

# COMMON GROUND

*Enhancing Community Oriented  
Policing in Milwaukee*



WISCONSIN

**POLICY FORUM**

## ABOUT THE WISCONSIN POLICY FORUM

The Wisconsin Policy Forum was created on January 1, 2018, by the merger of the Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum and the Madison-based Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance. Throughout their lengthy histories, both organizations engaged in nonpartisan, independent research and civic education on fiscal and policy issues affecting state and local governments and school districts in Wisconsin. WPF is committed to those same activities and that spirit of nonpartisanship.

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was undertaken to summarize the content of 16 community listening sessions held by the Milwaukee Police Department from the summer of 2022 to the winter of 2024 around community oriented policing and community engagement. The intent was also to report on what community oriented policing practices look like in Milwaukee's peer cities, and provide insights and policy options for department and city leaders to consider as they move forward with these topics.

Report authors would like to thank leaders from the Milwaukee Police Department for their commissioning and financial support of this research, their hard work in organizing, staffing, and catering meetings, and their bringing of insights and experience to the conversations that were had. We would also like to thank leaders from the Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission and Community Collaborative Commission for attending these meetings and helping to turn out resident participants.

Finally, we would like to thank Carlton T. Mayers II, Esq., for serving as the third-party facilitator at each of the listening sessions. Mr. Mayers brings years of experience in criminal justice, public safety, and policing reform to the table, as the founder, owner, and CEO of Mayers Strategic Solutions, LLC. He has overseen similar projects in cities across the country that include Baltimore, Chicago, Kalamazoo, and Ferguson, Missouri. We thank him for ensuring that each listening session was productive, informative, and did an ample job of contributing to the future of community oriented policing in Milwaukee. We also thank him for his contributions to the report's peer city analysis.



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# INTRODUCTION

Few local government issues receive more attention in the city of Milwaukee than policing. Spending by the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) makes up [close to half](#) of the General City Purposes budget, and recently passed state legislation granting city leaders the authority to impose a new citywide sales tax also requires the city to boost its police officer workforce.

Over the past decade, there has been considerable discussion both locally and nationally about the need for police reforms. The Wisconsin Policy Forum has also recently explored this issue, taking a broad look at [police reform in the city](#) in 2021 at the behest of then-Mayor Tom Barrett and producing a report that assessed how Milwaukee's reform efforts dovetailed with national calls for change.

In Milwaukee, police reform discussions pre-dated the murder of George Floyd and the ensuing protests, with high-profile incidents like the killing of Dontre Hamilton in Red Arrow Park and unrest in Sherman Park initiating close looks at how police officers use force, engage with residents in mental health crisis, and more.

Another key development was a [lawsuit](#) filed against the city by a group of Black and Latino city residents over alleged unconstitutional stop-and-frisk practices carried out by MPD. In July 2018, both MPD and the Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission (FPC) entered into a Settlement Agreement known as the Collins Settlement, named after the lead plaintiff in the case.

Much of the agreement focuses on concrete changes the department has taken and continues to take to train its officers; record, document, and publish data pertaining to certain activities conducted by officers; and come into compliance on matters like racial profiling. A few focus on the matter of "community policing;" some of those items remain unfinished.

The Settlement requires discussion of community policing as part of command staff meetings and asks that FPC's hiring process test for a "candidate's ability to lead and direct community policing efforts." Indeed, in the most recent annual report on the settlement, evaluators note that the FPC has "worked with the testing provider to incorporate concepts of community policing into testing procedures for promotional exams."

MPD and FPC settled on a definition of community policing – or, as we refer to it in this report, community oriented policing (COP) – in their creation of a new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). However, they have yet to roll out a more comprehensive Community Oriented Policing Plan, as stated in the purpose of that SOP.

In recognition of this gap, in the summer of 2022, both parties, along with the resident-led Community Collaborative Commission (CCC)<sup>1</sup>, began a series of listening sessions designed to incorporate resident voices from all parts of the city into the development of the Community Oriented Policing Plan for the department to guide its COP practices.

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<sup>1</sup> The CCC was created after the Collins Settlement to further police reform efforts in Milwaukee, including the creation of a community engagement plan. It is made up of community leaders from different Milwaukee-based organizations, including the NAACP, Safe & Sound, Pathfinders, and more. The CCC has met approximately once a month since the summer of 2020, and is currently chaired by Nate Hamilton, the brother of Dontre Hamilton.



The Wisconsin Policy Forum was contracted by MPD to attend these listening sessions and summarize them in a written report. We also offered to provide insights gained from research on COP policies and practices in peer cities that could further inform deliberations on a new COP framework for MPD.

Consistent with that charge, this report synthesizes key themes raised at the 16 MPD listening sessions held from July 2022 to February 2024. It also highlights COP efforts in other cities that are relevant to those themes, and concludes with policy considerations that could be weighed by MPD, FPC, city elected officials, and other stakeholders as they seek to update and improve MPD's existing COP policies and procedures and develop effective community engagement strategies.



# BACKGROUND

## What is Community Oriented Policing?

Community oriented policing (COP) is a model of police operations recognized by the [federal government](#) that centers around community partnerships, organizational transformation, and problem solving. The U.S. Department of Justice, which houses the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, [defines](#) it as “a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.”

MPD officially incorporated COP into its operations in April 2021 with the adoption of [Standard Operating Procedure \(SOP\) 003](#). This measure lays out a set of procedures for MPD officers to follow on a daily basis in their interactions with residents and their promotion of partnerships; defines leadership’s role in spreading the practices of COP; encourages partnerships with community members and groups, non-profit service providers, and private businesses; incorporates COP into department trainings; and encourages use of the “SARA” model<sup>2</sup> of problem-solving for neighborhood safety issues.

Since SOP 003 was adopted, MPD and FPC have been working to develop a Community Oriented Policing Plan that better informs both the SOP and their day-to-day operations. Even prior to the listening sessions that are a primary subject of this report, MPD and its various branches have run a wide range of programs, classes, and events that seek to promote greater engagement between the department and the community (for a complete list of community programs, see [Appendix A](#)).

A few entities within MPD are currently responsible for handling the bulk of the work surrounding police-community relations:

- MPD’s [Public Information Office](#) serves as the department’s public relations arm, and reports directly to the Chief of Staff.
- The department’s [Office of Community Relations, Engagement, and Recruitment](#) is responsible for running a number of programs that include the [Police Citizen Academy](#), robbery deterrence classes, police auxiliaries and public safety cadets (programs aimed at younger residents who show an interest in law enforcement), and the [National Night Out](#).
- Each of MPD’s seven districts has a **Community Liaison Officer (CLO)**. This officer is tasked with serving as the face of police-community relations within their district, facilitating programs such as [Block Watches](#), [Crime and Safety Meetings](#), and other district-specific initiatives.

While the formalization of COP within MPD is an explicit requirement of the Collins Settlement, it also reflects several years of community discussion and efforts by both MPD leaders and community stakeholders to foster improved relationships between the department and the residents it serves.

