

Mayor's Commission on Reentry Minutes
April 19, 2021 at 1:00pm

In attendance: Keith Mitchell, Pat Frey, Michael Forte, John House, Shereatha Sims, Will Johnson, Rick Louie Abney, and Waleisah Wilson.

Michael Forte opened the meeting in prayer.

The minutes were reviewed and Michael Forte motioned to accept the minutes as read. The minutes were approved.

Keith asked the Commission to review the notes that were sent out from the Community of Practice meetings and be prepared to discuss how what we are learning aligns with our strategy. He also shared that the Commission had a meeting with the Cure Violence team.

As we are looking at zoning for residential housing and challenges related to housing for returning citizens, we invited Will Johnson and Louie Abney to share information on zoning requirements. Will shared that zoning ordinances for people who are still under some type of supervision limit where they can be located. Although these are called transitional homes, they are treated differently than other types of transitional homes. They cannot be located in a residential area.

If someone is not under supervision, they can locate anywhere as long as they are not at a personal care home. State distance requirements create additional restrictions for sex offenders.

Q—Shereatha asked if there are specific areas where transitional homes can be located.

A—Will explained they are only allowed in industrial zones in Columbus as they are viewed more as facilities/dorms than homes.

Q—Pat asked if industrial means a hotel could be used as transitional housing.

A—Will stated, “No, because that hotel would not be located in a lite manufacturing area.”

Shereatha explained that landlords don't have properties in industrial zones so they will be unable to work with her to offer needed housing solutions.

Pat shared that folks will get arrested for being in the sex-offender camp if the agreement with the Georgia DOT is approved by City Council. This is a problem because we will be arresting people for being in an area that was sanctioned by Community Supervision and the Sherriff's Department. It meets their proximity restrictions. We need to put together a group to have discussion on how to handle this problem going forward.

Louie explained that the 2nd avenue area is the only area that is compliant location for them to live. If it gets shut down, they will be pushed into other areas of the community that are not complaint. In this case sex offenders will likely end up in Bibb City or near the elementary. Pat is beginning to make progress with the sex offenders residing in the camp. They are now beginning to respond and ask for

assistance. She emphasized that we need to take care of the symptom while we take care of the deeper problem.

Keith asked if there is an opportunity to get some guidance from Will and Louie on how to properly address the housing issue in our community. We would like to have them work with our Housing Subcommittee to find some solutions.

Will explained that the issues get muddy because of the political nature of the problem. He is happy to help with the technical issues, but this is truly a political issue. Pat responded that knowing what the rules are will help housing providers know how to plan as this is not a short term fix.

Waleisah shared that sex offenders on all levels are being lumped together by prosecutors and treated under rules that don't necessarily apply to them. She asked if the Commission can do some community education on these tier levels and requirements for sex offenders. Louie agreed this is a problem.

Q—John asked if someone is released on parole, does this count as supervision? If they moved into some type of group home, would this be considered a transitional home or just a group home?
A—Will said this is a grey area. His opinion is that it would not be considered a transitional home because there is not a parole office there overseeing parolees at all times.

Will and Louie agreed to work with the Housing Subcommittee on the housing challenges.

Keith asked if everyone got a copy of the strategic outline on Ban the Box. We need to rally around that effort to ensure that is successful in our community. Pat asked if all of the organizations we work for have taken the box off of their applications. Are we going to lead by example? Keith will make sure we address this among our participating organizations.

The Faith Based subcommittee has been meeting and has created a survey that will be sent out to churches. It asks the question, "are you serious about prison ministry?" If the answer to this question is no, the survey ends after this question is answered. If churches aren't serious about helping, we would be spinning our wheels by trying to connect.

There were no website updates to report. The communication component is an area we need to improve. This will be very important moving forward.

Keith explained that we want to spend most of our May meeting revisiting our strategic plan and strengthening our focus for that annual work. We want a strong pathway forward with where we are going, what we want to accomplish, and partnerships needed to accomplish this. We may also consider looking at this strategic plan from a 2-year approach. We also need key talking points in the areas of our work. Our goal is ultimately to have this presented in a way that will accurately represent Commission work to City Council and to our community.

Waleisah suggested someone should also get in touch with Restore Georgia, an organization advocating for sex offenders and pushing for laws that are more rational.

Keith met with Major General Coburn with the Georgia Military College. He is interested in partnering with the Commission on a pre-college prep program for individuals after they get their GED. We want to invite him to a future meeting to share more.

Our next meeting will be on May 17, 2019. We will meet virtually on zoom.