

COMBAT Commission Meeting
June 11th, 2024 10:03 AM – 11:51 AM
Zoom Meeting
Minutes

Present: Larry Beaty, Lanna Ultican, Joseph Spalitto, Arimeta DuPree, Alfred Jordan, Liz Williams

Also Present: Vince Ortega, Dawna J. Shumate, Joseph Loudon, Shannon Bobo, Jean Peters Baker, Deputy Chief Doug Niemeier, Jennifer Dameron, Major James Buck, Jalilah Otto, Beverly Newman, Dr. Pamela Behle

The meeting was called to order at 10:03 AM.

APPROVE MINUTES – March 12th

Larry Beaty motions to approve the minutes; Alfred Jordan seconds.

DISCUSSION:

Director's Report

- COMBAT's Marketing & Communications Administrator, Joe Loudon, reports on the publication of the [COMBAT's 2023 Community Impact Report](#)—which aims to provide a snapshot of COMBAT's efforts in the community and detail how funds are allocated.
- Loudon highlights that one of this year's themes is the longevity of COMBAT, emphasizing its [30-plus years of consistent support](#). This is contrasted with short-term programs that lose funding just as they start making progress, stressing the importance of COMBAT as a stable source of revenue.
- The report also provided an update on COMBAT's 5-year strategic plan initiated in 2022, with significant achievements including a [51% increase in STRiVIN' referrals in 2023, surpassing their year 3 goal in just one year](#). Additionally, efforts to involve the Kansas City and Independence Police Departments have led to 283 combined referrals in 2023.
- Another key objective was to enhance community engagement through more user-friendly technology, exemplified by the [launch of a new website](#) last fall.
- Lastly, the report calls for greater collaboration between law enforcement and COMBAT-funded agencies, a focus that was addressed at the 2023 COMBAT symposium.

Kansas City Police Department's Report

- Doug Niemeier, Deputy Chief for the Investigations Bureau of the Kansas City Police Department, begins by reporting [significant increases in narcotics recoveries](#)-- with cocaine up 292%, methamphetamines up 164%, fentanyl up 72%, and PCP up 22%. He notes that heroin recoveries are slightly down, but overall, the narcotics team is performing well.
- Deputy Chief Niemeier highlights the department's efforts in tackling overdose deaths, mentioning that the [Narcotics unit now responds to every overdose death](#). He shares overdose statistics:
 - o Overdoses were 22 in March, 28 in April, and 17 in May
 - o Fatal overdoses were 9 in March, 14 in April, and 9 in May
 - o He suggests a [possible correlation between increased narcotics interdiction and the decrease in overdose numbers over the past few months](#). Niemeier also

describes ongoing efforts to track down and charge individuals supplying narcotics, with one person already charged and more cases under investigation.

- Commissioner Alfred Jordan asks: **Is the increase in drug seizures due to enhanced enforcement or are there simply more drugs available?**
 - o Deputy Chief Niemeier explains that the increase in drug seizures is due to a combination of factors, including [strategic resource allocation and effective interdiction efforts](#). He notes that the interdiction team has successfully targeted narcotics being shipped into or through Kansas City, some of which were not intended for the city but were intercepted before reaching other communities.
 - o Deputy Chief Niemeier also mentions that [sales-related charges have significantly increased](#), with the number of cases rising from about 7 last year to around 25 this year. He attributes this increase partly to the success of [large investigations conducted in collaboration with federal partners](#), which have resulted in substantial drug seizures.
- Commissioner Arimeta DuPree asks: **Were there any firearms recovered alongside the recoveries of the cocaine, meth, fentanyl, and PCP?**
 - o Doug Niemeier confirms that [103 firearms](#) have been recovered so far this year, marking a 61% increase compared to the 64 firearms recovered at the same time last year.
- Commissioner DuPree asks: **What types of firearms were recovered?**
 - o Niemeier responds that the recoveries included a variety of weapons, ranging from [high-powered firearms and machine guns to standard Glocks-- some of which were modified with switches-- as well as semi-automatics and revolvers](#).
- Commissioner Larry Beaty asks: **Marijuana was absent during the discussion regarding seizures—Is this due to its legal status or were the quantities not strong enough to present a case?**
 - o Major James Buck responds that while they are [still seizing marijuana](#), the numbers are lower because they no longer actively seek it out. However, he notes that significant quantities are still being seized, including some large seizures in May that have not yet been reflected in the current data.
 - o Deputy Chief Niemeier adds that [651 pounds of marijuana have been seized](#) so far this year, which is a decrease from last year but still represents a substantial amount.
- Commissioner DuPree asks: **How many pounds of fentanyl have been seized so far?**
 - o Deputy Chief Niemeier responds that as of the end of the last month, [42.6 pounds](#) of fentanyl have been seized.
- Director Vince Ortega asks: **What was the origin of the seized PCP? Is it being manufactured by cartels or locally?**
 - o Deputy Chief Niemeier clarifies that the PCP was not manufactured locally but was shipped to the area. Major Buck adds that while PCP is not as cartel-driven as other drugs, there is a noticeable increase in it being [shipped from California and Texas](#), with no current international links.
- Director Vince Ortega asks: **What are the current homicide and bullet-to-skin stats as of this morning?**
 - o Deputy Chief Niemeier reports that as of this morning, there have been [64 homicides](#), compared to 81 at the same time last year. He adds that there have been [268 non-fatal shooting victims](#) so far this year—which is slightly higher than

last year. This is partially due to several mass shooting events earlier in the year, such as the parade and the Crown Center incident.

