

COMMITTEE CHAIR

- Zoning, Neighborhoods and Development Committee

COMMITTEE MEMBER

- Steering and Rules Committee
- Public Works Committee



JAMES A. BOHL, JR.

Alderman, 5th District

Work needed toward a multifaceted solution to deadly violence

Statement from Alderman Jim Bohl

July 7, 2015

With regard to our city's policing, I have frequently stated, "If people do not feel safe in their homes and neighborhoods, then no other service we provide as a city matters."

The shootings and homicides plaguing Milwaukee are causing deep concern for me, as they are affecting too many neighborhoods, including some that have not experienced violence in the past. This ongoing behavior, including a weekend shooting of a city firefighter working on the job and shootings of a number of other residents, has me outright angry. Enough is enough!

Further, our community's violence problem is being compounded by complaints I have taken of late relating to excessive police response times to non-emergency calls for service, such as residents coming home to find their domain was burglarized. These situations are of no fault to our stretched-thin police force, though they can be extremely frustrating to good citizens victimized by crime.

The level of crime and violence we are experiencing has caused me to examine closely how we as a city are approaching public safety. The sad reality is there are some measures involved in the spike of violent crime which are beyond our control. That is not an excuse, but should pose a challenge for "us" to work together to bring about changes that will help reduce the crime and disorder we are seeing. And, I am using a collective "we" here because I believe long-lasting, positive change will only result if the city, community at large, and even our faith based institutions are working together on the same page to stem crime and violence.

I believe full well that most of us understand that police cannot and should not be the only approach a municipality has to reduce crime. And, the Mayor and Council have recognized this and have approved a number of out-of-the box approaches in recent years from increased employment opportunities for the chronically unemployed, to the employment of trauma workers to respond to acts of violence, to expanded library hours and summer youth employment opportunities, and more. Despite all this, crime in several key categories, including one all important indicator – homicides – has risen.

-More-



Although I have made it clear that I believe police cannot be the only ingredient in our approach to public safety, I believe recent crime trends, along with the poor response complaints I am receiving indicate that our current police force, despite their hard work, is insufficient for the task at hand. This begs many questions and among them are:

****What is being done to engage the community at large and our faith-based institutions to coordinate efforts at reducing violence and crime?**

****What other cost-effective non-policing measures that are currently not on the table might be employed?**

****Why has the city expanded police overtime this summer to the tune of \$2 million above the 2015 budgeted allotment while we are furloughing each of our sworn police officers three days per year? Would we not be better served with some level of reduced overtime, paid out at 1 and 1/2 times the salary rate, and eliminating furloughs?**

****Exactly how many officers do we have patrolling on any given day, and have we truly maximized efficiencies within the police department to ensure police strength is adequate for our community's needs, including the safety of our citizens and city personnel? Does Chief Flynn believe we need more sworn personnel to accomplish this? I would argue yes, but if his answer is no, then what approach does the Chief think needs to be employed in his department and how does he intend to accomplish it?**

Finally, given our city's budgetary constraints, does the Chief intend to meaningfully use Police Community Service Officers (PCSOs), supported in the 2015 budget by the administration and Council, in a way to supplement police strength, free up sworn officers and better respond to non-emergency calls for service?

I must say that I was disappointed in the quick reappointment of Chief Flynn by the Fire and Police Commission. Only a decade or so ago, with an uptick in violent crime, the Fire and Police Commission issued a mandate to then Chief Arthur Jones to come up with a plan to reduce violent crime. I have concerns that there was not a similar request made of our current Chief during his reappointment vetting process. The need for that discussion is important, and should still take place.

Policing is not the only answer to reducing violent crime, but it is an essential corner piece in the puzzle. We as policymakers must make good decisions to ensure that this piece and other key measures are being properly set. I am hopeful for some constructive ongoing dialogue on this issue, as it is sorely needed.