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<sup>2</sup> Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment





## Purpose and Format of Listening Sessions

Beginning in July 2022, MPD, FPC, and the CCC began a series of public community listening sessions to gather citizen input on the state of police-community relations in the city and development of an enhanced approach to COP. The original intention was to hold one meeting in each of the city of Milwaukee's 15 aldermanic districts; after some combining of meetings among multiple districts as well as two additional meetings meant to capture the voices of youth that had not been as well-represented in the previous sessions as well as offer a final feedback opportunity for other residents, 16 total sessions were held between July 2022 and February 2024. Other than the final two sessions, each meeting was held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the final Saturday of each month.

Each meeting began with an introduction by each of the three stakeholder groups (MPD, FPC, and CCC). Midway through the process, the FPC representative began including in each introduction an explanation of the Collins Settlement and cited it as the impetus for the meetings.

The bulk of each meeting was led by a third-party facilitator, Mayers Strategic Solutions, LLC, who guided the conversations and engaged attendees by asking them to discuss the following questions:

1. Identify the characteristics of a safe community.
2. Identify what characteristics of a safe community are present within your neighborhood.
3. Identify what characteristics of a safe community are NOT present within your neighborhood.
4. What are some solutions to bring the characteristics of a safe community to your neighborhood?
5. What are you willing to do to ensure these characteristics are present within your neighborhood?
6. What are the police doing that you like?
7. What do you wish to see more of from the police?

Though the original intention of this exercise was to receive feedback from residents from the aldermanic district in which each meeting was held, at least some attendees from various outside stakeholder groups, as well as attending MPD officers, also took part in the discussions. This complicates our ability to fully discern which responses were submitted by district residents.

Also, while some meetings – particularly in aldermanic districts located on the Northwest side of the city – were well attended, many included just a few attendees. In fact, attendance ranged from as few as five participants to about 40. Consequently, the analysis within this report is limited by what we were able to observe from the relatively small number of residents who attended the 16 listening sessions and does not necessarily reflect the views of the much larger city of Milwaukee population.

Finally, it is important to note that across all themes, listening session attendees frequently discussed the racial, socioeconomic, and geographic disparities that exist within the city of Milwaukee. This section, and the policy considerations at the end of this report, should be considered in that light.





# THEMES FROM PUBLIC SAFETY LISTENING SESSIONS

Spanning the entire geography of the city of Milwaukee, the 16 public safety listening sessions yielded a wide-ranging collection of conversation topics. The main charge of this report is to synthesize these discussions and summarize key themes, which we do below.

## Theme #1: The Scope of Policing

*Responses included comments on less/more police, community control, foot patrol, bike patrol, respectful policing, diversion of funds from police, traffic enforcement, community watch, police engagement, community briefings, police patrol, more beat officers, better response times, community liaison officers (CLOs), police guardians*

Session attendees had competing visions for MPD. Some, especially attendees at the first few sessions, expressed harsh criticisms over the amount of funding MPD receives relative to other city departments. Most attendees, however, wanted to see more, better, or different service provision from the department.

A number of listening sessions featured extended conversations on how MPD could best interact with city residents; for example, individuals wanted to see further efforts to de-escalate potentially violent situations or incidents. Some residents wanted abandoned programs – like sports leagues – to be resurrected, and wished to see both more interaction with officers and more visibility of officers on patrol. Attendees said they liked when officers responded to calls and did so on time. Further training on topics ranging from trauma-informed care to officer mental health was also a desire of session attendees.

Some participants said the most positive interactions they had with MPD did not involve officer responses to calls or observed incidents. For example, the department’s CLOs were cited as an effective tool in building relationships with Milwaukee residents, and attendees also appreciated officer participation in events at schools.

Some resident concerns on the scope of policing involved issues central to the Collins Settlement, focusing on what officers were and were not allowed to do and ask for in the instance of a potential arrest. Another concern was the lack of a departmental requirement that officers live in the city of Milwaukee; while such a requirement once existed, it was abolished several years ago by the state legislature. [Currently](#), MPD officers must instead live within 15 miles of city boundaries.

## Theme #2: Accountability and Transparency

*Responses included comments on police transparency and accountability, openness to improvement, increasing police diversity, eliminating excessive force, implicit bias training, mental health training, less escalation, communication with residents, monthly MPD meetings, consistency, friendly officers, people skills, citizen contact cards, police response timeliness, trauma-informed response*



Listening session attendees generally said they want MPD to be more transparent, accountable, and communicative. Many voiced a need for change in how routine patrol policing happens; session attendees wanted calmer interactions with officers with less escalation and more open lines of communication. For others, accountability and transparency could be a bigger focus of department policy: trainings could be updated and improved, and more regular forums to talk about crime and safety could be established.

A number of residents mentioned instances in which they needed a police response in a timely fashion, but did not receive one. For example, a store owner noted that he had faced regular shoplifting incidents that he called in, but never received a response. Session attendees also cited moments in which a police response was unnecessary or unwanted, but MPD officers nonetheless arrived and made the situation worse.

Trust was a theme that ran parallel to accountability and transparency. Attendees from racial and ethnic backgrounds with histories of mistrusting police noted that in order to collaborate effectively around safety, there needs to be trust, which requires a two-way, give-and-take relationship. One way to address this lack of trust would be to create opportunities to build bonds between residents and the entire police department – not necessarily just CLOs, but also the patrol officers most likely to respond to calls for service.

### Theme #3: A Friendly, Neighborly Society

*Responses included comments on cooperation, sense of community, neighbors knowing and talking with one another, neighborhood association, community working together, more residents, kindness, consideration for others, being a good neighbor, getting involved, respect, integrity, visible people, block watches, neighbor interactions, looking out for each other, block parties, Facebook, Nextdoor, participation, time investment, good people, people that care*

A desire to live in a city with friendly neighbors was perhaps the theme most often expressed at public safety listening sessions. Many older residents said they grew up in a city where, for example, they could walk to school and know who lived in each of the houses they passed by. There was general agreement across many sessions that a neighborly society is one that is well-equipped to handle crime and safety.

Session attendees were appreciative of programs, events, and meetings that brought them into contact with each other. These included recreational activities like block parties and fundraisers, but also more formal meet-ups. Block watches, for example, were a common mechanism for bringing together residents most attuned to issues of crime in their neighborhoods to gather and discuss their concerns.

As technology has continued to evolve, residents both praised and lamented the migration of neighbors to online spaces. Facebook and Nextdoor were cited as the two most common internet-based gathering places for residents to alert others about crime, learn about public forums, and take an interest in the happenings of their neighborhood.

Along with the general interest in knowing and befriending neighbors, session attendees pointed to a friendly, neighborly society as one in which local leaders and/or elders could emerge to lead efforts to root out and address problems. In neighborhoods where law enforcement may not be trusted,



residents noted that there is almost always a figure or figures who hold positions of authority, even if those positions are unelected or non-appointed.

## Theme #4: Clean Neighborhoods and Parks

*Responses included comments on cleanliness, sanitation, no garbage in the streets, litter on median, respect for environment, clean parks, clean streets, green spaces, trees, blight-trash, broken glass, property maintenance, sustainability, cleaning up on weekends, park programs, public accessibility, litter-free neighborhoods*

Attendees agreed that safe neighborhoods are those with clean streets, sidewalks, parks, and other public spaces. Areas with excessive litter were equated with criminality, but beyond that, residents agreed that safety could be brought about by creating communities that encourage outdoor interactions. Residents also agreed that the lack of clean neighborhoods and parks creates the appearance of neglect in these areas, which may encourage further criminal activity.

