Mayor's Task Force for a Safer Virginia Beach

Final Report & Recommendations

November 2026

Ensuring Virginia Beach remains a safe community and desired tourist destination

CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH

VirginiaBeach.gov/saferVB

Message from the Co-Chairs

The Honorable
Senator Christie New Craig

The Honorable
Delegate Michael Feggans

Virginia Beach routinely ranks as one of the safest cities of its size; maintaining this distinction requires collaboration and partnerships. As a Task Force our goal was clear, hear from our neighbors and local businesses on their thoughts about community safety, leverage evidence-based practices from peers, and engage in productive dialogue to develop recommendations on further strengthening Virginia Beach's safety for the 450,000 residents who call VB home and the more than 14 million annual visitors whose economic impact benefits both the local community and the Commonwealth. Over the course of six meetings, three listening sessions, a public survey, and various community outreach efforts, the Task Force has developed 27 recommendations that offer pathways to ensure Virginia Beach remains a community and destination of choice. Similar to our community, the Task Force represented diversity in perspectives, lived experiences, and opinions on how best to strengthen community safety. The Task Force's efforts reflect the very best of collaborative public service. It is with great pride and gratitude that we formally submit these recommendations to the Virginia Beach City Council for its consideration.

Task Force Members

- **Alvie Culanding**, Chief Deputy, Virginia Beach Sheriff's Office
- **Chuck Cayton**, Chair, Resort Advisory Commission (RAC)
- **The Honorable Colin Stolle**, Virginia Beach Commonwealth Attorney
- **Dr. Cynthia Romero,** MD, M. Foscue Brock Institute, Brock Virginia Health Sciences at ODU
- **D. Nachnani**, President, Atlantic Avenue Association
- **Daniel Heatwole**, President, Central Business District Association (CBDA)
- **Debbie Lou Hague**, Virginia Beach Restaurant Association
- **Gabe Niles**, DJ, Producer, Creative
- **Gregory Smith**, Court Services Unit Director, Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice
- **Jamal Gunn**, Chair, Human Rights Commission
- **John Zirkle**, President, Virginia Beach Hotel Association
- **Kevin Will**, President & CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs of Southeast Virginia
- **M. Conrad "Connie" Agresti**, President, Citizen's Advisory Committee Second Precinct
- **Melissa Lukeson**, Community Organizer, COVA Coalition
- **Paul Neudigate**, Chief, Virginia Beach Police Department
- **Robert "Bobby" Jamison**, Director of Support Services, Virginia Beach City Public Schools
- **Dr. Veronica Coleman**, Pastor, New Jerusalem Ministries

The Mayor's Charge

During Spring 2026, there were two separate incidents of mass violence at the Oceanfront. In response, Mayor Robert M. "Bobby" Dyer convened the Mayor's Task Force for a Safer Virginia Beach and charged it with developing specific, actionable, and community-rooted recommendations that ensure Virginia Beach remains one of the safest cities in the nation.

How We Got Here

The Task Force's recommendations were informed by community input, research, and data. The Task Force identified its final recommendations after discussion and iterative prioritization exercises that used seven strategic pillars (Youth Engagement, Community Partnerships, Environmental & Place-Based, Accountability & Enforcement, Resort Area Spring Season, Legislation & Policy, and Communications) to organize and work through ideas.

Hearing from the Community

3	73	440	27	Targeted
community listening sessions	listening session attendees	community survey respondents	completed Boys & Girls Club questionnaires	engagement with incarcerated young adults

The Task Force hosted three professionally facilitated listening sessions that targeted community members, civil rights and faith-based stakeholders, and business and resort stakeholders. A community survey was also launched to allow for even greater participation. Additionally, the Task Force conducted targeted engagements that included interviewing incarcerated young adults in the Virginia Beach Jail, getting feedback from youth at the Boys & Girls Club, and interviewing young adults at the StandUp for Kids Drop-in Center located at the Oceanfront (StandUp for Kids is a nonprofit that serves unaccompanied homeless at-risk youth and young parents with children of their own).

