

COMBAT Commission Meeting
September 10th, 2024 10:04 AM – 11:16 AM
Zoom Meeting
Minutes

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

Also Present: Vince Ortega, Dawna J. Shumate, Joseph Loudon, Shannon Bobo, Major James Buck, Chief Bob Muenz, Diana Knapp, Michael Cunningham, Deloris Wells

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 AM.

APPROVE MINUTES – June 11th

Larry Beaty motions to approve the minutes; Joseph Spalitto seconds.

DISCUSSION:

Director's Report

- Tammie Jordan discusses 2025 funding, noting that 122 applications were received: 9 applications were for Law Enforcement School-Based Initiatives, 79 for Prevention, 25 Treatment, and 9 STRiVIN'. Among these, 18 agencies are new applicants who did not receive funding in the previous year.
 - o Out of the 122 applications, 20 prevention agencies initially failed to meet compliance. Despite follow-up emails requesting missing information, only 5 agencies responded, leaving 15 still out of compliance.
 - o All agency applications are currently under review, with reviewers scoring each submission. The final scores are expected by September 16, marking the end of the review process.
 - o Commissioner Mark Bryant asks: **Among the 15 non-compliant agencies, what were the reasons for their non-compliance? Did they fall into any specific categories, such as the absence of a 501(c)(3) determination letter?** Tammie Jordan explains that while the audit requirement was removed this year, common issues include **missing tax information (Form 990), not being on the Jackson County Tax roll, or lacking insurance**. Although a few agencies lack their 501(c)(3) status, the primary concerns are tax-related or insurance compliance. Agencies still have time to submit missing documents, and emails have been sent to encourage compliance. All applications have been sent for scoring to ensure non-compliant agencies can still be considered if they meet requirements later.
- Tammie Jordan announces a Secondary Trauma Retreat scheduled for October 25, running from 8:30 AM to 3:00 PM. The retreat will take place at the Carpenters Training Center and addresses secondary traumatic stress, which occurs when individuals experience emotional duress from being repeatedly exposed to others' first-hand trauma.
 - o The retreat will include a self-healing kit with items like stress balls and socks to help participants manage stress and foster self-care. The goal is to equip attendees with practical tools for relaxation and emotional regulation.

- Save-the-date cards have been sent to agencies, and attendance is mandatory for at least one person per program. This requirement ensures participation, as some executive directors might dismiss the training otherwise.
- Commissioner Bryant asks: **What will the cost of the retreat be?** Tammie Jordan explains that **most services are being donated**, including trainers, massage therapists, and the venue. The **only planned expenses are for food and the self-healing kits**, though the exact cost of the kits is not yet determined.
- Vince Ortega adds that the retreat is a repeat of a previously successful initiative requested by many agencies. It addresses the ongoing issue of secondary trauma, which has been a known concern for several years due to the nature of the work performed by counselors and law enforcement.
- Vince Ortega recounts how presenting the STRiVIN' program at a violence prevention and harm reduction symposium in Chicago led to interest from Washington, D.C., representatives. Subsequent presentations were made to D.C.'s mayor, deputy director, and staff regarding establishing a STRiVIN' program in their 7th Ward using opioid funding.
 - Over the past month and a half, D.C. representatives have been working on setting up a community database and recently visited Kansas City for a site tour. They met with local STRiVIN' leaders, including those at the Raytown hub, to gain insights and guidance.
 - The D.C. team has identified a 501(c)(3) hub to coordinate their program and is now tasked with mapping available resources and introducing them to the hub's director to initiate operations.
- Vince Ortega announces that Keron Hopkins, COMBAT's Budget Supervisor, will be leaving her position on September 20th. He expresses both congratulations for her next steps and sadness at her departure, acknowledging her nearly five years of excellent service to the organization.

Kansas City Police Department's Report

- Major James Buck notes that homicides are trending better than in prior years, with 110 reported so far. This figure represents the second-best statistic over the past five years. However, non-fatal shootings are up, with 444 recorded incidents.
- Major Buck summarizes the KCPD's year-to-date drug seizures and firearm confiscations:
 - Fentanyl: 62 pounds of fentanyl have been seized this year, equating to tens of thousands of pills.
 - Methamphetamine: 416 pounds of meth have been confiscated, partly due to collaborative operations with the FBI and the Jackson County Anti-Crime Task Force (previously named the Jackson County Drug Task Force.)
 - Ketamine: Increasing ketamine seizures raise concerns due to its Narcan resistance, complicating overdose reversals, especially when mixed with fentanyl or other drugs.
 - Commissioner Larry Beaty notes that ketamine has been studied and used by medical professionals for treating depression and severe mental illness and requests input from the group. Major Buck emphasizes that its medical use requires careful monitoring by professionals. Commissioner Joseph

Spalitto adds that ketamine is primarily used as an anesthetic in veterinary and medical settings.