Participants also noted that when a neighborhood's appearance is not kept up, it can impact attitudes and the responsibility the community takes for itself. Some recognized the issue of blighted streets and parks as one in which the community, law enforcement, and other agencies could come together and make improvements. Attendees at multiple sessions pointed out that some neighborhoods are much cleaner than others, and noticed a negative correlation between crime and cleanliness – the cleaner a neighborhood, the less crime it has. One resident pointed out that in a clean community, kids are more likely to be outside playing, because of the tacit belief that a clean community is a safe one.

Much of the discussion around cleanliness at the listening sessions revolved around responsibility. Attendees agreed that residents of a neighborhood should be responsible for its cleanliness, and while some saw a role for law enforcement that was punitive (i.e., enforcing litter laws), others noted that community cleanups could be an endeavor in which MPD and residents could get together. Many also pointed out that other city of Milwaukee departments – such as the Departments of Neighborhood Services and Public Works – can and should be playing an active role in making sure public spaces are trash-free.

## Theme #5: Well-Resourced Neighborhoods

*Responses included comments on affordable rent, well-funded communities, addressing poverty, investment in basic needs, resource abundance, accessibility, meeting basic needs, funding, enjoying city resources, second chances, revitalization, lack of resource information, responsiveness, awareness of resources, supportive services, collaboration of services*

Session attendees recognized that neighborhoods with access to certain resources felt safer and more socially connected. In the context of public safety listening sessions, resources could mean basic needs – food, water, shelter – but also public spaces like parks and libraries, social resources like community organizations and clubs, health resources like availability of medications to treat opioid overdoses and therapy, and more.

Residents agreed that above all, resources equated to money: well-resourced neighborhoods were able to take care of the problems they had because they were able to pay for them. Many attendees recognized that there are finite financial resources available to city government, and focused on how



best to allocate or reallocate existing resources. Some argued, however, that Milwaukee is a resource-rich city, and a better provision of resources might happen if existing groups were able to better collaborate.

Both camps agreed that regardless of what resources were available, a better job could be done in communicating to residents about what is already at their disposal. At a number of meetings, individuals brought up the idea that many residents do not know how to seek out resources they need, and that greater public education and connectivity on the part of city government could be fruitful.

The conversations around resources also touched on law enforcement. The availability and responsiveness of MPD to calls for service was a resource that residents wanted more of. When MPD representatives asked “what do you wish to see more of from the police,” residents were sometimes surprised to hear about all of the various programs the department already has in place.

## Theme #6: Lighting and Noise

*Responses included comments on lighting, noise levels, lights on porches, street lights, well-lit roads/streets, visibility, darkness, solar street lights, a need for more quiet*

Along with general cleanliness, the topic of street lighting and noise was a focus of many, if not all public safety listening sessions. Residents had noticed that street lights were out in many neighborhoods and took a very long time to replace, and they cited bright, functioning street lights as a characteristic of a safe community.

Beyond the aesthetic importance that street lights have to a neighborhood (see theme #4), residents noted that when lights remain out for long periods of time, the incidence of crime might begin to increase. One resident spoke passionately about a parking lot near her that had recently removed a street light and subsequently became a hub for late night drug sales. Even without the presence of crime, the lack of good lighting in a neighborhood might create the appearance of neglect, which could in turn foster further criminal activity.

In a few instances, session attendees also noted that excessive, loud noise can make a community feel less safe. There was some discussion over how best to resolve noise disputes, as individuals making the noise may seek retribution if they are met with a complaint from MPD.

## Theme #7: Youth, Entertainment, and Recreation

*Responses included comments on entertainment, community centers, investment in youth, places for teens to gather, cultural programs, doing more events all year, awareness of programs, programs for kids, social programs, engaging the youth, community events, community organizations, senior-youth connections, children outside playing, getting kids involved*

While nearly every attendee at the public safety listening sessions was of working age, there was a consistent focus on Milwaukee’s youth. Adults fear that youth are bored, without recreational opportunities, skipping school, and engaging in risky behavior, including committing crimes.

Some suggested starting to address these issues at school. MPD officials mentioned events and programs that bring law enforcement and schools together, such as the School Resource Officer



(SRO) program in which an officer is stationed within a school building. After-school programs were another popular solution, especially for children in single-parent households.

In general, residents wanted to see more opportunities for and outreach towards youth. They lamented the rise of smartphones and social media, but also noted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on in-person gatherings. Many were quick to offer up their own time to pilot or coordinate programs, while others were already running them. As discussed in theme #5, session facilitators brought up the fact that many services for youth already exist, but they are not often well-coordinated or publicized. Residents also noted that MPD could lead more positive interactions with youth like Night Out events and smaller-scale activities like handing out baseball cards to youth (which MPD used to do).

The importance of youth mentorship also was cited. For many children, growing up in a family facing poverty or in a single-parent family can mean reduced attention from adults. A number of attendees were quick to name the non-family member who helped raise them and suggested that a mentor can help children work through various problems while providing important guidance for school and future careers.

The second-to-last public safety listening session was specifically targeted at youth, and turned out a small but vocal group. Above all, youth attendees at this session expressed a need for relationships with adults and law enforcement built on mutual trust and respect. Many had only experienced negative interactions with law enforcement, and felt that officers needed to better understand why they might engage in risky behavior. They cited a need for “trauma-informed care,” “safety,” “inclusivity,” “proper communication,” and “safe adults.” Youth at a separate listening session also highlighted a need for safe spaces to engage in constructive activities like playing sports, doing arts and crafts, and getting internship and employment opportunities. Many wondered about the potential for vacant lots around the city to be converted into recreation centers and multi-purpose facilities.

## Theme #8: Safety from Violent Events

*Responses included comments on reducing crime, focusing on violent crime, promoting peace, reporting crime, no reckless driving, no fear of walking, no people threatening, no car theft, gun safety, victim resources, night walks, hypervigilance, problematic situations, see something say something, respecting life, reduce gun violence, arresting people*

One of the foremost public safety concerns expressed by session attendees was the incidence of violent crime in the city. In particular, the prevalence of firearms, car thefts, and reckless driving were all primary concerns. Session attendees said they want to live in a neighborhood where they could walk freely, unafraid of being the victim of or witness to a violent crime.

Gun violence was the most common fear expressed. Attendees noted that guns are more prevalent now than they used to be, and they were falling into the hands of younger and younger individuals. Indeed, MPD data indicate that from 2018 to 2023, firearm-related violent crime rose by 31%, firearm-related homicides by 78%, and weapons law violations by 94%. Residents proposed some solutions that were out of MPD’s control – such as stricter gun laws – but also many that either MPD or another city department could consider, including gun buybacks, more patrols in areas with higher levels of gun violence, and helping to address some of the underlying causes that encourage youth to seek firearms.