- Commissioner Jordan asks: **There's a notable downward trend in homicides year over year— Are there any known causes for this downward trend?**
 - o Major James Buck attributes the decrease in violent crime to [focused efforts on identifying and targeting groups responsible](#) for most of the violence. The police department is intervening with individuals on a path to crime and allocating resources to emerging groups.
 - o Jackson County Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker adds that recent FBI statistics show a nationwide decline in homicides, with Kansas City experiencing a 22% decrease. She highlights ongoing efforts, such as the Save KC initiative, to further reduce violent crime through [collaboration among community, police, and criminal justice agencies](#).
 - o Director Vince Ortega adds that the Midtown STRiVIN' Hub receives referrals for individuals targeted by focused deterrence efforts and tracks both shooting and homicide victims, including those indirectly affected (i.e. individuals present during the shooting but were not shot themselves.) [STRiVIN' collaborates with KCPD to ensure effective tracking and intervention without duplicating efforts.](#)

Jackson County Drug Task Force's Report

- Dan Cummings reports that from January to mid-May, [23 new investigations were opened, 83 drug purchases conducted, and 37 undercover operations carried out](#). The task force recovered over 55,000 grams (121 pounds) of methamphetamine, worth approximately \$6 million, along with other drugs including fentanyl (1,100 grams) and PCP (56 grams).
 - o Cummings notes that in the PCP seizure, an estimated 2 gallons of PCP was dumped out the window before the search warrant could be executed. The search involved collaboration with the Kansas City Police Department Technical Unit and other law enforcement.
- The Jackson County Drug Task Force, now rebranded as the Jackson County Anti-Crime Task Force is [increasingly focusing on gun-related crimes and fentanyl](#), including counterfeit M30 tablets (with 14,000 pills recovered this year so far.)
 - o Fentanyl dealers are heavily armed-- with the task force recovering 47 handguns, 24 rifles, shotguns, AR-15s, assault weapons, and four Glock handguns with "switches" that convert them to automatic.
- The task force is also [purchasing illegal gun switches from dealers in undercover operations](#), aiming to address the intersection of drug trafficking and gun violence. The task force has also recovered two explosive devices, compared to four the previous year. The annual report has been updated to include more information on fully automatic weapons and explosive devices due to their increased frequency.
- Ongoing investigations involve [collaboration with various federal agencies](#) including the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, DEA, and the U.S. Department of Treasury, [as well as local departments](#) like KCPD and Independence PD.
 - o KCPD's overdose response team handles every fentanyl overdose, while the task force educates 14 other Jackson County law enforcement agencies on investigating the source of the pills involved. Notifying the task force of overdoses immediately is crucial to gather information from the scene and follow up on the source of the pills.

- The task force has responded to approximately 30 to 40 overdose cases this year, making arrests for distribution and sales charges, though linking suppliers directly to deaths in court remains challenging.
- The task force also collaborates with KCPD and the Department of Homeland Security on interdiction efforts to intercept packages before they reach Jackson County.
- Commissioner Arimeta DuPree asks: **What is the source of the illegal firearm switches? Are they 3D printed or are they acquired through other means?**
 - Dan Cummings confirms that they are [tracking the sources of these illegal firearm switches in collaboration with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms](#). He anticipates reporting on federal firearms violations related to these cases soon.
 - Cummings highlights a recent case where a house involved in distributing fentanyl and illegal firearms yielded 12 stolen guns, including those used in homicides. He notes that criminals often discard guns used in crimes and replace them, which contributes to the cycle of stolen and illegal firearms.
- Commissioner Larry Beaty asks: **Is there a specific hotspot in Jackson County where narcotics trafficking is especially prevalent or is the issue more widespread?**
 - Dan Cummings responds that [drug trafficking issues generally flow towards Kansas City, MO and Kansas City, KS rather than being concentrated in one specific area](#). He adds that in the last five years, the only significant local narcotics production encountered was a single meth lab, which is rare compared to the prevalence of drugs originating from Mexican cartels. This indicates a [shift from local production to trafficking involving international sources](#).