- Firearm Confiscations: A total of 194 firearms have been seized so far this year.
- Tammie Jordan asks: **Have you seen anything about PCP on the streets? What are those numbers like?** Major Buck reports that **approximately 43 pounds of PCP have been seized this year**. He highlights that while its prevalence is lower compared to other drugs, efforts to disrupt its distribution pipelines have been moderately successful.
- Commissioner Mark Bryant asks: **Have there been any heroin or cocaine seizures?** Major Buck reports that **24 pounds of cocaine have been seized this year, but heroin seizures are minimal**, with little heroin currently being found in the area. He highlights that **fentanyl and methamphetamine are the most prevalent drugs** being seized at the moment
- Commissioner Bryant asks: **How many deaths have been attributed to fentanyl or methamphetamine?** Major Buck notes that **the death toll is above 100, but there has been a downward trend** this year compared to last year. This decline is attributed to the widespread **availability of Narcan, increased education efforts, and a focus on criminal justice interventions**. Major Buck also mentions some **recent successes in prosecuting drug-related deaths**, with two successful prosecutions in the past 60 days.
- Commissioner Beaty asks: **What is the current state of officer recruitment for KCPD?** Major Buck acknowledges a shortage but reports that **the department is nearing a "break-even" point**. The current influx includes around **21 lateral officers expected soon** and a **new class of 20-24 recruits** ready for deployment. Major Buck mentions that recent pay raises and increased focus on recruitment and processing have improved the situation, making KCPD competitive in the regional market.
 - Major Buck estimates that KCPD is currently short around 330-350 officers compared to its peak numbers from 10 years ago. The department's immediate goal is to ensure they have more officers by the end of the year than they started with, and he believes they are on track to achieve that goal.
- Commissioner Arimeta DuPree asks: **How many firearms were recovered from juveniles?** Major Buck explained that while he didn't have exact figures, a **significant number of juvenile arrests involving stolen autos also included firearms**. He will provide more detailed demographics in the next report.
- Commissioner DuPree asks: **What types of firearms were recovered?** Major Buck clarified that the **majority are handguns, many of which have been modified to automatic fire using switches**. He explained that these modified firearms can fire dozens of rounds in seconds and are difficult to control. The KCPD even organized a meeting with regional prosecutors to demonstrate these weapons' capabilities.
- Commissioner DuPree asked: **How are switches or modifications making their way to Kansas City?** Major Buck revealed that many are being **locally produced**, with people using 3D printers and online plans to create the switches. They are **inexpensive to obtain**, typically costing between \$50 and \$90, which makes them easily accessible and contributes to the spread of these dangerous firearms.

- Chief Bob Muenz reported that the Drug Task Force has seen an increase in Fentanyl pills and methamphetamine, while heroin use is declining. He also mentioned the recovery of 57 handguns and 28 rifles, with 13 fully automatic switches seized during drug investigations.
- Chief Muenz discussed efforts in Eastern Jackson County to reduce overdose deaths through Narcan education, particularly in schools like Blue Springs. He mentioned that these efforts have led to a reduction in overdose fatalities and noted that charges have been filed against drug dealers in cases involving overdose deaths.
- He emphasized that the Drug Task Force's work isn't limited to drugs but also addresses the nexus between drugs, stolen vehicles, and violence. He reported an increase in car thefts and vehicle break-ins, with offenders often carrying firearms and engaging in violent confrontations with victims.
- Chief Muenz shared information about a drug bust near the airport involving suspects fleeing from a Highway Patrol stop. He noted that traffickers are increasingly using less traditional routes, such as coming up through California and northern states, to avoid detection.
- Lastly, Chief Muenz highlighted the significant costs and resources involved in long-term drug investigations, requiring extensive hours and manpower from detectives to manage.

COMBAT Commissioners' Discussion Items

- Commissioner Liz Williams raised the issue of attending in-person at the Commission meetings—She suggested finding a day that works for everyone and emphasized the importance of meeting collectively in the Chamber as opposed to attending online. She asked if anyone had opinions on the matter.
 - o Commissioner Larry Beaty agreed with the importance of in-person meetings, recalling how the gallery used to be full when he first became a commissioner years ago.
 - o Commissioner Arimeta DuPree expressed a preference for the hybrid format of the Commission meetings, indicating her support for virtual options alongside in-person attendance.
- Commissioner Williams addressed the vacancies in the Commission, noting that one commissioner had moved out of the area, resulting in a resignation, and another commissioner had completed their last term. She raised the issue of filling these vacancies.
 - o Vince Ortega clarified that the responsibility for selecting new commissioners lies with the county executive. He suggested that Commissioner Williams and he could meet or email the county executive to discuss the matter.
 - o *Note: COMBAT's Deputy Director, Dawna Shumate, has since spoken with Frank White and initiated the process of filling the vacancies.*

NEW BUSINESS:

Presentation by the Department of Corrections - Diana Knapp, Director of Corrections; Michael Cunningham, Deputy Director of Operations; Deloris Wells, Deputy Director of Administration

- Diana Knapp provided a summary of Jackson County's house arrest program and explained that it allows pretrial individuals who don't need detention to be monitored at home-- with some being allowed to leave for work. The program currently serves over 300 individuals, helping manage the jail population, which is close to capacity.