Motor vehicle theft was a concern that seemed to be highly neighborhood-specific. It was also mentioned more at earlier listening sessions, as car thefts peaked in late 2021 and early 2022 before trending closer to pre-pandemic levels. Residents also said that reckless driving – which was part of a theme of its own (see next theme) – made individuals feel unsafe walking or biking around their neighborhoods. As with gun violence, session attendees mentioned that youth have become more and more inclined to steal vehicles and drive them recklessly.

## Theme #9: Safe Streets

*Responses included comments on safe streets, traffic enforcement, universal driver's education, pedestrian safety, rewards for safe driving, reckless driving, traffic control, driving the speed limit, driving instruction, 27<sup>th</sup> Street speeders*

Session attendees from a diverse array of neighborhoods stated that an increase in reckless driving and speeding were contributing to worsening conditions in their communities. Residents wanted to see law enforcement take a stronger stance against these crimes by enforcing speed limits and traffic rules, and hoped to see more attention paid to specific streets and intersections where the problem was more noticeable.

Attendees discussed a wide range of solutions to the problems posed by drivers who disobey the law. For many, creative infrastructure – like bollards, speed bumps, sidewalk bump-outs, additional signage, and even red light cameras – could shift some of the burden away from MPD by forcing drivers to slow down. Others discussed the critical role that driver's education plays for newer drivers who might take more risks on the roads.

MPD also facilitated a few discussions on their own protocol surrounding reckless driving. Particularly, officers said they often needed to be deliberative regarding their pursuit of reckless drivers, as there could be collateral damage to pedestrians, other drivers, and the built environment. Session attendees cited for MPD officers who attended listening sessions the intersections in their neighborhoods they believed deserved more attention.

## Theme #10: Mental Health

*Responses included comments on ensuring accessible mental health services and supports, parental involvement, destigmatizing mental illness and those who seek help for it, family stability, harm reduction resources, healing and wellness for officers*

When residents brought up the topic of mental health at listening sessions, there was near unanimous agreement that Milwaukee was facing an epidemic. Attendees cited the pandemic as a clear breaking point for many individuals, and some said they have observed behaviors from members of their community since that time that have ranged from erratic to criminal.

For most, the discussion revolved around mental health resources. Residents wanted to know how to quickly find care that met their needs or the needs of their loved ones. Many attendees were under the impression that there were simply not enough mental health resources in the community to go around.

Others focused on MPD's involvement in Milwaukee residents' mental health crises. Through a partnership between MPD and Milwaukee County's Behavioral Health Services, Crisis Assessment





Response Teams have been created that include both officers and trained clinicians who respond to calls for service involving individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. Session attendees had varying degrees of awareness of CART, and most agreed that MPD could do more to deploy mental health resources.

Attendees also were interested in the degree to which MPD officers had access to mental health resources. Officers discussed the training they received, and went into depth at one meeting about MPD protocol for officers involved in a firearm incident. Officers that attended the listening sessions made clear to residents that their own mental health was being taken very seriously by the department, and resources have become much more widely available in recent years, including the requirement that officers receive counseling after they have been involved in a critical incident. Residents and officers also discussed the use of service animals – such as dogs and horses – to support officer mental health.

## Other Items Outside of Law Enforcement Scope

While the themes discussed above cover many of the topics of discussion at the public safety listening sessions, residents also brought up items that were outside of the role of a traditional police department. While MPD might not be well-equipped now or in the future to address some of these topics, they still merit mention. Those topics include:

- **Civic Society.** Residents noted that safe communities are home to informed, participatory citizens who vote in elections, lobby for policies to be passed, and donate to causes they find important.
- **Public Works.** Lead service lines and structural damage to public spaces and structures were items residents brought up when asked what makes a neighborhood less safe. These items generally fall within the purview of the city's Department of Public Works and the Milwaukee Water Works.
- **Transportation.** Session attendees hoped to live in a Milwaukee with many transportation options beyond cars, including walking, biking, trains, and buses. For some, safety corresponds with the ability to get around with ease and comfort.
- **Housing.** Shelter is an obvious necessity for safety, and residents recognized that a lack of safe and affordable housing can be a major struggle for them and their neighbors. They wanted to see landlord-tenant relationships improved, and more housing built. Many cited the issue of out-of-town property management companies buying up properties in the city as an impediment to accessible, clean, safe housing.
- **Health.** Beyond mental health, physical health was cited as a key predictor of safety.
- **Hunger/Food.** Along with housing, residents brought up issues of access to healthy, affordable food as a key source of safety.
- **Employment.** For both youth and adults, session attendees noted that an increase in the level of employment or employment opportunities in a neighborhood can influence its level of safety.





# COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING IN OTHER CITIES

MPD currently conducts a wide range of events and programs that seek to build and enhance relationships with the community, including several that target specific populations. A full [calendar](#) of MPD events is available online, and a list of ongoing initiatives is available in **Appendix A**.

To provide context for themes voiced by residents at MPD’s community listening sessions, we conducted a broad overview of COP initiatives and community engagement plans in other cities. Our goal was to identify examples of initiatives that might address some of the weaknesses or further some of the objectives raised at the Milwaukee sessions. We focused on a wide range of peer cities<sup>3</sup> that are similar to Milwaukee in demographics or population, have stood out nationally for the work they have done around COP, or both.

Our search for examples also focused on initiatives from these cities that had some similarity to existing MPD and FPC activities and policies and that local leaders therefore might build upon instead of starting from scratch. In doing so, we found that Milwaukee already operates many programs that have equivalents in peer cities:

- Police departments in many peer cities transfer calls for service that involve mental health crises to a team that has at least one mental health professional. In Milwaukee, the county’s **Crisis Assessment Response Team (CART)** works [in tandem with MPD](#) to respond to these calls.
- Many police departments operate or facilitate groups that allow residents of a specific community to take charge of issues of public safety in their neighborhoods. MPD helps to facilitate [Block Watches](#) in various neighborhoods that serve this same purpose; while some groups are recognized by the department – which hosts their meetings – others are more tacit and run via Facebook or other social media.
- We found that many peer departments place an emphasis on youth programming, and the same can be said of MPD. The department’s Office of Community Relations, Engagement, and Recruitment (OCRER) runs the **Public Safety Cadets program**, which is “dedicated to preparing young adults, ages 14-20, for careers and leadership in the public safety profession.” The MPD calendar of events also lists many youth-focused dialogues, teen nights, group meetings, and even a “Student of the Month Award.”
- For working-age Milwaukee residents, the city’s **Citizen Academy** is a seven-week long program that dives deeply into the daily work of MPD officers. Similar programs exist in many peer cities, helping community members make sense of the work their police departments perform.
- In May 2023, MPD [re-launched](#) its **Police Athletic League** after it had been defunct for a number of years. This program, which exists [nationally](#), allows youth to interact with police

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<sup>3</sup> Our group of peer cities included Albuquerque, NM; Austin, TX; Baltimore, MD; Buffalo, NY; Burlington, VT; Cincinnati, OH; Cleveland, OH; Detroit, MI; El Paso, TX; Fresno, CA; Indianapolis, IN; Kansas City, MO; Memphis, TN; Minneapolis, MN; Newark, NJ; Oklahoma City, OK; Omaha, NE; Orlando, FL; Pittsburgh, PA; Portland, OR; San Antonio, TX; St. Louis, MO; Tampa, FL; Tucson, AZ. While we examined initiatives in each of these cities, we mention only items that stood out in peer cities as particularly helpful for the purposes of a future MPD Community Engagement Plan.



not only via athletics, but also through mentorship and educational activities. Many of Milwaukee's peer cities also run Police Athletic Leagues.

