

## MINNEAPOLIS

# Minneapolis crime fighting plan offers carrot or stick to gang members

If violence-prone offenders don't straighten up, they'll be subject to extra scrutiny.

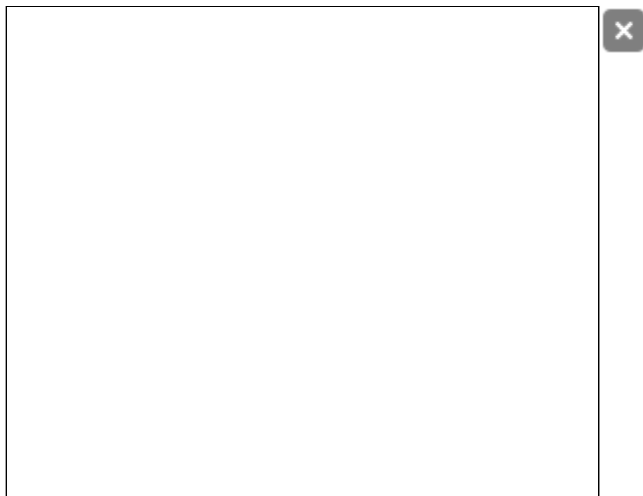
By Libor Jany (<http://www.startribune.com/libor-jany/219430401/>) Star Tribune |

NOVEMBER 24, 2016 — 9:47PM

After a gang-related shootout erupted outside a downtown Minneapolis police station one night in early October, city and law enforcement officials announced they had a plan to defuse street violence with a community-oriented approach that wouldn't just fight crime but would give gang members a chance to straighten out their lives.

At the time, Mayor Betsy Hodges and Police Chief Janeé Harteau said the new initiative goes beyond past efforts — identifying potential chronic offenders and smothering them with attention, not just from law enforcement but also help finding a job and pairing them with a local advocate on call for support 24 hours a day.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been pledged to the effort, including a \$250,000 U.S. Department of Justice grant. Local authorities have been in weekly contact with U.S. Justice Department officials, the first step they say to finding a solution to the city's gang problem.



“From a public health approach, we want to make sure that trauma, particular community trauma, is a major part of the work that we’re doing,” said Sasha Cotton, the city’s youth violence prevention coordinator, who is spearheading the effort. “We know that trauma motivates people to behave differently.”

Under the new approach, called group violence intervention or GVI, those deemed the most likely perpetrators of gun violence will be rounded up for a meeting with police, community and civic leaders and offered a simple ultimatum: Clean up your act or face extra police scrutiny.

But in some of the city’s most dangerous and volatile neighborhoods, community leaders and residents are skeptical that authorities can quell the violence.

Department officials, they say, failed to consult with local nonprofit groups already doing painstaking street work. A lack of community involvement doomed previous efforts to tame gang violence, they say. Others complained that some of the money instead should be distributed to the neediest communities.

Spike Moss, a longtime community organizer, said too little is being done to address some of the broader cultural and social forces that drive crime, such as unemployment, poverty, drugs and the availability of weapons.

“You can walk around the North Side for nine months to look for a good job,” Moss said. “You can walk around the North Side for nine minutes to find a bag of dope.”



ELIZABETH FLORES – STAR TRIBUNE

In October, Minneapolis Police Chief Janee Harteau and Mayor Betsy Hodges held a news conference to address downtown crime

## **Violence amid gang feuds**

Through Nov. 21, 317 people have been shot in Minneapolis, compared with 239 during the same period last year. And while the number of homicides has dipped, aggravated assaults — a crime category that includes shootings and is considered one of the best measures of city safety — are up about 10 percent citywide, to 2,095 from 1,898 in 2015.

On the city's North Side, a bloody feud between rival gangs has flared in recent months, leading to numerous shootings and other violent acts, including a pair of overnight shootings on Oct. 3 that left six people wounded and littered the street outside downtown's First Precinct headquarters with spent shell casings.

The following morning, officials called a hastily arranged news conference to address the bloodshed.

Much of the increase in violence stems from the fact that young people are quicker to resort to gunplay to resolve minor disputes, authorities insisted.

Still, V.J. Smith, of the violence prevention group MAD DADS, is hopeful but not yet convinced the new plan will have an effect.

"We already have everything that it takes to do any type of model that you can think of. Sometimes, when you bring another model from another city, there are attempts to bring the leadership from another city, too," Smith said, pointing out that an attempt to adapt Chicago's successful Ceasefire program to Minneapolis failed.

Local authorities say their new approach takes a different tack from law enforcement's past emphasis on street arrests.

## **Lives back on track?**

Under the group violence intervention program, those who decide to leave the gang life will be offered social services, including education, job training and mental health counseling in exchange for staying out of trouble. The idea is to isolate individuals from their peers who are committing crimes, while helping them get their lives back on track, proponents say.

It's a step back from the tough-on-crime approach of the 1990s that many big cities tried, giving rise to controversial tactics like stop-and-frisk and broken-windows policing. That kind of policing led to a double-digit drop in crime in places like New York City but alienated many minority groups.

"I imagine the New York approach, the sort of deterrent type of approach, is going to [trigger] a lot of lawsuits," said City Council Member Blong Yang, who heads the Public Safety Committee. "On the other hand, the procedural type of justice, critics would say that's a little bit too fluffy."

Minneapolis isn't the first to try the community-based approach. In High Point, N.C., a similar GVI program helped reduce violent crime rates by 64 percent. Cincinnati officials credited its program in part for a 35 percent reduction in gang-related homicides.

In Richmond, Calif., officials started offering gang members checks of up to \$1,000 a month not to commit another gun crime, a controversial approach being copied elsewhere, which some credit for a decline in firearm violence in the northern California city.

## **Privacy questions**

But the programs come amid a growing debate on the use of complex computer algorithms to not only forecast potential crime hot spots, but also determine who is likely to shoot or be shot. The practice, known as predictive policing, has raised the eyebrows of privacy advocates.

"It's also problematic because we're talking somewhat about associations, which are constitutionally protected, and talking about speech, which is constitutionally protected, so using those to predict dangerousness is problematic as well," said Teresa Nelson, legal counsel for the Minnesota chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Police officials have not said how they intend to identify whom to approach for the program, but added that they already are monitoring the most violent offenders.

Minneapolis Deputy Chief Bruce Folkens said those who revert to their old ways will face heightened scrutiny from law enforcement.

“Ultimately, it would be ideal to have gun violence eradicated, but reductions in gun violence is what we are striving for,” he said.

---

**Libor Jany** is the Minneapolis crime reporter for the Star Tribune. He joined the newspaper in 2013, after stints in newsrooms in Connecticut, New Jersey, California and Mississippi. He spent his first year working out of the paper's Washington County bureau, focusing on transportation and education issues, before moving to the Dakota County team.

libor.jany@startribune.com      612-673-4064      StribJany