- Knapp clarified that not all participants in the program use ankle bracelets, as some individuals are monitored less intensively. Those who are assigned ankle bracelets are subject to 24/7 GPS tracking, and substance monitoring is also part of the program.
- Commissioner Larry Beaty asks: **What happens if someone violates the terms of the program?** Knapp responds that a **violation report is prepared and submitted to the court**, which then decides whether to keep the individual on supervision.
- Commissioner Beaty asks: **What is the status of the new jail that is being built?** Michael Cunningham confirmed that the project is on schedule. They are working closely with the design and construction team, with a representative liaising with the construction team on-site. The **target turnover date for the jail is early 2026**, possibly around February. Following that, **additional training and preparations will take place to ensure the facility is fully operational within six months**— which will have a capacity to house up to 1,000 inmates.
- Commissioner Arimeta DuPree asks: **Is the Jackson County Detention Center working with federal partners to house pretrial detainees charged by the U.S. government at the new jail? Or will those detainees be housed in other counties?** Diana Knapp clarified that there are **currently no plans to contract out any of the new jail's beds to external jurisdictions**, indicating the facility will focus on housing county detainees.
- Commissioner DuPree asks: **How many inmates are currently being housed in the Jackson County jail?** Diana Knapp reported that the Jackson County Jail's population fluctuates **between 750 and 775** detainees. With an 800-bed capacity, the facility is considered **overcrowded without a 20% vacancy rate for proper management**. Knapp added that the new jail's beds will be dedicated to the county's 16th Circuit Court pretrial population to alleviate overcrowding.
- Commissioner Beaty asks: **What percentage of the COMBAT funding formula is allocated the county jail?** Deloris Wells clarified that the jail receives **\$5,403,000** from COMBAT, which **supports the jail's operations and covers about 85 of the officers on staff**. Diana Knapp noted that this funding comes from a legislation passed in 1995-96, which allocated **12%** to the county jail.

Unaddressed Newspaper Article

- Commissioner Joseph Spalitto raised a concern about an article about COMBAT in the Kansas City Star from July 19th— which he found disturbing, inappropriate, and untrue. He questioned why the commission and COMBAT directors have not addressed the article.
 - Vince Ortega explains that the author of the op-ed piece filed a Sunshine Law request and COMBAT cooperated fully to provide all the information he had requested. Ortega feels that COMBAT has no need to defend itself because the information provided to the author had clearly shown that COMBAT's spending was appropriate and justified.
 - Commissioner Spalitto points out that the article's claim of financial irresponsibility on COMBAT's part cannot be disproved without publicly available financial data. Joe Loudon responds that the funding amounts awarded to each agency are updated on COMBAT's website every year, indicating that the author of the article had not reviewed the available information on their website. He also adds that the author had "represented himself poorly" when contacting COMBAT staff.
 - Loudon expressed concern about focusing too much on one op-ed piece, acknowledging that such articles are common and often critical. He also highlighted

the current election season and other significant political issues, such as tax assessments, which may make it difficult for their message to make a positive impact. He suggested that pushing their agenda to the forefront might not be ideal given the current political landscape.

OLD BUSINESS:

- Commissioner Arimeta DuPree highlighted the need for COMBAT to be more visible in the community, suggesting the creation of a public service announcement (PSA) or a social media campaign to inform taxpayers about their work. She emphasized the importance of promoting the positive initiatives COMBAT is undertaking despite the challenges surrounding crime.
- Commissioner Liz Williams recalled discussions about working with Joe Loudon to create a PSA and increase COMBAT's presence on social media, acknowledging the shift in how people access information.
 - o Joe Loudon confirmed that they are working on a video with an agency but noted concerns about editing the video due to Vince Ortega's upcoming retirement. He also mentioned efforts to improve COMBAT's website and social media engagement, recognizing the need for daily management of social media content.
 - o *Note: Vince Ortega's retirement has been canceled since this meeting.*
- Joseph Spalitto highlights a lack of direct communication between the mayor and COMBAT, questioning whether the mayor has acknowledged or sought input from COMBAT about efforts to curb violence or the organizations it funds.
 - o Vince Ortega clarifies that the mayor is part of the Save KC governing board, which includes monthly meetings and weekly subcommittee discussions. He emphasizes COMBAT's significant role in data collection, social services, assessments, and tracking within the Save KC initiative.
- Joseph Spalitto expresses frustration over the lack of media recognition for COMBAT's contributions, a sentiment echoed by Larry Beaty.
- Liz Williams shares her experience at community events, noting that many residents are unaware of COMBAT's current initiatives and still associate it with its early days. She suggests increased community engagement and outreach to raise awareness and provide resources.
- Vince Ortega agreed wholeheartedly, as this is part of the five (5) year strategic plan that COMBAT Commissioners were involved in and stresses the importance of social media for driving traffic to COMBAT's website and amplifying its messaging. He explains the need for a dedicated social media specialist, as current resources are outdated and insufficient, and shared plans to include the position in the 2025 budget. However, it was eliminated by the Prosecutor's Office.

MOTION:

Meeting adjourned at 11:16 AM

ANNOUNCEMENT:

Next virtual meeting is scheduled for January 14th, 2025 at 10 AM.