner Spalitto expresses his opinion that the Commission's current activities, which seem to involve issues usually belonging to the KCPD or the Drug Task Force, should not be their main focus. He questions the need for monthly meetings, especially when the Commission appears to be deviating from its intended purpose.
- Madame Chair Liz Williams asks if Commissioner Joseph Spalitto would like to meet in person—He says he would if the meeting takes place on a Thursday.

Regarding Reviewing the Budget

- Madame Chair Liz Williams asks when the Commissioners should expect to receive the budget. Director Vince Ortega mentions that there are 18 new agencies, but some of them are not in compliance, which is causing a delay in the process.
 - o However, COMBAT hopes to provide Commissioners with at least a month to review the budget recommendations. He also offers the opportunity to meet with them himself, Tammie, and Dawna if any of the Commissioners have questions.
- Mark Bryant says one month is not enough time to review 106 agencies because he works. He suggests scheduling one Commission meeting for each category of funding and reviewing each application as a group. Vince Ortega explains that scheduling 3 separate Commission meetings would delay the funding process by 3 months.
 - o Vince Ortega later emphasizes that many of the funded programs have a long history of funding with COMBAT without issues—and that he's still more than willing to meet and answers questions about new agencies that don't have a preexisting relationship with Jackson County COMBAT.
- Commissioner Liz Williams says that if Commissioners don't have time to meet with COMBAT staff to take an in-depth look at certain applications, she is willing to collect their questions and meet with COMBAT in their stead.

MOTION:

Meeting adjourned at 11:59 AM

ANNOUNCEMENT:

Next meeting is Thursday, October 19th, 2023