



CARBONDALE

All Ways Open

DISCUSSION ITEM (DI) 2023-01

From: City Manager/Legal/Police/Community Development

Date: February 28, 2023

Re: Carbondale Gun Violence Needs Report – (DI 2023-01)

Background: Carbondale’s crime rate has been on the decline for several years, however an increase in violent crime has occurred beginning in 2020. Over the past three years “shots fired” calls have been rising with an average of five gun-related incidents per week. These issues create public safety concerns among residents and obligate too many police resources in investigations and patrol. As such, in March, 2022 the City Manager contacted researchers from Southern Illinois University (SIU) to seek help in determining the root causes of gun violence in Carbondale. Subsequently, the City Council approved the completion of a needs assessment to quantify the root causes of gun violence. Over the course of several months the SIU team conducted hundreds of surveys and in-person interviews with residents while also analyzing data from numerous sources to quantify the reasons that gun violence persists. In October, the completed *Carbondale Gun Violence Needs Report* was presented to the City and published on the City’s website

(<https://www.explorecarbndale.com/DocumentCenter/View/8107/Carbondale-Gun-Violence-Needs-Assessment-Report>). Since then, the SIU team has reviewed the report with the Carbondale Police Department as well as City staff.

The completed report identifies key drivers for gun violence and makes recommendations to reduce gun violence that are tailored to Carbondale. Those recommendations include conflict mediation and restorative justice, focused deterrence initiatives to address repeat offenders, strategies to address drive-by shootings, housing improvements, and youth programming among others. The City is already deploying strategies to address many of these recommendations to include funding various organizations in Carbondale that focus on trauma and mental health, utilizing technology (license plate readers, surveillance cameras, etc.) to assist police investigations, and strengthening housing codes, among other initiatives (<https://www.explorecarbndale.com/842/Gun-Violence-Prevention-and-Intervention>). Although there are many initiatives already in place, in response to the report Staff would like to implement additional tools to reduce gun violence and asks that the City Council consider the following requests.

Discussion: Currently the City annually funds numerous agencies that are working on issues that may directly or indirectly impact violent crime and gun violence. Those include annual community agency funding to groups like the Boys and Girls Club, Attucks Community Services, Women for Change, Carbondale Warming Center, Eurma Hayes Center, Good Samaritan Ministries, I Can Read, and the Survivor Empowerment Center. In addition, the City Council recently utilized American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to make \$2.1 million in investments to community organizations. The following may directly or indirectly affect violent crime and gun violence: Carbondale United, Centerstone, Carbondale Public Library, I Can Read, Attucks Community Services, Carbondale Warming Center, Carbondale Junior Sports, Boys and Girls Club, and Stress and Trauma Center.

The report gives considerable attention to the effects of trauma and the need to address mental health. The city has been very proactive in already doing this by hiring a mental health advocate, establishing a process with the Jackson County Court and Choate Hospital to involuntarily detain and evaluate people in mental health crisis, and standing up a mental health panel that convenes numerous area healthcare agencies monthly to discuss shared challenges and best practices. These actions are in addition to the previously mentioned City Council utilization of ARPA funding to Centerstone. In spite of these initiatives, mental health calls continue to consume a large amount of police calls. The City's mental health advocate is in contact with 30-50 people weekly and has over 300 individuals in her database that she has been in contact with since her employment at the police department in 2021.

In concurrence with the SIU report, the National Institute of Health has found that substandard housing has a direct and negative effect on people's mental health and leads to increases in violence. Carbondale utilized its home rule powers to enact a mandatory rental housing inspection program in 2009 that requires rental units to be inspected at least every three years. In spite of an improvement in the overall quality of rental housing since the program was enacted, City staff have witnessed a noticeable decline in the quality of many older rental houses. As the SIU report states, "the areas with the highest levels of gun violence are densely populated residential areas whereby residents and key stakeholders report housing problems". In 2022 the City Council approved several proposals that City staff recommended to help strengthen our housing code enforcement. Those included adopting a safe housing lease addendum, codifying the amount of time that landlords are given to make repairs, increasing minimum fine amounts, and establishing a vacant building registry. Additional strategies that could be deployed and that are recommended in the report address greening and demolishing of vacant buildings.

The needs assessment emphasizes that in order to address and reduce incidents of gun violence, a multi-layered approach should be developed. Through various initiatives previously mentioned, there are multiple interwoven strategies in place to address gun violence. However, a more coordinated effort with additional strategies borrowed from the report's findings may result in a more efficient reduction of gun violence and better long-term outcomes for the community and its residents.

Recommendations: Although there are many recommendations in the completed report that the City Council can choose to accept and deploy strategies to address, City Staff requests that the City Council consider the following recommendations, which we believe can be implemented rapidly.