- MPD also recently launched a **camera-sharing program** called [Community Connect Milwaukee](#), which at the permission of the camera-owner allows MPD to build a registry of security cameras it can use to solve crimes, and additionally allows MPD to access those cameras when a crime has occurred nearby.
- MPD participates in the **Safe Place program**, which exists in peer cities like Tampa. Via two departmental LGBTQ+ Liaisons, businesses can sign up to serve as a haven for nearby victims of crime to wait until MPD shows up to respond to the incident. The program is geared towards both the LGBTQ+ community and victims of human trafficking.

The following pages identify and briefly describe several categories of COP-related initiatives observed in peer cities that might offer additional food for thought for officials and residents in Milwaukee.

## Service Provision to Communities in Need

MPD's current slate of programs targets many diverse populations, but a common thread across a number of peer cities was the provision of services that go above and beyond the job duties of policing to communities that need assistance. The Albuquerque Police Department's [shift to community policing](#), for example, included helping connect homeless residents with food and shelter and collaborating with community churches to create databases of services those institutions could provide. This kind of work is less tied to a specific program or event, and may involve department directives to a certain group of patrol officers to spend a certain amount of time each day or week working in their communities.

Oklahoma City offers a number of more concrete programs and events that deploy officers to help in their communities. The Family Awareness and Community Teamwork ([FACT](#)) program is focused around gang prevention for high school-aged youth, with plainclothes officers offering movie nights and other recreational activities, and the Youth Enrichment Services ([YES](#)) unit is a wing devoted to easing truancy throughout the city. The department's Homeless Outreach Team ([HOT](#)) includes two officers and one lieutenant whose job is to coordinate efforts between governmental agencies to provide services to chronically homeless residents. The Oklahoma City Police Department (OCPD) also operates a program called Seniors and Law Enforcement Together ([SALT](#)) with a goal of reducing the victimization of the elderly through programming and presentations. A number of current deputy chiefs within OCPD have been a part of one or more of these programs.

Like Oklahoma City, the Tucson Police Department (TPD) also has a [HOT Unit](#) that is well-positioned to meet the needs of the homeless members of their community. Despite deploying only two full-time officers to this unit, TPD has managed to [engage](#) with over 1,000 individuals and connect many with some form of housing. The Tucson program operates in partnership with other city departments to coordinate service provision, recognizing that there are other city employees who would be better positioned to meet resident needs – even if officers are the first to make contact.

It should be noted that MPD used to have its own HOT Unit, which worked closely with the Milwaukee Continuum of Care. Today, officers that are part of the department's Advanced Crisis Intervention Team receive eight hours of training around homelessness outreach, as there tends to be a high level of crossover between advanced crises and homelessness, though no dedicated HOT exists within the department.



## Deployment of Volunteers or Non-Police Staff for Public Safety Needs

Coordination with other city departments is one course of action police departments may choose to take, but some cities deliberately use volunteers or non-police municipal staff to address public safety needs. For some cities, use of volunteers frees up patrol officers to focus more heavily on traditional job duties, while for others, there may be utility in employing social workers in part- or full-time capacities.

Nationwide, many are familiar with the concept of crossing guards at schools, but the El Paso Police Department allows residents to apply to be School Zone Safety Volunteers. These volunteers fill the role of crossing guard while also managing the flow of traffic and helping to guide compliance with local traffic laws. Concerns about reckless driving were prevalent across public safety listening sessions, particularly when it came to the impact on youth.

Newark's Public Safety Collaborative<sup>4</sup> offers a different, enhanced version of school traffic safety. The [Safe Passage Program](#) first uses data to determine which schools are being most impacted by crime and other public safety issues. It then deploys a team of social workers to position themselves along popular routes to and from those schools, as well as in spots where students tend to congregate. Should a fight or other issue come up, these "Outreach Workers" are empowered to step in and alleviate tension.

The Kansas City, MO Police Department has an even larger vision for the deployment of civilian staff. As part of their [Social Services Program](#), six specialists are employed by the department – one for each patrol division station. When a patrol officer has an encounter with a resident, they can choose to make a referral to their station's specialist, who can provide prevention, intervention, or follow-up. By employing social workers, the department is able to boost its [customer service](#) to residents.

## Victim Services and Forums

For residents impacted by crime, police departments can strengthen their relationship with the community by offering services that are easy to access and helpful in alleviating the circumstances of what took place. They might devote non-sworn staff to victim services, or partner with existing community organizations that specialize in this kind of work.

In El Paso, the department's [Victim Services Response Team](#) has existed for nearly 30 years to connect victims with the proper channels based on what happened to them. This may include helping to file Protection Orders, dealing with the fallout from a domestic violence situation, or even making a connection with the Texas Crime Victim's Compensation Program.

Other programs take a more holistic approach, addressing the longer-term trauma brought on by crime. A Newark program called "[Trauma to Trust](#)" was kicked off in 2016; funded solely by grants, it offers training for officers and members of the community centered around how crime and

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<sup>4</sup> The Newark Public Safety Collaborative is a novel community policing collaboration between the City of Newark, the Newark Police Department, and a wide range of community partners and stakeholders. Using data and analytics, the Collaborative can determine which public safety and crime prevention initiatives might best solve the problems at hand, and deploy the community group or law enforcement personnel most adept at solving the issue. It is housed at the Rutgers School of Criminal Justice. For more, see <https://newarkcollaborative.org/>.



victimization has impacted the city. [Hundreds](#) of individuals have participated in the two-day program, which also aims to impact policymaking within the Newark Police Department.

Similarly, the “[Omaha 360](#)” program brings the police department in contact with the community on a regular basis to discuss violence prevention and intervention efforts. Started in 2008, the program has been a resounding success, as rates of gun violence and homicide have plummeted since that time; program leaders attribute much of that drop to Omaha 360, and the U.S. Department of Justice recognized the program’s model as a best practice.

Burlington, VT demonstrates another model. Their department [employs](#) a Domestic Violence Prevention Officer whose job is to “provide another layer of quality control” when a domestic violence case is initiated, with the goal to both advocate for the right of the victim and reduce domestic violence recidivism. The department also works hand-in-hand with Burlington’s [Community Justice Center](#), which runs a number of victim-centered programs including restorative justice panels, conflict assistance, court diversion, and more.

It should be noted that MPD maintains a longstanding partnership with the Sojourner Family Peace Center, a child advocacy and family violence center. MPD officers are stationed at Sojourner; as part of a 2015 policy update, officers that respond to domestic violence incidents conduct risk assessments and connect victims to Sojourner’s hotline. This partnership has been lauded by Sojourner, and provides a great starting point for other victim services MPD could provide.

