Mayor's Task Force for a Safer Virginia Beach
Meeting #1 Summary
July 6, 2026

BACKGROUND

The Mayor's Task Force for a Safer Virginia Beach has been assembled by Mayor Robert M. "Bobby" Dyer to engage the community and stakeholders and develop recommendations to ensure our community remains a safe place for our residents and a desired tourist destination for our visitors. The Task Force is anticipated to complete work in late 2026 and then submit its recommendations to City Council for consideration.

The Task Force will have six meetings that will take place at City Hall, Rm. 1009/1010, except for the September 3rd meeting, which will take place at the Voter Registrar Building:

- July 6, 1-5 p.m.
- July 21, 3-7 p.m.
- Aug. 31, 1-5 p.m.
- Sept. 3, 1-5 p.m. Voter Registrar's Office. 500 Studio Drive, Training Room 200
- Sept. 28, 1-5 p.m.
- Oct. 29, 1-5 p.m.

OVERVIEW/INTRODUCTIONS

The Task Force convened its first meeting on Monday, July 6, 2026 at City Hall. This meeting was attended by City staff, facilitators from Berkley Group and the Miles Agency, and 19 appointed Task Force members, with Mayor Dyer providing opening remarks. Mayor Dyer thanked the Task Force members and emphasized the importance of this initiative. He highlighted group dynamics, encouraged members to connect individually, and stressed that building positive relationships and informal interactions are vital for success.

Additionally, Mayor's Task Force for a Safer Virginia Beach Co-Chairs the Hon. Senator New Craig and the Hon. Delegate Michael Faggans welcomed the task force members and offered their expectations for the task force work.

Task Force Attendance:

- The Hon. Christie New Craig, Co-Chair
- The Hon. Michael Feggans, Co-Chair
- Alvie Culanding
- Chuck Cayton
- The Hon. Colin Stolle
- Dr. Cynthia Romero, M.D.
- D. Nachnani
- Daniel Heatwole
- Debbie Lou Hague
- Gabe Niles
- Gregory Smith
- Jamal Gunn
- John Zirkle
- Kevin Will
- M. Conrad Agresti
- Melissa Lukeson
- Paul Neudigate
- Robert Jamison
- Dr. Veronica Coleman

City Staff Present:

- Mayor Robert "Bobby" Dyer (Introductory Remarks)
- Monica Croskey (Deputy City Manager; Task Force Support)
- Dana Harmeyer (Deputy City Attorney)
- Brent McKenzie (Legislative Affairs Liaison)
- Raven Emanuel (Task Force Admin Support/Notetaker)

Facilitators Present (Berkley Group):

- Eric Campbell (Executive Manager)
- Laura Hamilton (Executive Manager)
- Drew Williams (CEO & Owner)
- Tori Haynes (Senior Planner; Task Force Admin Support)

Facilitators Present (Miles Agency):

- Delceno Miles

DCM Croskey presented a video addressing recent "teen take-overs" and underscored the significance of the task force in preventing and mitigating such incidents in Virginia Beach. Task Force members then introduced themselves and shared their aspirations for the meetings moving forward. DCM Croskey proceeded to introduce the facilitators: Delceno Miles from the Miles Agency, who will be facilitating three upcoming community Listening Sessions, and Eric Campbell and Laura Hamilton from the Berkley Group, who will be facilitating Task Force meetings.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Facilitator Laura Hamilton outlined rules for interaction and summarized the task force's purpose, leadership, membership, and timeline. The Task Force established the following ground rules to promote respectful, productive, and collaborative discussions.

How We Engage With Each Other

- Assume good intent
- Once voice at a time
- Speak from your own experiences
- Challenge ideas not people
- Engage when recognized
- It's okay to agree to disagree
- Don't be afraid to get to know each other

How We Handle Information

- Public meetings but no public comment (public comment will be gathered at Listening Sessions)
- Pre-reads matter, come prepared
- Listen to understand, don't just listen to respond
- Share summaries and meeting info with our communities
- Communicate meeting discussions accurately and transparently

How We Manager Our Time and Process

- Respect agenda and the clock
- Be present and minimize distractions
- Deliberate but not dominant speaking
- Consider brevity
- Don't belabor the point

How We Manage Our Time and Process

- Consensus is the goal
- Stay focused on what's actionable for Virginia Beach
- Aim for realistic, non-partisan consensus
- Consider all of Virginia Beach, not just the Oceanfront
- Don't limit to legislative solutions – local programs and initiatives should be included as well

RAPID THOUGHT CAPTURE

Facilitator Eric Campbell led an exercise to collect a range of perspectives from the task force, centered on four key focus areas in Virginia Beach. The following questions served as the framework for the facilitated discussion. The summaries below highlight key takeaways developed by Task Force members.

