

# Great Falls Crime Task Force Recommendations (Final)

*September 27, 2021*

## Resources for Local Criminal Justice System

- A. We recommend that the City Commission and City Manager task the GFPD, the City's Legal Department, and the Municipal Court administration with providing an assessment of the additional personnel/resources they will require in order to most effectually address the current level of crime and civil/criminal cases in our local legal/court/law enforcement system. Recommendations include, but are not limited to:
- a. More police officers and support staff for GFPD:
    - i. Estimated cost for eight (8) patrol officers is \$800,000, and would require funding outside of what the city is able to finance. Additional presence in the patrol bureau increases visibility, presence, detection crime response, and investigation. The department has done everything possible to schedule existing personnel to handle call volume.
    - ii. Estimated cost for four (4) sergeants is \$550,000, and would require funding outside of what the city is able to finance. Patrol Officers require field supervisors for the reduction of risk management, training, accountability and discipline.
    - iii. Estimated cost for one (1) crime analyst is \$70,000 and does fall within the city's ability to finance. This position would provide needed technical capability/skill to assist with investigations using modern technology to gather, compile, and interpret data from crime reports to determine trends in a particular geographic area.
    - iv. Estimated cost for one (1) Task Force Officer – an officer from the GFPD - assigned to Safe Trails Task Force is \$96,000 and does fall within the city's ability to finance. This position would work in partnership with the FBI and other federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement to combat the growth of crime in Indian Country. Great Falls is in close proximity to two reservations.
  - b. Address detective case load (use closure rates and conviction rates as guides)
  - c. Support Crisis Intervention Collaborative with Alluvion.
    - i. This partnership will assist GFPD with responding to the increasing frequency of mental health calls. The estimated cost of this program is \$80,000 and would require funding outside of what the city is able to finance.
- B. Increased personnel for the City Legal Department and Municipal Court in order to more thoroughly and expeditiously process cases and ensure fairness and consequences for 'low level' crime.
- a. Better understand impact and effect of deferred prosecution agreements.

- C. We recommend by City Commission Resolution(s) to our Federal Delegation and possibly to the MT Department of Justice that we:
  - a. Request more DEA agents, recognizing the statewide drug problem from Mexico, so that local officials can communicate with Congressional delegates the need for additional federal resources to mitigate multi-state narcotics and firearm crimes.
  - b. Request an FBI representative be assigned to the Safe Trails Task Force.
  - c. Request an additional U.S. Postal Inspector, recognizing that two for the entire state of Montana is not enough.
  
- D. We recommend a Community Impact Study, similar to the one conducted recently by the City of Billings, after determining the cost. This could help increase collaboration with local services, and assist in providing a clearer picture of some of the issues we have already discussed as well as identify areas we have not addressed.
  
- E. Continue to support Crisis Intervention Collaborative (CIC) through GFPD, GFFR, Legal Department, Municipal Court and other city staff members, and in the future consider allocating funds to the CIC program to assist with mental health diversion from jail and the enhancement of Mental Health Treatment Court.
  
- F. We recommend that the City Grants Administrator assist Legal Department with investigating grant funding for victim and/or witness assistance for the Legal Department Criminal Division, and also work in collaboration with Victim-Witness Assistance Services.
  
- G. Considering the City's financial limitations' effect on law enforcement, we recommend budget amendments and/or evaluate a public safety levy, identifying specific uses of funds if approved by electors. Areas of funding to consider, but would not be limited to:
  - a. Additional police officers and support staff
  - b. Pre-trial services
  - c. Drug K-9 units at USPS, UPS and FedEx
  - d. Mental health services
  - e. Code Enforcement Officer to focus on problem properties where criminal activity is taking place and less on non-criminal or non-legal complaints
  - f. Legal Department case management software, estimated cost of \$50,500
  - g. Legal Department staff, including Paralegal/Investigator for an annual cost with benefits of \$61,000 to \$76,000. Prosecutor for an annual cost with benefits of \$86,000 to \$107,000, in order to keep up with current caseload. Additional PD resources would further enhance the shortage.
  - h. Municipal Court additional elected judge and staff
  
- H. Once a resource assessment is made of the initial and ongoing costs for implementing the recommendations, then the City Commission and City Manager can determine

whether or not to fund them and how to do so, whether through the regular budget process, a community safety levy or through grants.

- I. We recommend that if the city were to receive recreational marijuana tax revenue, that the City Commission use all of this tax revenue to support public safety. The legislature allows cities and counties to tax these funds for local resources. This can provide a revenue stream for various recommendations.
- J. The Task Force recommends that the proposals and funding options be presented to the City Commission and the public for deliberation by the beginning of the 2022 budget process.