1. **Hire a Project Director for Gun Violence Initiatives** - As we consider the number of organizations working on social problems that affect gun violence, and include the police initiatives that are being deployed, there are many variables that need to be tracked, analyzed, and evaluated. More importantly, there is a need for a coordinated effort that can be measured over time to better understand what programs and initiatives are working and where gaps may exist. Adding a project director to coordinate these diverse activities would provide better accountability and reporting and would also provide a conduit among the various groups and initiatives, and could help facilitate future partnerships that don't currently exist.
2. **Hire (2) Additional Mental Health Advocates** – As mentioned, our mental health advocate has a very large caseload that continues to grow. This position helps divert many residents that are in crisis from law enforcement responses to social services. Also, adding additional mental health staff will allow more people to be better connected to social services which helps improve their quality of life.
3. **Hire (3) Additional Code Enforcement Staff** – The City has a mature rental registration program that mandates all rental properties be inspected at least every three years. There are currently five code enforcement officers that conduct approximately 3,000 rental inspections annually. This doesn't include environmental inspections (overgrowth, trash and rubbish, abandoned vehicles) or complaint-based inspections that arise randomly. Likewise, in 2016 the City Council adopted a chronic nuisance ordinance that transfers responsibility for problem tenant behaviors to the landlord to provide greater accountability. The ordinance has been utilized numerous times to help remediate problem tenant activities however it could be better managed with a staff person specifically assigned to its enforcement.

The 2020 Census estimates that 73% of Carbondale's housing is rental property and that around 23% of all housing is currently vacant. The City Council recently approved a vacant building registry that Building and Neighborhood Services (BNS) staff will track. Police are responding to an increasing amount of calls related to trespassing in vacant properties and there are frequently criminal activities that occur in occupied rental properties where suspects and/or victims cite substandard housing issues as contributing factors to criminal behaviors. In order to better monitor vacant and substandard housing, additional code enforcement staff is needed.

Although additional staff should be capable of performing all areas of BNS, assigning one person to focus on properties that may qualify as a chronic nuisance property, and assigning two additional staff to proactively monitor vacant housing would alleviate pressures on BNS staff as well as the police department. These positions would work in

concert with BNS and police to better ensure that problem rental properties are identified and monitored.

4. **Community Housing Trust** – On June 14, 2022, the Carbondale City Council passed a resolution authorizing the City Manager to Establish a 501 (C)(3) corporation to provide for a Community Housing Trust. The Carbondale Community Housing, NFP was incorporated on October 6, 2022 and since then, the City Council has reviewed corporation by-laws to approve before appointing a permanent board.

A community housing trust is a private, nonprofit corporation that can provide access to secure, affordable housing for community members. Housing trusts improve housing affordability by separating the ownership of land and housing. Trusts often provide additional services such as rental assistance, credit counseling, and access to loans.

Carbondale Community Housing, NFP could provide a method to acquire vacant housing, improve the housing stock, and provide a higher standard of living for residents. When considering the success of local housing grants that were established by the City Council and the recent expansion of TIF #2 into three residential areas, the housing trust could be among the most effective tools to stabilize neighborhoods and reduce gun violence. The City Council is encouraged to establish initial funding so the housing trust can proceed with hiring a director and begin working on improving neighborhoods.

5. **Lighting** – The needs assessment mentions environmental design, residents' perceptions of safety, and targeting crime hot spots. Adding additional street lighting and possibly pedestrian lighting could help address each of these areas. In 2019, the City completed an inventory of all street lights and GPS located them. The map reveals a lighting scheme that focuses generally on streetlights at street intersections and at mid-block locations. This frequently assumes a 300' spacing between lights which leaves dark spots, especially in areas with a very tall tree canopy. By reducing the spacing and focusing on areas 1, 6, and 10, adding street lights could have a positive effect on public safety. Staff has reviewed the attached streetlight map and recommends adding approximately 100 street/pedestrian lights throughout areas 1, 6, and 10.
6. **Increase the Budget for Housing Demolition** – Each year the BNS division receives funding for 3-4 demolitions of uninhabitable residences. In response to the report, strategically demolishing and greening more lots, especially properties that are beyond repair, will have a positive effect on public safety and will improve the appearance of neighborhoods.
7. **Consider Additional Funding to Community Agencies** – The City of Carbondale has received \$7,858,667 in ARPA funding. In October, 2021 the City Council approved a process to grant a portion of the funds to community agencies. In July, 2022 the City Council approved funding for twelve recipients. However, the City received 51 applications for funding and several that weren't funded proposed services that align with recommendations from the SIU report. As such, the City Council may want to consider

utilizing social service agencies to complement the work already being done by the City and other groups.

8. **Make Additional Recommendations for Gun Violence Reduction Strategies:** The City Council is asked to recommend any additional strategies outlined in the report that they deem appropriate to complement the work already being done.

Budget: The following budget includes costs related to recommendations #1 through #5.

Recommendation	Cost	No.	Annual	3 YR TOTAL
Project Director for Gun Violence Initiatives *	\$ 90,000	3	\$ 108,000	\$324,000
Additional Code Enforcement *	\$ 66,000	3	\$ 198,000	\$594,000
Additional Mental Health Advocate *	\$72,000	2	\$144,000	\$432,000
				TBD
Additional Lighting **	\$ 2,500	100	\$ 250,000	\$ 250,000
Added Housing Demolitions	\$ 50,000	3	\$ 150,000	\$ 150,000
GRAND TOTAL				\$ 1,750,000
* - Overhead included				
** - Would add \$15,000 annual electric cost				

Funding: The current balance of ARPA funds is \$5,099,847.86. Staff recommends that if the City Council approves the addition of Staff that it be a minimum commitment of three years to better gauge the efficacy of the program. ARPA funds are required to be obligated by the end of 2024 and spent by the end of 2026 so these expenditures would fall within the grant deadlines.