1. Problems/Issues: What is broken or concerning about public safety in Virginia Beach right now?

- Communication: Communication about City programs isn't reaching everyone, so those resources may be under-utilized by those who could benefit from them. The language used to communicate the city's issues can also be improved. For example, when discussing violence statistics, it should be clarified whether those numbers cover gun violence, domestic violence, etc. for community awareness.

- Funding: Limited funding is available to support the City's vulnerable populations and address the public safety impacts associated with pop-up mass gatherings.
- Legislation and Enforcement: Existing state laws and local ordinances are not sufficiently deterring gun violence or large, unsanctioned gatherings. Some members also discussed how recent changes to state law have reduced certain proactive enforcement tools previously available to law enforcement, limiting opportunities to intervene before incidents escalate. Participants further noted that Virginia's Dillon Rule limits the City's ability to adopt local ordinances tailored to address these issues.
- Media Narratives and Public Perceptions: Negative narratives about the oceanfront or particular neighborhoods dominate news cycles disproportionately to actual data and experiences, leading to negative perceptions of the city as a whole.
- Mental Health: More resources to address mental health are needed.
- Messaging: advertising locally vs. outside markets
- Parents and Role Models: There is a lack of positive role models and parental supervision for youths.
- Police Staffing: More staffing is needed at the police department and sheriff's office. There is also a need for crisis intervention professionals to be on law enforcement staffs.
- Regional Challenges: Violence from other areas spills over into Virginia Beach.
- Respect for Authority: Youth are not respecting rules or authority and do not fear consequences.
- Social Media: Social media is being used to coordinate pop-up mass gatherings that overwhelm local resources and contribute to violent incidents.
- Societal Issues: Balancing political differences, constitutional rights, community violence impacts, and the needs of vulnerable populations with the public's expectation of public safety remains an ongoing challenge.
- Youth Opportunities and Programming: There is a lack of youth programming and entertainment options – kids and teens don't have enough positive activities after school and during breaks to keep them busy when parents are at work.

2. Opportunities: What assets, relationships, or gaps can be leveraged?

- Availability of mental health first aid training
- Business community
- Communication with resort area shareholders
- Faith-based organizations
- Local nonprofits

- Local schools and universities to improve communication with young people
- Parks and recreation centers and staff
- Police partnerships and engagement
- Relationship with General Assembly
- Social media influencers to promote positive events and perceptions of the city
- Under-utilized public services

3. Solutions: What should the City do?

- Economic and Community Development:
    - Develop historically challenged locations
    - Develop year-round activation activities at the Oceanfront
- Education and Communication:
    - Educate the public on what the city expects and hold them accountable
    - Help improve family dynamics financially – create direct connections to jobs
    - Make law-related education mandatory for all youth
    - Use SROs to help educate students on ordinances and law – visits to each government class, etc.
- Infrastructure:
    - Atlantic Avenue improvements
    - Improve transportation for youth to get to available programs – school partnerships to use buses may be an option
    - Reduce traffic to the Oceanfront through offsite parking lots with free shuttles to Oceanfront
- Mediation:
    - Create free access to mediation services to assist in resolving community disputes
- Ordinances and Legislation:
    - Accountability – "throw the book" at those who break the law as a deterrent to others
    - Code changes to provide law enforcement the tools they need to deal with problematic activity
    - Establish a violent/repeat offender registry

  - Hold parents of juveniles involved in crimes accountable (i.e., fines)
  - Hold the standard for a higher guest experience – zero tolerance for foolishness
  - Increase consequences and penalties for instigators as a deterrent to others
  - Increase parental accountability for the actions of minors
  - Ordinances to prevent gathering of youth (prevent transportation, access to businesses, no gun zones, etc.)
  - Pass legislation to address gun storage and straw purchases
  - Trespass laws
- Partnerships:
  - Follow the lead of other localities that address gun violence
  - General Assembly
  - "Hire the hackers" – engage natural leaders
  - Partner with violence interrupters in areas of concern
- Planning and Listening:
  - Don't make rash decisions
  - Listen to groups and organizations that have been doing the work already
  - Plan with intention
- Police Presence:
  - Increase police presence
- Programming and Resources:
  - Better messaging for existing programs
  - Boredom lends to issues, providing more activities and things to do as a proactive approach
  - Coordinate disparate or similar programs
  - Create agreements among agencies to provide supports and track connections to resources
  - Develop more inclusive year-round programming for visitors and residents
  - Expand the "Parks After Dark" concept to neighborhood recreation centers

  - Improve notification of local programs and events
  - Provide resources that connect positive role models/mentors with youth and families that need help