## Resident-Led Policymaking

In Milwaukee, the FPC’s mission is to provide civilian oversight of both MPD and the Milwaukee Fire Department. FPC commissioners are all civilians and FPC meetings are open to the public. It appears to us, however, that other cities have increased the level of civilian involvement in police department policy to levels not seen in Milwaukee<sup>5</sup>.

Austin’s [Community Police Review Commission](#) is open to the public on an application basis, and members are required to have no association with any police department prior to their service. The Commission is empowered to review misconduct, make disciplinary recommendations, request briefings, advise the police chief, report to the public, and conduct community engagement activities. Chicago’s [Community Commission for Public Safety and Accountability](#) – created in 2021 - functions similarly, as residents meeting certain requirements can apply to serve four-year terms with powers that include setting policy, reviewing the budget, and working on community policing programs.

El Paso runs a program similar to FPC, called the [Community Advisory Board](#). The major difference is that rather than one board for the entire city, Community Advisory Boards exist in each of El Paso’s five regional command centers, and may therefore be more adept in meeting challenges that are community-specific. Residents are appointed by the Regional Commander rather than a non-police elected official (FPC members in Milwaukee are appointed by the Mayor and approved by the Common Council).

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<sup>5</sup> MPD’s Critical Incident Review Board, which advises the Chief of Police via analyses of critical and other incidents, also includes two civilian members. However, one of these members must be a graduate of the Citizen Academy, and both do not count towards quorum. They may also only attend meetings at the discretion of the Chief of Police.



Finally, the [Portland Committee on Community-Engaged Policing](#) (PCCEP) was convened as part of a DOJ ruling similar to the Collins Settlement. The 13-member committee holds elections for its positions, and brings together the chief of police, mayor's office, and Office of Equity and Human Rights. While it is an advisory committee, PCCEP serves as the go-between institution for the city and community on policymaking and implementation. The committee has subcommittees on the settlement agreement, racial equity, mental illness, and youth, which meet regularly. In November 2023, the DOJ and Portland filed a [joint motion](#) to terminate parts of the city's consent decree in recognition of the progress it had made.

## Collection and Use of Data

A better relationship between the community and the police may start with enhanced data collection. In order for the department to know where best to deploy its limited resources, it must understand what problems are impacting the community and how those problems evolve over time. MPD already has extensive data collection strategies in place to track crime incidences and other key metrics and it uses that data for decision-making, but other communities may offer insights on enhancements, particularly with regard to community engagement.

For example, the Memphis Police Department has issued an [annual report](#) in the past on its Community Outreach Program. The department collects dozens of data points it can track over time to determine how its efforts around community engagement are improving or falling behind.

At the other end of the scale are examples like the Data-Informed Community Engagement ([DICE](#)) model in Newark. The Newark Public Safety Collaborative uses a concept called [risk terrain modelling](#) to investigate when, where, and why crime is happening, and follows that up by soliciting input from local leaders and stakeholders from the communities in which crime is present. Armed with accessible, understandable data, police officials can conduct conversations with residents about crime prevention and better community-police relationships that are based on data rather than anecdotes.

COP can also be built into departmental operations from a data perspective. The City of Baltimore, via the police department's community engagement plan (CEP, which we discuss shortly), recommends not only collecting metrics around community policing, but also incorporating them into regular meetings that help the department to identify areas in need of improvement as well as recognize successes. The CEP also emphasizes the need for "data-driven analytical support for problem solving."

## Creating a Safer Built Environment

As referenced in the "Themes" section above, many listening session attendees in Milwaukee were quick to note that a safe community is one that is clean, well-lit, and pleasant to walk, bike, or drive around. While the police department perhaps is not the first city department many would think of when it comes to maintaining a cleaner city, Newark provides two implementable examples of programs that might benefit Milwaukee residents.

The Newark Public Safety Collaborative first partnered with a local public utility company in 2019 to install 1,500 [LED streetlights](#) where older, less powerful halogen lights used to be. The LED lights made the streets where they were installed significantly brighter, and Newark later found that compared to a control area, violent crime – primarily aggravated assault and nighttime robberies –



dropped significantly. As LED lights tend to last much longer than other types, a one-time project could have notable down-the-road impacts; MPD’s knowledge of where crimes like aggravated assault and robbery occur most frequently makes them an important partner in the deployment of street lighting technology.

The Collaborative also brought together community partners to refurbish [vacant lots](#) in an area of Newark settled on by use of data analytics. Those groups added little free library boxes, performance stages, murals, greenery, and more. In Milwaukee, this kind of initiative could accomplish multiple goals at once, beautifying the community and making it safer while also providing time and space for law enforcement and community residents to connect.

## Comprehensive COP/Community Engagement Plans

MPD could look to peer cities for insights on how they have crafted their COP procedures and community engagement activities. Two of the peer cities we examined have publicly available, comprehensive plans: Baltimore and Cleveland. It is important to note that both of these plans evolved out of federal consent decrees; while the process for which this report is written is not part of a consent decree, the Collins Settlement serves as a parallel.

In Baltimore, the [Community Policing Plan](#) is centered around “implementing [a] community policing philosophy throughout the Department.” It starts with a foundation built on five elements: organizational redesign, dedicated officer and analyst capacity, community-oriented policies, community-oriented training, and community partnerships.

For example, as part of the dedicated capacity element, the Plan notes that the goal of increased patrol staffing will be to “allow patrol officers to spend at least 40% of their time engaging in proactive and Community Policing.” As part of the organizational redesign element, it includes the idea that “every officer is a Community Policing officer.” The Plan details the specific Community Policing responsibilities of each type of law enforcement officer, from patrol to Executive Command and including community members. The need for data collection and analysis, as well as the need for every stakeholder in the Baltimore community to play a role in implementation, are running themes of the Plan.

Cleveland’s [Community and Problem-Oriented Policing Plan](#) includes many of the same elements as Baltimore’s. For example, the introduction to the Plan notes a similar need for structural changes and the idea that “All Officers Are Responsible for CPOP [Community and Problem-Oriented Policing].” The threshold for patrol officer time spent on CPOP – 20% - is lower than in Baltimore, but still detailed clearly in the plan. Cleveland’s plan takes an action-oriented approach to neighborhood-based policing, directing the department to use a city-developed asset map of community resources as a starting point for COP, and also directing CLO-equivalents to conduct “district neighborhood awareness training” on the demographic, cultural/ethnic, and historical components of each community.

While these cities provide newer examples of COP plans, Cincinnati provides a parallel that could also serve Milwaukee. Based on an [ACLU settlement](#) similar to Collins that was filed in 2001, city leaders from diverse backgrounds – ranging from police union representatives to community organizers – devised the Collaborative Agreement. The Agreement outlined ways in which the Cincinnati Police Department (CPD) could bolster its community engagement, relationships with city residents, proactive policing, and more. What stands out most about the Collaborative Agreement,





however, is its sticking power: it is still used as a governance guide for Cincinnati, having been in place for over 20 years. The Agreement even received a “refresh” in 2017, in which community- and problem-oriented policing were a main focus. Since the initial Agreement, CPD has undergone [dozens](#) of policy updates to bring them more in line with best practices.

## Summary

MPD already has several policies and programs that constitute a solid basis for COP. In fact, in roughly half of the peer cities we examined, we were unable to find COP initiatives that differed significantly from MPD’s and would therefore be informative to the department.