### **Communication and Education**

- K. We recommend that the City Commission make public safety, as it relates to crime and the local criminal justice system, a top priority and agenda item for City Commission meetings and business in order to regularly reinforce that the City of Great Falls considers public safety its number one priority. We recommend the following actions in order to carry this out:
  - a. Once monthly crime/safety updates from GFPD or CCSO at City Commission meetings (starting January 2022)
  - b. Once a month designate at least a portion of City Commission work sessions to collaborating, communicating and planning coordinated crime prevention strategies with partners like NPOs, local legislators, judges, State and County LE, DEA etc. (starting January 2022)
  - c. Revise the Annual Police Report to include needed metrics based on community and City Commission requests.
  - d. Provide a focused report to Neighborhood Councils.
  - e. Better advertise the Crime Mapping Software
    - i. Provide each Neighborhood Council the ability to access the boundaries of its particular council so that councils can regularly present statistics at individual meetings. (<https://greatfallsmt.net/police/great-falls-crime-map-0>)
  - f. Retool use of Neighborhood Councils for crime prevention/training
  - g. We recommend meeting with business leaders to understand business trends as they relate to crime prevention.
- L. We recommend that the City Manager task the GFPD and City Public Communications office with initiating an education, advocacy, communication program to help the public become more aware of and have better access to information and resources for personal crime prevention and personal safety measures. The GFPD indicates there would be \$0 cost to coordinate press releases and dissemination of information with the city. Some of the related resources and information could include but are not limited to:

- a. Safety lighting
  - b. Security cameras
  - c. Utility bill reminders about keeping vehicles locked and valuables out of sight; crime trends, yard clean-up; tax time phishing scams, etc.
  - d. A revitalized, coordinated Great Falls Neighborhood Watch program working in collaboration with Neighborhood Councils.
  - e. Non-criminal Panhandling
  - f. Non-criminal Loitering
  - g. Non-criminal Public nuisance
- M. Utilize other social media in addition to Facebook:
- a. Instagram and Twitter
  - b. More Q&A opportunities for the public using Facebook, Instagram and live sessions.
  - c. More town hall meetings where the community can directly ask questions. Crimestoppers is willing to help with this.
- N. We recommend holding one or more Legislative Forums focused on the negative impacts of the 2017 Justice Reinvestment Act with local legislators.
- a. Ask appropriate parties to provide direct and specific testimony on negative impacts to the community. Those invited would include, but not be limited to:
    - i. Montana League of Cities and Towns
    - ii. The courts
    - iii. City Attorney
    - iv. County Attorney
    - v. Law Enforcement
    - vi. Probation and Parole
    - vii. Great Falls Pre-Release
- O. We recommend potentially re-aligning one of two annual Citizens Academies specific to crime related topics and strategic planning with Neighborhood Council members. The estimated cost of this is \$1,250 and would be part of the annual budget.

### **Consequences**

- P. We recommend that the City Manager task the GFPD and City Legal Department to conduct a review and assessment of Title 9 Public Peace, Morals and Welfare section of City Code and recommend revisions and/or amendments where necessary to legally address issues regarding:
- a. Drug paraphernalia – the city should never allow safe injection sites, illegal drug needle drops or needle exchange.
  - b. Theft - due to the 2017 Justice Reinvestment Act, misdemeanor 1<sup>st</sup> offense theft is no longer a jailable offense. The city should look at a jailable 1<sup>st</sup> offense theft

ordinance, which would hold offenders more accountable. The downside is that the city would have to pay for the jail stay, but the upside is that the city would receive the theft fine revenue, which would offset the incarceration fees.

- c. Use of city ordinance codes for some minor traffic offenses. This penalizes the driver for the infraction and hopefully changes their driving behavior. It is also a simple fine and not a violation that affects their driving record and insurance. This would not be used for DUIs, Reckless Driving or traffic accidents.
- Q. We recommend that the City Manager task the City Legal Department and City Public Communications office to release the sentencing and prosecution records of local prosecutors and judges on the city's website, social media, and newsletters starting as soon as possible during the first six-months of 2022 so that the public is fully informed as to how our local criminal justice system is being managed by those with the responsibility of ensuring public safety.
- R. We recommend to Municipal Court that it consider utilizing the CCSO Program options to reduce jail numbers:
- a. Clearing out Failure to Appear warrants on a monthly/periodic basis and advise defendants to come in without being arrested, and that they can be released on their own recognizance.
  - b. Put defendants in detention for a short period to impress the need to follow the law, and to try to stop repeat defendants, because Criminal Division deals with repeat offenders on a regular basis. Mental health and socioeconomic status are factors.
- S. We recommend Municipal Court evaluate reasons for fine collection reductions and corresponding effect on accountability for misdemeanors, considering the collection numbers:
- a. 2012 \$1,221,472
  - b. 2013 \$1,089,955
  - c. 2014 \$833,447
  - d. 2015 \$860,714
  - e. 2016 \$828,763
  - f. 2017 \$894,261
  - g. 2018 \$812,902
  - h. 2019 \$705,667
  - i. 2020 \$627,765
  - j. 2021 \$753,719
- T. We recommend evaluation of misdemeanor pre-trial services and use of public safety assessment tools to enhance accountability, in-court appearances, reduction of notices to appear for failure to pay, and reduction of multiple extensions in payment of fines.

