

VICE CHAIR

- Public Works Committee

MEMBER

- Anti-Graffiti Policy Committee
- Judiciary and Legislation Committee



ROBERT G. DONOVAN
Alderman, 8th District

PUBLIC SAFETY IN MILWAUKEE: THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT FOR A POSITIVE FUTURE

The problems currently facing the city of Milwaukee are many and profound. They include a stubbornly high crime rate, multigenerational poverty, joblessness, breakdown of the family, a floundering education system, the housing foreclosure crisis, widespread drug abuse... the list goes on and on. None of these major problems can be solved overnight, but it's imperative that the community adopts and strives to implement a plan to address each one of them.

These problems are so profound that all members of the community must engage in addressing them. Everyone from government, the religious community and community-based organizations to foundations, businesses and individuals will need to be involved in one way or another; their "buy-in" is critical to the success of our efforts to address these problems. This is why the plans must be simple, straightforward and use strategies that have been proven effective. They must be plans that residents of Milwaukee can easily understand and relate to, and which they will believe in and wholeheartedly support.

I have long believed that the problem that must be addressed before any others is public safety or, specifically, the lack of it. Crime is the overarching problem affecting the entire community and holding it back from reaching its full potential. The crime rate is simply too high in too many Milwaukee neighborhoods, and has led to a culture of fear, hopelessness and disinvestment. Without a marked improvement in the public safety of the community, no efforts to address any of Milwaukee's other major problems – low educational attainment, high unemployment, widespread poverty, disinvestment – can be successful.

It's important to point out that we are dealing not only with the reality of crime but the perception of it as well. While the reality of major crime generally affects a finite number of neighborhoods, the perception of crime impacts the entire community.

With this in mind, I believe it is essential that Milwaukee develops a comprehensive plan to address public safety. For a variety of reasons – indifference, other priorities, political considerations – many Milwaukee leaders have, for years, failed to put forth such a plan, even though the success of the community depends on it. We must first stabilize, and then reduce, the crime rate in the many Milwaukee neighborhoods where public safety is a serious concern. Therefore, I am offering the following 8-point initiative as the framework for a common-sense approach to addressing a complex, profound problem.

Each component of this proposal has proven to be successful in its own right in improving public safety. Implemented together, the components can make an even bigger difference in the community. We need only look at New York City and the success of former Mayor Rudy

Giuliani and former Police Commissioner Bill Bratton's multi-pronged crime-reduction strategy implemented two decades ago. That city now has the lowest crime rate of the nation's 25 largest cities and in 2012 recorded an all-time low murder rate.

By striving to emulate New York City's success, Milwaukee can also make lasting, significant improvements to public safety. Without those improvements, the future of our city looks grim, as disinvestment and middle-class flight continue unabated. But by getting its crime problem under control, Milwaukee could have a very bright future indeed. A safe community is attractive to businesses and residents alike, bringing new investments and resources that reduce the poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and other social ills that currently plague this city.

I believe the following common sense action plan, which already incorporates a number of efforts the Mayor and Chief Flynn have supported, can, if embraced wholeheartedly by all segments of the community, go a long way at improving Milwaukee's safety.

TAKE BACK MILWAUKEE A PUBLIC SAFETY PLAN FOR A GREAT CITY

1. CREATE "I PLEDGE MILWAUKEE" INITIATIVE

Under Philadelphia's "I Pledge" campaign, residents of that city are encouraged to commit to making it a better place by pledging to fight violence, give a few hours per month for community service, mentor young people, get to know their neighbors, etc. – the list of possibilities is endless. The "I Pledge" campaign recognizes that the power of a city lies in its people, and in particular, their collective hopes, fears, choices and actions. The goal of this initiative is to encourage residents to choose service over selfishness, and to pledge the actions, time, money and other commitments necessary to make the community a better place for themselves, their families, their neighbors and all city residents. Milwaukee needs to follow Philadelphia's example: by successfully organizing an "I Pledge Milwaukee" campaign, we can engage all members of the community (individuals, businesses, foundations, churches and so on) in doing something positive for their city. Participants could pledge things as simple as starting block watches, cleaning up their neighborhoods, joining neighborhood associations or checking on elderly neighbors. Others with less time and but more financial resources could pledge a financial contribution to a local cause that improves the community, including the some of those programs/initiatives described below. I truly believe that everyone has something to offer the community, no matter how rich or poor, powerful or humble. I Pledge Milwaukee could be the vehicle to help them channel their abilities, interests and resources in a way that improves the city around them. There's no limit to what this community can accomplish if we're all pulling in the same direction!