That said, themes emerged in the cities that did have more expansive COP practices. First, **MPD could do more to target neighborhoods and individuals most in need of attention.** Cities like Burlington, Newark, and Omaha all take a more in-depth approach to victim services, offering residents of their communities the opportunity to speak out, be heard, and receive emotional or financial compensation. Others, like Oklahoma City, Albuquerque, and Tucson, dedicate officer time to specific residents of their communities most in need of attention outside of a crime being committed, for the purposes of future safety.

It is also clear that **data plays a key role in COP in peer cities.** Both Baltimore and Cleveland place a heavy emphasis on the collection, analysis, and deployment of data in their comprehensive plans, ensuring a strategically targeted approach to COP, while Cincinnati has had a similar plan in place for more than two decades. Newark and Memphis demonstrate two ends of a potential data spectrum: on one end, data can be as simple as counting how many programs the department ran or residents it helped, while on the other, it can be used to optimally deploy officers and solicit community feedback.

Finally, a scan of Milwaukee’s peer cities shows that **COP requires active participation by community members and participation from all police department personnel.** In cities with comprehensive plans, an emphasis is placed on the specific role of each employee of the police department in rolling out and implementing COP; plans also clearly delineate the amount of each officer’s day that should be devoted to interacting with the community. COP is not on the shoulders of law enforcement alone, though, as shown in cities like Portland, Austin, and El Paso that more comprehensively include civilian residents in policymaking and advisory roles.





# POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

One year ago, MPD published its [2023 Violent Crime Plan](#), which lays out ongoing COP initiatives, calls to action, and even “micro-level” crime plans for each of the city’s seven police districts. It is clear from this report, information available on MPD’s various websites and social media, and discussions at public safety listening sessions that MPD takes very seriously its role in bringing an effective COP strategy to Milwaukee’s residents.

In this section, we offer a few policy suggestions MPD may wish to consider as it 1) builds out Standard Operating Procedure 003; 2) drafts a Community Engagement Plan; and 3) continues to improve its community oriented policing. MPD already has practices in place that address many of the items cited by listening session attendees to enhance public safety. Consequently, much of our discussion below focuses on ways to expand programs so that more residents know about and participate in them, rather than creating them from scratch.

Providing officers with the capacity to engage more with their community will take time. We pointed out in [Under Pressure](#) that one of the central challenges facing MPD is the lack of capacity for officers to conduct proactive policing activities, both because of the loss of sworn staff and an increase in time-intensive “Priority 1” calls for service. Nonetheless, and particularly because the city is mandated under 2023 Wisconsin Act 12 to boost its police department staffing levels over the next decade, it is important for the department to consider these items despite its current staff capacity challenges.

1. **Expand COP practices to include every sworn and non-sworn member of MPD.** Currently, MPD employs 12 CLOs and 13 Community Partnership Unit (CPU) officers. These officers are tasked with forming relationships with the community and relevant city agencies, running community events, staffing block watch meetings, and generally being the face of the department in their respective districts.

As of the end of 2023, the department’s sworn staff totaled just under 1,600. While there are three or four CLOs/CPUs in each district, there are also hundreds of patrol officers whose role is not as explicitly community-oriented. In listening sessions, residents acknowledged that while CLOs and CPUs serve an important role, they are not always the same MPD officers who are conducting stops and arrests or patrolling their neighborhoods. Residents cited trust, transparency, and neighborliness as imperative to community safety; strong relationships with all officers could help to build all three.

Both Community Engagement Plans we found in peer cities (Baltimore and Cleveland) provided a specific amount of time every officer should be devoting to COP, regardless of their designation. While a threshold of 20-40% of patrol time spent on COP might be unrealistic and/or impractical for MPD right now, the department could consider setting a more manageable threshold. Allowing every officer to spend more time getting to know their community not only helps residents become more familiar with MPD, but also helps officers get to know the neighborhoods they are patrolling. The department could also consider other ways to allow patrol officers to spend more time in conversation with Milwaukee residents.

2. **Increase data collection and sharing.** MPD publishes a user-friendly [dashboard](#) with various metrics on “part 1” crime – the most serious offenses, such as homicide or motor vehicle



theft - and also has crime and traffic accident data available as part of the city's [Open Data Portal](#). While crime is clearly the leading indicator of citywide public safety, however, many of the issues and concerns discussed in public safety listening sessions go beyond the number of offenses committed.

Peer departments collect and publish COP data that helps inform department leaders on how best to engage with the community. In Baltimore, for example, the Community Engagement Plan encourages the department to collect COP-related metrics such as how many events are being held, the number of attendees at events, and outcome data from those events. Those metrics are discussed at regular staff meetings.

Collecting and analyzing more data could help MPD to establish a more community-oriented approach by tackling the problems specific to a neighborhood. In many cases – as residents pointed out at listening sessions - crime is the end result of a long process of fraying social trust. Knowing how many street lights in a neighborhood are out or what schools have the highest proportion of chronically absent students could be just as important for the deployment of MPD resources as what district has the most homicides. The 2023 Violent Crime Report cites “community feedback” as an accountability metric for each of MPD’s seven districts; quantitative data in this area from surveys or calls for service also would be valuable.

In addition to part 1 crimes, MPD might consider rolling out a dashboard or publishing information on part 2 crimes, which – while generally less serious– constitute a large proportion of the city’s criminal activity. Additionally, the department might collect more data on the events that precede incidences of crime, such as housing insecurity, truancy, and calls to Milwaukee’s Unified Call Center for items like broken streetlights. Looking to Newark’s Public Safety Collaborative, MPD could devote more resources to sharing neighborhood-specific crime data with community groups in those neighborhoods, which could then work in collaboration with law enforcement to address the underlying causes of crime.

3. **Take a more active role on social media, and organize the MPD website(s) in a way that is more user-friendly.** Currently, MPD has four websites – the official [city page](#), one for the [Public Information Office](#), one for the [Traffic Safety Unit](#), and one for the Office of Community Relations, Engagement, and Recruitment. The department also has [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages. Residents who closely follow MPD might be aware of where best to find information, but for the average Milwaukee resident, it might be difficult to know where to look to find community events (Public Information Office) versus submitting a resident complaint (city page) versus learning about the National Night Out program (Community Outreach and Education).

Additionally, MPD leadership mentioned at numerous community listening sessions that they were not as familiar with social media as those in other city departments. While sites like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube might have been purely recreational in the recent past, today they are important avenues for digital communication – especially among youth, a focus of the public safety listening sessions.



MPD could consider building out its social platforms not only to familiarize residents with what they do, but also to create digital communities that are more adept at addressing the problems in each city neighborhood. A high school student, for example, may not be likely to independently visit an MPD website or the department's Facebook page, but a TikTok video filmed at a Police Athletic League event might be able to garner that student's interest. For residents who seek MPD's services, it might also be beneficial to create a single website that makes it easier to establish a point of contact with the department. Particularly in non-emergency situations, the internet could serve as the best place for residents to connect with MPD and engage with neighbors to enhance public safety.