## **Partnerships and Collaboration**

- U. We recommend that the City Commission begin taking the necessary legal steps, as soon as possible during the first six-months of 2022, such as through zoning, public referendum or other measures to prevent the coming proliferation of recreational marijuana shops in Great Falls. Preventing easy, widespread access pot products will help prevent further addiction and drug related crime in our community, especially among school age children.
  - a. Prohibit the establishment of marijuana shops within the city limits.
  - b. By resolution, the City Commission states its position regarding recreational marijuana sales in Great Falls, and state a position of no recreational marijuana. Work with local organizations to repeal allowance of recreational marijuana in its jurisdiction using existing state law.
  
- V. We recommend that the City Commission and City Manager identify and assign a city representative or department, as soon as possible during the first six-months of 2022, to devise and implement an ongoing lobbying and communications strategy with State and Federal elected and other officials to coordinate state, local and federal crime prevention measures. Some of the agencies/offices to lobby and coordinate with would include but not be limited to:
  - a. Cascade County state legislators
  - b. Cascade County Commission
  - c. MT Governors and AG offices
  - d. Senators Tester, Daines and Rep Rosendale offices
  - e. Billings DEA office
  
- W. We recommend that the new city grants coordinator begin immediately to monitor and regularly report to the City Manager and City Commission on all available grant opportunities for local law enforcement and criminal justice system resources.
  
- X. We recommend requesting state funding for a pilot project for the Pre-Trial Services program. This can assist in the need for holding offenders accountable and keeping them involved in the system to provide identified services if able/necessary to potentially reduce recidivism. This program has been a success in Lewis and Clark County.
  - a. If state funding is approved, we recommend that the City Manager assess and report to the City Commission on the details and options for implementing the Pre-Trial Services Program.
  
- Y. We recommend that the City of Great Falls reach out to other educational partners, such as Great Falls Public Schools, MSU-B, Great Falls College-MSU and others to support programs for citizens that will teach them ways to make decisions that will help

improve their lives. This program could be part of pre-trial services.

- Z. We recommend to continue working with the Department of Justice and Project Safe Neighborhoods, the cost of which is grant dependent. This is a U.S. Dept. of Justice grant, which includes working with the U.S. Attorney's Office to establish a collaborative team of federal, state, local and tribal partners to implement a strategic plan for investigating, prosecuting and preventing violent crime.
  
- AA. We recommend that the City Commission continue to pursue and work with local non-profits to form and expand on partnerships surrounding mental health, addiction, and homelessness projects to free up law enforcement and Criminal Justice System (CJS) resources for public safety. This can include, but not be limited to related education to the following groups:
  - a. Schools (intro to law enforcement)
  - b. Community training, to include but not be limited to:
    - i. Business crime deterrents
    - ii. Child abuse detection
    - iii. Human Trafficking prevention
    - iv. Emergency Room abuse detection
  
- BB. We recommend enhancing utilization of Principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design by Planning and Community Development (P&CD) in evaluating development.
  - a. Incorporate or provide basic fundamentals into P&CD Design Review for permits in elevated crime areas.
  
- CC. We recommend continued supporting or enhancing support of the Crisis Intervention Collaborative Violent Crimes Task Force, including TFOs, (Task Force Officers) and Big Sky Safe Trails Task Force. Continue to support HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area), ICAC (Internet Crimes Against Children), and others.
  
- DD. We recommend continuing to work with Veteran's Court, and Mental Health, Drug and Juvenile Drug Treatment Courts to reduce reengagement with the criminal justice system.
  - a. Improve information sharing with emergency service providers, including hospitals, and DPHHS (Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services) to receive drug statistics in a timely manner.
  
- EE. Consider utilizing the city's current communications specialist position or hiring a specific person to be a Crime Safety Communications and Education Coordinator who could help communicate the following programs and events:
  - a. See It-Report it campaign
  - b. "If You See Something, Say Something" Awareness Day, Sept. 25
  - c. Neighborhood Watch Program

- d. National Night Out, first Tuesday in August
  - e. Downtown Safety Alliance
    - i. The GFPD will continue to partner with the Downtown Safety Alliance regarding the Downtown Safety Master Plan, and provide input from the law enforcement perspective.
- FF. We recommend continuing to encourage and help to facilitate and/or provide resources for partnerships that will help alleviate the rate and continuation of crime by certain individuals/repeat offenders. The Community Impact Study could help with this.