NEW BUSINESS:

COMBAT Communications

- Commissioner Liz Williams suggests that information about COMBAT should be shared with the [Kansas City Call newspaper](#) to inform the public about COMBAT's efforts. She believes that public awareness would increase if this information were published in the paper a couple of times a year to people understand where their tax dollars are being spent.
- Commissioner Larry Beaty adds that getting exposure on [public forums, such as Nick Haines' show on public television](#), could also help increase public awareness. He inquires about the timing of the next vote on the COMBAT tax. Joe Loudon confirms that the tax is set to expire in March 2027 and will appear on the ballot for a renewal vote sometime before that.
- Commissioner Alfred Jordan emphasizes the [importance of publicizing the work done on the COMBAT website and analytics in traditional media](#). He notes that while traditional articles are useful, the website and analytics offer continuously updated information that the public can repeatedly access.
 - Vince Ortega agrees with the need to highlight the technological resources available, praising COMBAT's Crime Analyst, Shannon Bobo, for her efforts in manually updating data due to integration challenges and for collaborating with various crime analysts. He also thanks Joe Loudon for his hard work in launching the new user-friendly website.
 - Ortega notes that the reach of traditional media is limited-- and the vast majority of the audience is on social media. He suggests that a full-time person is needed to

manage social media engagement, as it requires daily, continuous updates and interaction beyond what is currently handled by the team.

Jackson County Circuit Court & Family Court

- Jalilah Otto, Presiding Judge of Jackson County Circuit Court, expresses gratitude to the commission for the opportunity to discuss the impact of COMBAT on the court and the community. She highlights the court's size, with 38 judicial officers and about 700 employees, and notes the significant link between the court's work and COMBAT's influence on the community.
- Beverly Newman, the Court Administrator, explains that **most court expenditures are for personnel** and that there has been an **increased focus on funding for treatment-related services**. She emphasizes the importance of treatment courts and the expansion of services such as medical and dental care for court participants.
 - o Newman also notes that while the outcomes from treatment courts are positive, maintaining these outcomes is becoming more challenging due to issues like service availability and access to providers.
- Dr. Pamela Behle, who oversees research and statistics for Family Court and other areas, highlights the court's commitment to tracking outcomes and measuring the return on investment in programming for youth and families. She **attributes the success of their family treatment programs to strong collaboration and well-trained staff**— as well as the **comprehensive support provided** including mental health and substance abuse treatment, housing assistance, and financial help for utility bills and rent.
 - o The family treatment court shows **high success rates with greater reunification and significantly lower recidivism** compared to standard dockets. Families in the program have a much lower likelihood of re-entering the system, demonstrating the effectiveness of their approach.
- Dr. Behle highlights a **new program serving 17-year-olds**, which became possible after Missouri raised the age of Juvenile Court jurisdiction. The program has been successful, serving over a hundred 17-year-olds annually with promising outcomes.
 - o Preliminary results indicate that this program is **significantly reducing the potential for long-term incarceration** among 17-year-olds. Compared to those processed through adult courts-- who faced hundreds of years in incarceration-- the new program has resulted in very low recidivism rates.
 - o The program **focuses on understanding and supporting each 17-year-old's passions and future goals**, aiming to guide them towards building a productive life based on their interests. This personalized approach is key to their success and lower reoffending rates.
- Dr. Behle introduces the **Safe Babies Court initiative**, which aims to **improve outcomes for infants experiencing abuse or neglect**. This initiative, based on a model by the national organization 0 to 3, focuses on collaboration and partnership across various local organizations, including Jackson County CASA, Foster Adopt Connect, the Children's Division, and Children's Mercy Hospital.
 - o Dr. Behle notes that the traditional court processes for handling foster care and abuse cases have been inadequate in preventing long-term trauma, highlighting the need for the new approach offered by the Safe Babies Court.
- Commissioner Alfred Jordan asks: **Does COMBAT fund the previously mentioned initiatives?**

- Dr. Behle confirms that COMBAT funds [some programs partially and others fully](#). The funding is supplemented by other resources such as state funds and treatment coordinating commissions, but COMBAT does directly support the programs and the staff that makes them possible.

Commission Vacancies

- Commissioner Liz Williams inquires about the COMBAT Commission vacancies, noting positions open in District Number 1 and District Number 2 At-Large.
- Vince Ortega mentions discussions with Commissioner Alfred Jordan and COMBAT's legal advisor regarding the process for filling these vacancies. He clarifies that the County Executive is responsible for making these appointments, while current COMBAT Commissioners will hold the seats until filled.
 - A legal advisor confirms that the County Executive is indeed responsible for appointing members to the Commission, as per subsection 9306.1 of the code. [The County Executive considers recommendations from the County Legislature but makes the final appointments.](#)

MOTION:

Meeting adjourned at 11:51 AM.

ANNOUNCEMENT:

Next hybrid meeting is scheduled for [September 10th at 10 AM.](#)