

The City of Saint Paul seeks to reimagine emergency response with support from the GPL

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Advancing a “community-first” approach to public safety

During the past year the U.S. saw a significant increase in racial justice activism, including a growing chorus of residents calling on governments to transform public safety systems. The City of Saint Paul, Minnesota has been engaged in this work since 2018, when it started increasing investments in “community-first” approaches to public safety. A central feature of this approach involves prioritizing the input of a diverse collection of community stakeholders and empowering them to contribute to the process of redesigning public safety systems that prevent violence, improve efficiency and restore residents’ well-being.

The City of Saint Paul’s most recent example of this occurred from December 2020 to April 2021, when Mayor Melvin Carter convened the Community-First Public Safety Commission. This Commission was composed of 47 community members, including individuals affiliated with Root & Restore (a social justice advocacy organization), Saint Paul Public Schools, the Saint Paul Police Federation, as well as several other faith-based and/or community organizations and cultural affinity groups.

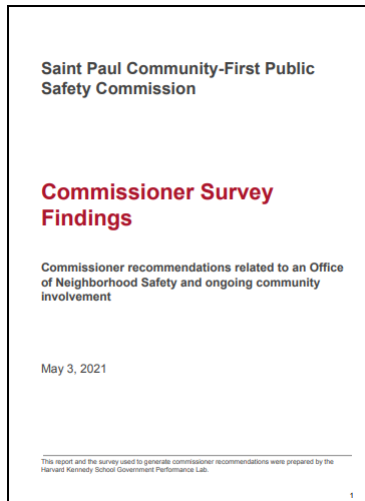
By participating in the Commission, members committed to working together to identify new approaches to delivering public safety. Specifically, the Commission was charged with considering alternative responses to lower-priority 911 emergency calls and the establishment of a city-staffed office devoted to violence prevention and ongoing community involvement (commonly known as Offices of Neighborhood Safety). The Mayor’s Office requested the Government Performance Lab (GPL) help facilitate this Commission in a way that would elevate the voices of all members and result in concrete action steps. Additional support and leadership was provided by Citizens League, a nonprofit organization that empowers Minnesotans to engage in civic life and public policy.

Engaging Commissioners in the research process

The first step the GPL took in supporting this community-led process was to provide the Commission with research and analysis that helped commission members better understand Offices of Neighborhood Safety and the role of community participation in delivering public safety programs. Specifically, the GPL conducted a landscape analysis of 17 Offices of Neighborhood Safety across the country to better understand their histories, structures and programming. Halfway through conducting the landscape analysis, the GPL reached out to Commissioners for their feedback and input to make sure the analysis was on track to address their most pressing questions and surface insights that would be most relevant to their priorities. Throughout this feedback process Commissioners submitted questions, comments, and requests, including a desire to have the analysis

profile specific Offices of Neighborhood Safety that were of particular interest and describe in more detail the programs that were housed in these offices. This real-time feedback was used to inform the remainder of the analysis.

Elevating Commissioners' priorities



Equipped with the insights from the landscape analysis, the GPL team designed and conducted a survey that aimed to capture the perspectives, concerns, and recommendations of all Commission members. From there, the GPL produced a report that incorporates the survey results as well as key insights from the landscape analysis. The report outlines important recommendations of the Commission in a way that points to a clear potential plan of action.

Moving forward, Mayor Carter plans to use the report -- which includes eleven recommendations from Commissioners about the development of an Office of Neighborhood Safety and ongoing community participation -- to inform budget and strategic decisions this spring and summer.

Community-First Public Safety Commission key recommendations:

Creation of a city-staffed office

95% of commissioners recommend creating a city-staffed office focused on violence prevention.

Focus of programming

“Gun Violence” and “Youth Violence” make up the top priority tier for programming. The next tier includes “Group-Based Violence” and “Structural Violence.”

Community participation in the office’s launch and operations

Hiring community members impacted by violence is the top recommendation for community participation, followed by an advisory council and volunteer opportunities.

Community governance

“Strategic Planning” and “Public Meetings” are the top community governance recommendations.

Continue to engage commissioners

95% of commissioners would like to be involved in the implementation of a city-staffed office or the design of ongoing community involvement.

More information, including the full Commission report, can be accessed [here](#).

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