2. EXPAND "OPERATION IMPACT" PROGRAM CITYWIDE

Operation impact is a multi-faceted, comprehensive approach to reducing crime and disorder employed in a target area on Milwaukee's South Side. Components of the program include: 1) partnering with We Energies to improve lighting in and near alleys

and other locations in the target area; 2) expanding the use of surveillance cameras on private business properties, and I'm pleased to point out that largely due to the efforts of Ald. Murphy, the surveillance camera component is expanding to other areas throughout Milwaukee. 3) paying for additional overtime for beat cops in the target area; and 4) operating a "Neighborhood Ambassador Program" in which community-service workers assist with such activities as graffiti removal, litter pick-up and distribution of fliers and other information. Supported largely by private contributions, Operation Impact has been a stunning success for the targeted area. It has prevented and reduced criminal activity, thereby enhancing residents' and visitors' sense of security and neighborhood quality of life. This has, in turn, led to other positive changes in the community, including new and expanded businesses, housing investment and renovation, improved property maintenance, and so forth. In effect, Operation Impact has become a morale booster and rallying point for the entire neighborhood. For these reasons, the time has come to expand Operation Impact and its many benefits citywide. As on the South Side, these actions and improvements will not cost a great deal of money (and can be largely funded through contributions from corporations, foundations, small businesses and individuals as part of the "I Pledge Milwaukee" initiative described above), but are likely to have a great impact on the peace of mind and quality of life of Milwaukeeans.

3. ADD 250 MORE POLICE OFFICERS IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS

Without a doubt, one of the most effective means of improving public safety is to put more police officers on the streets. If properly deployed, more police officers can make a huge difference in the safety of the community. Furthermore, I am confident that Chief Flynn, if given more officers, would put them to the best possible use.

Unfortunately, Milwaukee has been headed in the wrong direction in this regard. Currently, the Milwaukee Police Department has 179 vacancies among its sworn law enforcement positions. This is on top of the 100 vacant positions that were eliminated by the current administration just a few years ago. In addition, hundreds of police officers will become eligible for retirement over the next few years; it's critical that the City begin the replacement process now, or it will be caught short-handed before it knows it. For all of these reasons, the City of Milwaukee needs to be committed to hiring 250 police officers over the next two years. This would not only fill the vacancies that currently exist, but also increase the actual sworn strength of MPD on the streets of Milwaukee to a level not seen in several years – a level more in keeping with the current level of crime and disorder in the city. The 2014 Budget includes adding 120 additional officers. The 2015 Budget needs to add another 130.

In conjunction with hiring these additional officers, it is essential that the City make a greater effort to hire more minority police officers and create a police force that is more representative of the community it serves. Community-based organizations and churches from the respective ethnic communities could and should be involved in the recruitment activities needed to create a more diverse police force.

4. INCREASE USE OF BEAT PATROLS /

RECOMMIT TO “BROKEN WINDOWS” POLICING

This plan also calls for assigning a significant number of the newly-hired police officers to neighborhood beat patrols. In addition, monies provided by private donors under the “I Pledge” and “Operation Impact” programs could be used to fund police officers’ overtime for this purpose. These officers would patrol the same streets in the same neighborhoods, day in and day out. Beat officers, whether patrolling on foot or on bicycles, have been proven extremely effective in improving police-community relations and stabilizing neighborhoods. In other words, deploying the right officers with the right attitudes to the right locations can make a world of difference in the public safety environment of particular neighborhoods.

