

Marion County Public Safety Coordinating Council
2016 Community Forums and Neighborhood Association Meetings

BACKGROUND

Established in 1997, the 29-member Marion County Public Safety Coordinating Council acts as an advisory council to the county board of commissioners. The council works to forge long-term partnerships in the public safety system through an environment of collaboration, leadership, data-driven policy, transparency, and accountability. Throughout 2016, the council visited neighborhood associations and hosted regional community forums, including a telephone town hall.

Community forum topics included: justice reinvestment; juvenile justice; Mid-Willamette Homeless Initiative; and emergency preparedness. Forums offered an opportunity for community members to discuss issues of importance to specific neighborhoods as well as general county-wide concerns. Focus of the conversations was often influenced by which council member attended the meeting.

PROCESS

Reaching out to the community through neighborhood forums allowed council members to meet people in settings conducive to open dialogue and direct feedback. With the 24 community forums and telephone town hall, council members connected directly with approximately 1,700 Marion County residents.

THEMES

Review of community forum meeting notes identified common themes that were consistent across the county. Each theme below lists a numerical indicator to identify the number of community forums where the topic was discussed.

HOMELESSNESS (18): Homeless camps, squatters in vacant buildings and community parks, and homeless sleeping on city streets are concerns throughout the county. People sleeping in cars and parking recreational vehicles in neighborhoods were presented as problems for residents and people experiencing homelessness.

LAW ENFORCEMENT (16): Support for police and Sheriff's Office community outreach programs and an interest in increasing positive community/law enforcement interactions were presented as consistent themes. Also raised were questions and suggestions regarding the new Salem police facility.

DRUGS (16): Discussions focused on the effects of marijuana legalization, especially related to questions about increased crime. Drug houses and increased drug usage in neighborhoods is a concern.

CRIME (13): Gang activity, vandalism, graffiti, property crimes, damage to vehicles, and damage to parks were mentioned as concerns primarily in Salem.

JAIL/REENTRY (12): An overview of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative was given at each of the meetings, leading to conversations about recidivism rates, releasing inmates to their home community,

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and acknowledgement that the reentry employment program is critical for clients and is successful in communities.

TRAFFIC (11): Speeding, traffic incidents, and pedestrian safety appeared as concerns throughout the county. Issues more specific to Salem were congestion, school zone violations, and illegal parking.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT (8): Community emergency preparedness awareness is widespread. Questions arose about how and where to get emergency information, as well as concerns over what happens to inmates in a natural disaster.

YOUTH ISSUES (6): Many neighborhoods have experienced an increase in youth-related crimes including: loitering; vandalism, especially in parks; and an increase in youth drug use. People are interested in Peer Court/Teen Court programs, and family/youth prevention programs.

MENTAL HEALTH (5): A need for services in rural Marion County is necessary since transportation to Salem is not available, or is difficult for many people. The Crisis Outreach Response Team was discussed at several forums, in response to community concern over the wellbeing of people with mental illness.

OTHER TOPICS OF INTEREST: Themes that were mentioned less frequently but merit inclusion: Cities/county allowing tiny houses/accessory dwelling units to increase the housing supply; concerns about services for veterans; animal control issues, and transportation concerns for people needing to access services.