Following the Facts

The Task Force received briefings on Virginia Beach crime statistics. The briefings were designed to offer data to inform Task Force discussion and ideation. The data show Virginia Beach has the lowest homicide rates among its national population peer group. Data also show Part I Violent Crime is at a 5-year low both citywide and at the Oceanfront. The Task Force also examined victim and suspect data which show that a disproportionate number of victims and suspects are between the ages of 18-24.

Scanning the Space

The Task Force reviewed evidence-based evaluations of programs designed to reduce violence, including reviews of violence interruption programs from across the country. The Task Force also reviewed recommendations from past regional efforts that examined strategies for reducing violence, including materials from the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission's violence prevention roundtables. Additionally, the Task Force received briefings on previous legislative efforts to define and regulate community safety zones (formerly known as "pop-up" events).

Learn More

You can review the community input, crime data, evidence-based peer evaluations, and Task Force meeting recaps at the Task Force's website at VirginiaBeach.gov/saferVB.

Task Force Recommendations

Below are the Task Force's final recommendations for strengthening communitywide and Oceanfront safety.

Resort Area Spring Season

Strengthen Communications + Engage in Brand Management Locally

A. Develop a communications strategy that focuses on countering the disproportionate negative media coverage of the Oceanfront.
   - Crime data show that violent crime is at a 5-year low citywide and at the Oceanfront.

B. Inform the public of behaviors the City expects.
   - Develop a short video that features diverse community representatives highlighting community values and desired positive behaviors; make the video available for broad use across the community (e.g., hotels, restaurants, individual social media sharing).

Better Manage the Resort Area's Physical Footprint

C. Each Friday and Saturday during the Spring season temporarily convert portions of Atlantic Ave. into a pedestrian mall to create an open streets concept, and partner with Beach Events to program the space with entertainment.

D. Similar to airports, sporting events, and concerts, establish ridesharing pick-up and drop-off zones.

E. Establish and/or refine hours of use for the City's open spaces/parks located at the Oceanfront.

Enhance the Resort Area's Physical Appearance

F. Move forward with Atlantic Avenue improvements that address infrastructure and the pedestrian experience.

G. Ensure consistent enforcement of business property standards resulting in cleaner storefronts, secured vacant buildings, and better lighting in parking lots.
   - There is a perception among some that enforcement is not evenly applied across business types (e.g., hotels, restaurants, retail stores). Consistent enforcement will improve the overall appearance of the Oceanfront.
   - Consider having multidisciplinary compliance teams (e.g., fire, health, code enforcement) to provide for efficient and comprehensive inspections. Enforcement should be balanced with pragmatism so as not to impede business viability.

H. Enhance and continue commercial façade grants.
   - Continue with the lower matching requirement and promote that the matching requirement has been lowered.

Strengthen Public Safety through Partnerships

I. Partner with violence interrupters at the Oceanfront, and potentially citywide.
   - Violence interrupters should be leveraged for prevention and in partnership with law enforcement, not in place of law enforcement.
   - Consider incorporating reporting requirements to track activity and impact.

J. Collaborate with aspiring event organizers to develop more structured, unstructured events while also providing a pathway for entrepreneurial development.
   - Consider establishing an Events and Entertainment Incubator/Cohort in which The HIVE and the Resort Management Office partner to: (a) provide training on the special events process, (b) offer listen & learn sessions that feature local established companies, and (c) allow for a capstone project in which the cohort produces an event for an identified City space for a specific day/defined hours.
   - Consider identifying an area for semi-structured events for which organizers could sign up/pitch ideas for their event. Events would be small scale in nature.

K. Enforce alcohol overserving laws at bars and clubs more consistently; hold establishments accountable for patron behavior tied to nightlife incidents.

Broader Community

Legislation & Policy

L. Advocate for HB778 or successor community safety zone legislation that includes the ability to establish no-gun zones near entertainment districts and the ability for cost recovery from pop-up event organizers.

M. Maintain citywide curfew for unaccompanied minors.

N. Seek legislative authority for law enforcement to be able to use drones for crowd management.
   - Rationale & Context: Currently law enforcement must wait until after an incident occurs to be able to use drones. Seek legislation that allows communities with populations of 300,000 or more to deploy drones for safety and security.