- Public Funds:
  - Fully fund budget requests of organizations that contribute to safety goals – library, police, schools, etc.
- Rewards and Incentives:
  - Reward those that are bringing communities together and creating safe spaces
- Youth Outreach:
  - Engage youth leaders and organizers by channeling their leadership and organizational skills into positive community activities – redirect mischievous behavior into positive behavior
  - Establish a Mayor's Youth Task Force
  - Establish a network of mentoring opportunities for youth and young adults through local organizations
  - Listen and act to youth voices
  - Work with teens with a purpose – create leaders in youth communities

4. Assets: What is already working in Virginia Beach that we should protect?

- Community support
- Diverse community
- Existing programming such as Parks After Dark and Next Wave
- Festivals/events/public activations throughout the city
- Oceanfront business community
- Oceanfront seasonal activation program
- Parks and recreation centers
- School resource officers in public schools – develop positive relationships with youth
- Strong collaborative relationships between city staff and agencies
- Technology such as shot spotter camera systems

- Tourism
- Skill building/workforce programs
- Virginia Beach City Public Schools – academic and career/technical education programs; transportation partnerships using school buses
- Virginia Beach Correctional Center – outreach and rehabilitation programs
- Virginia Beach Police Department
- Virginia Beach Public Library

LISTENING SESSIONS PREPARATION

Delceno Miles from the Miles Agency will facilitate three listening sessions taking place from July 28 to July 30. These sessions are designed to involve the community through specific focus groups.

Things to consider prior to the three scheduled listening sessions:

- Who needs to be there?
- What questions need to be asked?

Task Force members were asked to identify community organizations, leaders, and trusted voices that could help encourage broad public participation in the listening sessions and represent the voice of those who cannot attend. Members were also asked to provide questions for each listening session.

Listening Session #1 – Civil Rights and Faith Community – July 28th

- Voices to Include:
    - Black Lives Matter 757
    - Calos Coalition
    - Calvary Revival Church
    - Catholic churches
    - Chapel Pantry
    - Disconnected veterans, especially younger vets (those who served at age 18-20 and less than 10 years)
    - Ebenezer Baptist
    - Enoch Baptist Church
    - Filipino community

- First Baptist Church (Norfolk)
- Hampton Roads Pride
- Human Rights Commission
- Interdenominational Minsters Conference
- Judeo-Christian Outreach Center
- Mount Olive Baptist Church
- NAACP
- New Hope Baptist Church
- Parent associations
- Pleasant Grove Baptist Church
- Rehobeth Baptist Church
- Star of the Sea Church
- T.E.A.M. L.A.M.B.
- Teens With A Purpose
- The New Jerusalem COGIC
- The Mount
- Urban League of Young Professionals
- Young Life

- Questions to Ask:
  - Are you feeling connected to your community? Need resources?
  - Do you feel included in the city?
  - Do you feel safe across Virginia Beach & if not, where & why? Thoughts on solutions.
  - How can we bring in youth who need help?
  - How can youth be influenced?
  - How can the City better engage with our youth/young adult residents/visitors?
  - How can they help/volunteer?

- How do you instill respect in youth?
- How has the City failed your community in keeping you safe?
- How to get youth to respect themselves?
- Rights vs. responsibilities
- Send meeting info and ask that the meeting be shared during church announcements.
- What activities will youth/young adults be attracted to?
- What are influences to youth?
- What can the community do to instill values in youth?
- What changes in approach by law enforcement would help?
- What community would youth like to see and grow into?
- What inhibits youth growth?
- What is creating the violence in Virginia Beach?
- What other measures of success on safer communities need to be considered beyond crime statistics?

Listening Session #2 – Business Community and Oceanfront – July 29th

- Voices to Include:
  - Atlantic Avenue Association
  - Advocates for the unhoused
  - Atlantic Avenue Association
  - Central Business District Association
  - Chamber of Commerce
  - Civic Leagues – e.g., Shadowlawn, Old Beach, Croatan
  - Convention and Visitors Bureau
  - Dough Boy's
  - Fun Family Xperience Theater
  - Hampton Roads Workforce Council

- Hanbury Architects
- Jump parks/skating rinks
- Kemps River Crossing Shopping Center
- Latino business community
- Lynnhaven Mall
- Marijuana Dispensary Distributor Association
- Oceanfront Inn
- Private parking lot operators
- Residents of the Oceanfront or nearby
- Resort Advisory Commission
- Small Business Development Center
- Style Rite Barber Shop
- ViBe Creative District
- Virginia ABC
- Virginia Beach Hotel Association
- Virginia Beach Restaurant Association
- Virginia Beach Vision

- Questions to Ask:
  - A year from now, how could you tell that your community is safer?
  - Do you have any ideas that could help with public safety?
  - Do you really want diverse demographics at the Oceanfront or only "certain" families?
  - Does your business feel safe?
  - For national or global brands/companies: What do you think of the Virginia Beach market and public safety?
  - For Virginia ABC: Why not enforce pilferage laws?
  - Hours of operation?