4. **Continue to study the ways in which MPD could take a more neighborhood-specific approach to patrolling and COP.** Listening sessions clearly demonstrated that the needs of each of Milwaukee's neighborhoods are different. In recognition of that, the [2023 Violent Crime Report](#) lays out each MPD district's initiatives related to both COP and Problem-Oriented Policing. The report is an excellent starting place for taking a more nuanced and community-based approach to public safety, and MPD should seek to ensure that the initiatives laid out for each neighborhood are both distinct and representative of the needs of the residents in that police district.

While the Violent Crime Report effectively delineates initiatives and themes by each of MPD's seven police districts, we heard from session attendees a desire for something even finer grained. There are many neighborhoods within each police district with varying demographic, social, and economic characteristics. For example, MPD District 3 includes neighborhoods like Washington Heights that border Wauwatosa, but also lower-income neighborhoods to the east, like Midtown and Walnut Hill. An MPD with more resources – or different deployment of some existing resources – might choose to invest in community policing initiatives that are not only district-specific, but neighborhood-specific.

5. **Continue to build out the assets the department offers, particularly in the area of youth engagement, by collaborating with existing community organizations.** As shown in **Appendix A**, MPD already does quite a bit to get involved with its community. Visits to schools, district events, and the Police Athletic League all offer avenues for Milwaukee's youth to meet officers and have fun in a safe, productive way. Additionally, Pathfinders – a youth services organization in Milwaukee – is invited twice a year to provide education to MPD officers on how to support youth experiencing an array of issues that include housing instability, mental health, and sexual exploitation.

Without data, it is difficult to know how many of the city's youth MPD is reaching with its programs, but there is always more that could be done. Residents at listening sessions continually brought up youth disengagement and recklessness as a public safety struggle for Milwaukee. MPD could continue to build on the relationships it has with organizations like Safe & Sound and the United Neighborhood Centers of Milwaukee to meet Milwaukee youth where they are at and provide resources and recreation. Particularly, MPD could invest more in forming connections with high school-aged youth outside of schools – those that might be more predisposed to reckless behavior. Along with recreation, mentorship might offer a powerful opportunity to form longer-lasting bonds.



6. **Continue to develop strong working relationships with relevant city agencies to solve problems that detract from public safety.** MPD's Community Partnership Units are the department's liaisons with key city agencies, such as the Office of Community Wellness and Safety, the Department of Public Works, the Department of Neighborhood Services, and the City Attorney's Office. Several suggestions voiced by listening session attendees involved concerns that fall outside of MPD's purview and might be more appropriately handled by one of these agencies, such as parks, lighting, streets, or housing.

MPD could continue to explore ways to facilitate more open communication between itself and these agencies, as residents may be more familiar with - and therefore more likely to report issues to - MPD.



# CONCLUSION

This report provides a summary of the 16 public safety listening sessions held across the city of Milwaukee from July 2022 to February 2024, along with insights from COP efforts in peer cities. We hope that MPD, FPC, the CCC, and other city stakeholders can use the contents of this report to bolster SOP 003, create a department-wide community engagement plan, and continue to move community oriented policing forward in Milwaukee.

The listening session process yielded important findings. A large swath of attendees from different backgrounds and neighborhoods were generally supportive of the department, but also agreed there was more needed to make Milwaukee a safer city. While some residents voiced concerns around common crime issues like the preponderance of firearms and motor vehicle theft, others noted that safety can be linked to the physical environment of neighborhoods and wished to forge lasting connections with their neighbors.

Our research also found that MPD already has a solid framework for community policing in place. CLOs and Community Partnership Unit officers have been tasked with creating and nurturing the links between the department and the city's residents, and initiatives like CART and Block Watches – while sometimes small in scope – have broadened the definition of public safety to include more than just traditional law enforcement practices. MPD partnerships with organizations like Safe & Sound and the Sojourner Family Peace Center also speak to the department's connection to its community.

However, we found that among peer cities, there are examples that MPD could use to build out its COP practices. The ways in which other departments use data to alleviate crime and enhance public safety, for example, should be considered. MPD could also assess, in crafting a community engagement plan, whether it might be appropriate to require each officer to devote some of their time to COP initiatives. Beyond these items, our research suggests potential for enhancements to digital communication and both community and public partnerships.

We heard from the attendees of listening sessions that residents want their neighborhoods to be places where people can come together and form the bonds of community. Given MPD's size and mission, it will necessarily be a key player in that reality. We hope this report serves as a useful prelude to a community engagement plan that can strengthen the bonds between law enforcement and residents in the coming years.



# APPENDIX A: LIST OF COMMUNITY POLICING INITIATIVES

The following is a (non-comprehensive) list of initiatives MPD has participated in and groups they have partnered with in recent years. Information comes from various MPD websites and the Public Information Office's calendar of events.

## MPD Office of Community Relations, Engagement, and Recruitment (OCRER)

- Citizen Police Academy
- Police Auxiliary
- Robbery Deterrence Classes
- Public Safety Cadet Program
- Water Balloon Bonanza
- Back to School Bash
- Trunk or Treat

## MPD Community Liaison Officers (CLOs)

- Crime and Safety Meetings
- Block Watches
- Other Community and Group Meetings
- Faith and Blue

## Other MPD Initiatives (i.e. not run by CLOs or OCRER)

- LGBTQ+ Liaisons
- Traffic Safety Unit
- Atlas One
- Critical Incident Review Board
- Adopt-A-School
- Ring Door Bell Giveaway (Fusion Division)
- Police Athletic League
- Food Pantry Volunteering/Donation
- Teen Groups, Teen Nights, Youth Dialogues
- Coffee with a Cop
- Student of the Month Award
- Church Presentations
- Barbershop Events (i.e. "Barbershop Monday")
- Turkey Giveaway
- Car Seat Giveaway
- Wakanda Wednesday
- Art Therapy
- National Night Out; Night Walks
- End of Summer Broadway Bash
- Summer Pop-Up Events
- Block Parties
- Back to School Book Bag Giveaway, Picnic, Festival
- 414 Trust Kickball Tournament, Cops and Kids Kickball Game
- Festival Comunitario



- Live in Action Resource Fair
- Cops and Bobbers
- District Clean Ups
- Walk and Roll Bike Event
- Shop with a Cop

**Partnerships (i.e., initiative is run by another organization OR an organization MPD frequently partners with)**

- Crisis Assessment Response Team (CART) (Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division)
- Credible Messengers (Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division)
- Crime Stoppers
- City of Milwaukee Office of Community Wellness and Safety
- Partners in Hope
- Safe & Sound
- Earn and Learn (City of Milwaukee)
- Project ChildSafe
- MPOWER
- Operation Green Light (local businesses)
- Reach-A-Child
- Camp Hero (Girl Scouts)
- Advance Auto Parts Gift Card Giveaway
- Mentor Greater Milwaukee
- Milwaukee Bucks
- Running Rebels
- Drive Wisdom (Safe and Sound)
- Steering Wheel Lock Giveaway (Kia, Hyundai)
- Community Connect Milwaukee
- Safe Place Program (local businesses)
- Kids Culinary Summer Camp (Lisa Kaye Catering)
- Sojourner Family Peace Center

