Proposal: Crime & Safety Commission

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Crime & Safety Commission

As a citizen of Pottawattamie County and a County Supervisor, I have introduced the proposal to create a crime & safety commission as a way of developing a unified approach to assessing and responding to crime throughout Pottawattamie County. My proposal has been developed as a way of allowing the elected officials, community organizations, and the citizens of Pottawattamie County to become more informed on the crime that is taking place in their communities and more engaged with public safety agencies in the discussion of how the issue of crime is assessed and responded to in their individual communities and the county as a whole.

Each city and the county is responsible for determining how they will fund and respond to crime in their area, and a crime & safety commission can become a resource and a clearinghouse for elected officials, public safety officials, community organizations, and the citizens throughout Pottawattamie County. It will help to facilitate the discussion on crime statistics, the response to crime by public safety, the expectations of citizens, and how a community is perceived due to crime. A commission can become an opportunity to openly discuss each of these issues.

Organization

When you research crime & safety commissions throughout the United States, you will find different examples of how communities and local and state governments organize and utilize commissions to address crime related problems in their communities. How a commission is organized and the overall mission of a commission is based on the needs and goals of those who are participating.

To begin the discussion, I’m proposing the development of a crime & safety commission that will be based on a partnership between the elected officials of the county and cities of Pottawattamie County, and then expand to partnerships with law enforcement, criminal justice agencies, and organizations that could play a part in the discussion. The commission could be a countywide committee established under the Board of Supervisors, or established as an agreement between each of the participating elected officials or the government organizations they represent.

I’m not recommending the development of a 28E agreement that would create a new organization, or the introduction of paid staff to develop a new department or
organization. The commission should be a simple partnership based on members working together on projects that will help them discuss, assess, and determine how communities should respond to crime. It could be led by a chairman or member that serves as a facilitator, or a leadership team of members that wish to take a lead role in the project. All of this would be up to the participating members.

I’m proposing that the commission would meet quarterly at different locations throughout Pottawattamie County. The meetings would allow members to discuss crime statistics and the projects the commission has agreed to move forward with. I believe the meetings should be open to the public, and a portion of the meeting should allow for public questions and input on any concerns they may have.

Commission projects

I’m proposing three initial projects that the commission members, law enforcement, and criminal justice agencies could work on together to address crime issues throughout Pottawattamie County. The development of a countywide crime statistics report; the enhancement of countywide crime mapping analysis; and the assessment of how law enforcement, the criminal justice system, and each community responds to domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse.

Obviously there are many other projects that the commission can and should address, and it would be the responsibility of the members to identify and prioritize the projects they wish to move forward with.

Countywide crime statistics report.

When looking at the criminal justice system throughout Pottawattamie County, there are over 10 different state and local law enforcement and criminal justice agencies that operate within Pottawattamie County. Many of these agencies have overlapping jurisdictions throughout Pottawattamie County and work together in their response to crime.

As a basic example, a robbery in the City of Council Bluffs could involve multiple law enforcement and criminal justice agencies. A 911 call made to the Sheriff’s Office Communication Center begins the response to the crime. The Council Bluffs police department will respond to and investigate the crime. If a suspect is arrested, the suspect will be held in the Sheriff’s Office jail. The suspect will then be prosecuted by the County Attorney’s Office in the courts of the 4th Judicial District. In this example, four different agencies could be involved in the response to this crime.
Each of the local law enforcement and criminal justice agencies operating in Pottawattamie County keep statistics on their calls for service, cases, and activities, but there is no centralized location that you can find this information. To get a true assessment of what the law enforcement and criminal justice agencies are doing throughout the county, a person must contact each agency individually and request this information. Although each agency is open to sharing this information, it becomes a time consuming process for elected officials and citizens that wishes to view the information.

I’m proposing the develop a countywide crime data report that would be published each quarter. The crime data report would show statistics for the activities of each of the law enforcement and criminal justice agencies in our county. Instead of utilizing the limited, and often year old data found in the FBI uniform crime report, these quarterly reports would give elected officials and the public an updated look at the crimes that are taking place throughout Pottawattamie County and how each agency is responding. This information would help individual communities and the members of the commission to assess what problems are being seen throughout the county, and determine how they wish to respond. This quarterly report would also be beneficial to advocacy and community organizations, neighborhood groups, and individual citizens who wish to know and understand what is taking place in communities.

Over time, the commission will work with agencies to determine the best way to interpret and utilize the statistics on this report, and this data can be used to make strategic budgetary decisions.

**Countywide crime mapping analysis software.**

The Council Bluffs police department and the Sheriff’s Office are effectively utilizing online mapping software on a website called Crimemapping.com. The software allows agencies to show the locations of each report and produce basic reports on dates, times and locations of crimes.

I’m proposing a discussion on expanding crime mapping to include more advanced analysis software that will allow law enforcement agencies throughout the county to better assess and respond to crime throughout the county. By utilizing staff in law enforcement agencies or developing a partnership with the Pottawattamie County Geographic Information Systems (GIS) department, data reports can be developed to allow law enforcement and elected officials in each community to better determine where staffing and budget resources should be focused while addressing crime prevention and responses in their community.

Advanced data reports on crime trends and problems that might be occurring in neighborhoods throughout the county could be added to the quarterly crime statistics report. These advanced data reports could be utilized by communities,
neighborhoods, businesses, and even individuals to make decisions on how to prioritize efforts to present and respond to crime.

Response studies.

I’m proposing that the members of the commission work together to study and review the responses to the many crimes that take place in Pottawattamie County. To conduct the reviews, the commission would work with law enforcement, criminal justice agencies, and other organizations that respond to crimes or work with crime victims, and begin to discuss the role of each organization.

As an example, to study and review the response to domestic violence, the commission would first learn about the laws related to domestic violence from the County Attorney’s Office, and then work with organizations such as Catholic Charities to understand the dynamics associated with domestic violence. The commission would then start to work with each agency involved in responding to domestic violence to learn about their role. We can then walk through a response to domestic violence from the time a 911 call is received to when a suspect is prosecuted and convicted of a crime. The study needs to be a discussion with each agency on what currently takes place, why it happens, and what would work better.

Throughout the study, the members of the commission will work with each agency to determine if our response is adequate, and work to possibly make recommendations on what improvements would help the process. This will be an opportunity for agencies to discuss best case scenarios and ideal responses to crimes, and elected officials can collectively discuss priorities and needed funding.

This will become an opportunity for elected officials and the community to better understand the process of preventing and responding to crime, and it will allow law enforcement and the criminal justice system to explain their needs and recommendations.

I’m proposing that we first look at the response to domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse throughout Pottawattamie County. These would be the first of many systematic reviews that the commission can conduct to analyze the response to crimes and make recommendations on how we should move forward in the future.

How do we move forward?

Our first step is to determine if each community and the county as a whole would benefit from having an open discussion about crime and whether or not a crime & safety commission would help to facilitate this discussion. There are many ways
to develop a crime & safety commission, so it’s important that people come to the table with an open mind. People must understand that the discussion must be a countywide discussion, not just a discussion about one or two communities. The development of a commission needs to be viewed as a group effort, that will provide individual communities with good data and information they can use to make decisions.

At our first meeting, I would like to discuss the proposal of crime & safety commission and each of my proposed projects. The meeting is meant to determine if communities would like to move forward with the development of a commission, and if so, how do we want to organize it. My hope is that the first meeting will give us an outline for the commission and I will be able to develop a formal proposal to create a crime & safety commission that I can present to each of the elected officials in the community.