- What are individual businesses willing to do to promote a safer community?
- What are the barriers to success to growing a small business?
- What are you scared of when groups of youths come in?
- What are your suggestions to improve perception that the Oceanfront is not safe?
- What can be done to improve safety around your business?
- What changes in policing would make you and your employees feel safer?
- What could make you or your employees feel safer in your community?
- What does public safety mean to you?
- What is your perception of public safety in VB?
- What kinds of problems does your business face and what are your thoughts on how to fix it?
- What safety concerns worry you the most?

Listening Session #3 – Community – July 30th

- Voices to Include:
  - Civic Leagues
  - Homeowner/condo associations
  - Incarcerated population
  - Military
  - Moms Demand Action
  - Moms groups
    - 757 Progressive Moms
    - The Landsby (thelandsby.co)
    - VB Moms Group
  - Parents
  - People age 38 and under
  - Previous offenders
  - Professionals who work with offenders

  - Recreation center leadership
  - Life Change Institute
  - Teachers/educators
  - Tourists and visitors to understand their needs and what they are looking for when visiting the Oceanfront
  - Victims of shooting violence
  - Virginia Beach City Public Schools
  - Young teens/young adults
  - Younger Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) voices
  - Youth violence organizations

- Questions to Ask:
  - Does Virginia Beach want to have fun places in the Town Center?
  - How can we channel your time in a positive way?
  - How can we help the military child be successful in the community?
  - How can we make you feel safe around all areas of Virginia Beach?
  - How do we provide mentors to more youth?
  - How safe do you feel your neighborhood is? Compared to the Oceanfront, Town Center, etc.?
  - How would you characterize your clients' thoughts on public safety?
  - What are we not doing as a city to help curb violence?
  - What drives violence?

CONTEXT SETTING

Following the facilitated discussion, Mr. Dana Harmeyer, Deputy City Attorney, presented a Legislative Overview, explaining Virginia's Dillon Rule and the powers expressly granted to local governments, as well as the limitations on what Virginia Beach can legally address in local ordinances. Mr. Brent McKenzie, Director of Legislative Affairs, provided an overview of the legislative process for how a bill becomes a law in the General Assembly. Mr. McKenzie also discussed the City's recent legislative efforts to provide local governments with additional authority and tools to manage pop-up mass gatherings (HB778), similar to the authority already available for permitted special events.

The meeting concluded with Chief Neudigate, Police Chief of the Virgina Beach Police Department, giving an overview of the city's crime statistics. Chief Neudigate noted that, based on per capita homicide rates, Virginia Beach remains one of the safest cities in the nation among communities of comparable size. Further, in 2025, violent crime rates within the city were the lowest in the last five years. Despite these positive trends, the emergence of popup mass gatherings has presented new challenges for addressing disruptive behavior and preventing violence. While maintaining an appropriate police presence remains an important component of public safety, Chief Neudigate noted that enforcement alone cannot deter all criminal activity and that additional strategies and tools are needed.

Task Force members discussed current public safety challenges, opportunities for collaboration, and potential solutions to strengthen community safety in Virginia Beach. Participants also developed guiding principles for productive dialogue, emphasized the importance of consensus-building and actionable recommendations, and identified priority topics and stakeholder groups to inform the Task Force's upcoming community Listening Sessions.

KEY THEMES

Three key themes emerged during the first meeting's discussions:

 **Support Youth and Strengthen Community Connections**	 **Build on Existing Community Assets and Partnerships**	 **Take a Comprehensive Approach to Public Safety**
Participants consistently identified the need to expand positive opportunities for youth through year-round programming, recreational activities, mentorship, and stronger connections with schools, families, and community organizations. Discussions also emphasized improving access to activities, fostering youth leadership, and understanding the factors that influence young people's decisions and behaviors.	Participants recognized that Virginia Beach already possesses strong community assets that can be leveraged to improve public safety, including businesses, schools, parks and recreation, libraries, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, neighborhood organizations, and existing City programs. Task Force members emphasized strengthening collaboration among these partners and ensuring that future public engagement includes diverse voices representing all areas of the community.	Participants emphasized that improving public safety will require a multifaceted strategy rather than a single solution. Discussions identified opportunities related to police staffing, mental health resources, education, communication, community programming, economic development, infrastructure, partnerships, and legislative or ordinance changes. Task Force members also highlighted the importance of using data and public input to develop practical recommendations that address the root causes of safety concerns while preserving Virginia Beach as a welcoming, family-friendly community.

CLOSING COMMENTS

The Hon. New Craig and the Hon. Michael Feggans, Task Force Co-Chairs, expressed their appreciation to all participants, acknowledged the groundwork that has been established, and conveyed optimism regarding the future direction of the Task Force.

Meeting ended at 5:00 p.m.