

TO: Mayor Murphy, Merced City Council, City Manager, and City Attorney

FROM: Mayor Pro Tempore Anthony Martinez, District 1

DATE: March 25, 2017

SUBJECT: Discussion of implementing a community outreach initiative within the Merced police department.

Mayor Murphy and members of the Merced City Council, this memo will serve to inform you of my intentions to engage the council in a discussion regarding our local police and the installation of a city-wide community outreach initiative with the purpose of reducing crime, building and strengthening community relationships, and providing a forum for direct discussion, education, and engagement between the Merced police and the residents of the city of Merced.

Context

Throughout our town hall meetings this year there were members of the community that spoke to the council with the suggestion of initiating a violence prevention program in Merced similar to Stockton's Ceasefire program. Community members pointed out that programs such as these require direct involvement with police and members of the community. This involvement occurs in the form of advisory committees, "listening sessions" and other city-wide efforts led by the police department with the city council's support.

After hearing people speak on this issue, it became apparent to me that there is a desire within the community of Merced to have a larger role in direct communication and input with the chief of police. In short, there is a strong desire from the public to help contribute to its own public safety. If this is the case, then I believe an initiative designed by our chief with our council's support and community input will maximize our desire to better implement city-wide community policing and strengthen our current relationships within local neighborhoods.

Discussion

When discussing the Ceasefire program of Stockton, it is important to acknowledge that this program is part of a greater crime fighting plan. It is not considered the "be-all and the end-all," but, instead, one tool of a much bigger plan. I believe that each police chief must be responsible for forming his or her own plan in combating crime in all aspects, empowering residents to help keep their neighborhoods safe, and building trust and openness among law abiding members of the community, no matter their histories, their political beliefs or where they were born. I also believe that it is the city council's role to support its chief in the plan he or she chooses to implement.

With that being stated, I further believe it is time for the city of Merced to embark on our own initiative to help strengthen relationships between residents and police, and to create a pathway for the community to directly contribute its ideas and insights to the chief of police and his captains. Like Ceasefire, I imagine this initiative to be a small part of a greater plan designed by the chief to help fight crime in all aspects. While it should be noted that the violence in Stockton is far more pervasive than it is in Merced, our community outreach initiative needn't be solely focused on the reduction of violent crime, as Ceasefire is; instead, ours will be focused on developing relationships, educating others, and offering the community opportunities to contribute to its own public safety.

It must be acknowledged that the Merced police already do many positive, community related activities to engage with residents, such as coffee with a cop and its Citizen's Academy. It must also be acknowledged that there is a genuine desire among the police to connect with residents on as meaningful of a level as possible. With that being stated, I believe directing staff to help assist the chief in developing a community outreach initiative with the goals of strengthening community relationships, providing the community with opportunities to directly contribute to their own public safety, and supporting members of the community that want to reestablish themselves as law abiding citizens, will empower our chief to add to what the police are already doing and assist our police in further branding themselves as a model force in the state of California.

Closing

In closing, I would like to state that after speaking with members of Building Healthy Communities, the chief of police and the city manager, I believe there is a strong desire to develop an initiative that adequately represents Merced. What that should look like is still an issue for consideration, but if supporting the chief of police in helping to create an initiative with the aforementioned goals, and with community input, is something that sounds suitable to you, then I would ask that you consider the ideas I will present during the next council meeting and be prepared to share any thoughts, concerns, or ideas of your own. I thank you in advance for hearing my thoughts on this issue and for your consideration of this.