Enhance Mental Health Infrastructure

O. Request that the General Assembly fund a Virginia Beach pilot program to establish an integrated mental health model that increases accessibility to mental health professionals and available bed space.
   - Rationale & Context: Each year, the Virginia Beach Police Department responds to over 220,000 calls made to 911. Approximately 2% of these are mental health related calls; however, given the current challenges within the mental healthcare ecosystem, these calls account for 11% of VBPD dedicated patrol time. In addition to the strain placed on law enforcement resources, the current system does not efficiently meet the needs of those who are experiencing mental health crises. A pilot would enable Virginia Beach to replicate models deployed in jurisdictions in other states that allow for a more streamlined and empathetic process.

P. VBPD should move forward with utilizing Special Conservators of the Peace to relieve sworn police officers from custodial and transport duties for Temporary Detention Orders and Emergency Custody Orders.

Q. Expand the Mobile Co-Responders Teams (MCRT), a partnership between Virginia Beach Police Department and the Human Services Department, and request that the General Assembly increase funding for the regional Mobile Crisis Response, a non-police healthcare intervention.

Enhance Communications + Marketing

R. Leverage the City's communication mediums to develop and implement an educational campaign on gun storage safety, being sure to highlight existing tax incentives offered by the Commonwealth and storage device initiatives offered by the Virginia Beach Police Department and Virginia Beach Sheriff's Office.

S. Consolidate or streamline the City's various apps/digital sites (e.g., VB Connect, VB Go, Ages & Stages, and Visit VB Experiences page) and then promote the resulting streamlined app or hub page to improve overall awareness for residents and tourists.

- Rationale & Context: The City seems to have several apps/digital sites that appear disjointed and/or duplicative. Consider streamlining to a single app or implementing app/site designs that allow for easy navigation between the various apps/sites (e.g., a link that leads to a single hub/webpage).

T. Use social media influencers to promote positive events, programs, and perceptions of Virginia Beach, being sure to leverage the influencers to reach local youth and young adults.

Invest in Youth & Young Adult Opportunities

U. Offer and support youth and young adult apprenticeships and career training.

- Rationale & Context: Community input noted the importance of youth being able to see possibilities for their future. Not only should the City establish its own apprenticeship program, but it should also take a lead role in encouraging and assisting other local employers and organizations with setting up their own programs. The City should partner with Virginia Beach City Public Schools in this effort.

V. Increase youth's access to jobs and programs by providing or funding youth transportation and microtransit options.

- Rationale & Context: Community input noted the current transportation challenges youth face when trying to access opportunities. From funding rideshare vouchers to initiating discussions on opportunities for more creative use of Virginia Beach City Public Schools' buses, the Task Force encourages the City to intentionally lean into this space to address the transportation challenges faced by VB youth.

W. Leverage youth-centered digital platforms and mobile apps to assist with peer-to-peer connections and to raise awareness of existing youth and young adults' programs and events.

Environmental Design

X. Enhance street lighting.
   - Pursue smart lighting at the Oceanfront (including in parking lots) which would allow for greater illuminance when needed.
   - Develop a community campaign to inform the public about the importance of reporting street light outages and how to report them (e.g., who they should contact, how to contact them, what information they should gather to effectively report the outage).

Expand Transportation Options

Y. Build out a comprehensive citywide microtransit strategy.

Be an Employer of Choice

Z. Ensure starting salaries for police officers are competitive with the regional market.

Community Partnerships

AA. Enhance community partnerships by creating a community partnerships hub that can assist with matching residents with community resources (e.g., mental health providers, volunteer opportunities, housing resources).
   - Consider partnering with or supporting efforts such as resources757.org (https://www.resources757.org/).

Where to Next

The Task Force's recommendations provide a mixture of short- and long-term initiatives that will require varying levels of planning, funding, partnerships, and additional decisions by the Mayor, City Council, City staff and the General Assembly. The Task Force recommends that implementation not disappear into day-to-day operations after the report is issued. We recommend that the Mayor, City Council, and City leadership select a handful of recommendations to focus on this Fiscal Year and provide semi-annual progress updates on where they stand with considering the remaining recommendations.