Along with the additional beat patrols must come a recommitment to use of the “broken windows” strategy of policing, which holds that cracking down on quality of life offenses, such as graffiti, littering, public drinking, loud music and aggressive panhandling, sends a message that order will be maintained. This not only deters further petty crime and low-level anti-social behavior, but prevents more serious crime as well. New York City has successfully combined the broken windows approach with the hiring of thousands of additional police officers and use of the CompStat system (a multilayered dynamic approach to crime reduction, quality of life improvement and personnel/ resource management already in use here in Milwaukee) to produce its dramatic drop in crime over the past 20 years. So, too, can Milwaukee combine the additional police strength called for by point #2 with broken windows-oriented beat patrols to bring about much-needed improvements in public safety. Beat patrols and broken-windows policing are not needed in every neighborhood, but they could have a huge positive impact on some of Milwaukee’s most distressed areas, as well as communities that are teetering on the edge between stability and decline.

5. EXPAND USE OF “SHOTSPOTTER” TECHNOLOGY

A gunshot detection system detects and conveys the location of gunfire or other weapon fire using acoustic, optical or other types of sensors, as well as a combination of such sensors. These systems are used by police to identify the source and, in some cases, the direction of gunfire and/or the type of weapon fire. The Milwaukee Police Department employs a proprietary gunshot detection system known as “ShotSpotter” in a 3-square-mile, violence-plagued section of the city. ShotSpotter has been highly effective in helping MPD pinpoint the time and location of violent incidents in the target area. With an annual cost of only \$40,000-\$50,000 per square mile, ShotSpotter is well worth the investment. Milwaukee needs to find the funds necessary to expand this system to serve a much larger area of the city. The State’s and the County’s current commitment to help fund this initiative is a step in the right direction and needs to continue.

6. STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY PROSECUTION UNIT

Typically, on any given block in even the city’s most challenged neighborhoods, just one or two houses or businesses cause 95% or more of the problems – drug dealing, gang loitering, loud music/noise, underage drinking parties and other activities that generate dozens of calls for police service. Fortunately, the City of Milwaukee has an effective

dozens of calls for police service. Fortunately, the City of Milwaukee has an effective tool for dealing with these nuisance properties: the Community Prosecution/Nuisance Abatement Unit of the City Attorney's Office, which collaborates with community agencies and other City departments to abate nuisance properties, eliminate known drug and gang houses, investigate and prosecute problematic licensed premises, address boarded-up and vacant properties, and prosecute prostitution and other ordinance violations. Since its creation in 2005, the Community Prosecution Unit has been successful in reducing criminal activity, disorder, and code violations at properties for which its resources have been harnessed and employed. However, those resources are quite limited. The City, in partnership with the District Attorney and the State of Wisconsin, needs to find the funds necessary to expand the Community Prosecution Unit and extend the benefits of its work to more parts of Milwaukee.

7. PASS NEW STATE LEGISLATION

The safety of Milwaukee's neighborhoods would be significantly improved if the State Legislature would pass various legislative proposals supported by Chief Flynn and the Milwaukee Police Department. These may include legislation banning habitual criminals from obtaining concealed carry permits and making possession of concealed firearms by those currently prohibited from such possession a felony. These and other common sense crime/public safety-related legislative proposals would make it easier for the police to do their jobs and more difficult for would-be criminals to do theirs. Milwaukee residents and community leaders need to let their elected representatives in Madison know that they support legislation that would reduce crime and improve public safety in this city.

8. PROTECT ALL NEIGHBORHOODS

In some outlying neighborhoods of Milwaukee, a police squad car on patrol is a rare sight indeed. While this may be viewed as a good thing – i.e., crime rates are generally lower in these neighborhoods – public safety is still a real issue in these areas. Property crimes – burglaries, vandalism, theft, etc. – can be devastating to families and neighborhoods, and may tip the balance in favor of decisions to leave the city for good. This results in middle-class flight and the loss of taxpayers and tax base. We need to begin to protect our “stable” neighborhoods, as well as our more challenged ones, or we will lose them to the ravaging effects of crime, too. We must use a “Harden the Target” approach to step up crime-prevention efforts in these neighborhoods, perhaps even using auxiliary police officers to go door-to-door providing important, relevant information about crime prevention. Also, using the enhanced police force urged by point #2, the Police Department can pursue a policy that provides a more equitable distribution of police services citywide.