

# MEETING MINUTES

Mayor's Crime Intervention Task Force  
The GATE 201 E. Gordon St., Kinston, NC  
Thursday, August 30, 2023, at 10:30 am

**Mayor Dontario Hardy called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m.**

**Pastor Ryan Vernon delivered the prayer and everyone recited the pledge of allegiance.**

## **Present:**

Otravia Freeman (DJJ)	Christy Smith (Len. Co Sheriff's Ofc.)
Mike Walston (DJJ)	Frankie Dawson (DJJ)
Felicia Solomon (LCPS)	McKinley Jones (KPD)
Jimmy Summers, II (DJJ)	Nikki Benston (DJJ)
Robert Williams (KPD)	Joyce Hawkins (Neuse Regional Library)
Gregory Dunk (Friends of the Homeless)	April Houston (RADD)
Linda Rouse Sutton (Lenoir County Comm.)	Anna Kinsey (KCHC)
Jackie Rogers (Lenoir County Sheriff)	Justin Gorman (NCSHP)
Russell Price (DJJDP)	Dr. Joseph S.O.U.L.)
Melanie Morgan (Neuse Regional Library)	Nisha Grady (Prevention/Treatment)
Chris J. Suggs (Kinston City Council)	Michael Taylor (Kinston Teens)
Annette Turik (District Court Judge))	Frances J. Herring (LCPS)
Pam Stokes (DJJ)	Nicholas Harvey (LCPS)
Crystal Gwendo (Greene Lamp)	Brent Williams (LCPS)
Yvonne Deatherage (Mayor, Pink Hill)	Jennifer Mervin (SAFE in Lenoir Co.)
Shannon R. Ruiz (P.E.A.C.E Foundation)	Colleen Kosinski (AARC)
Ta'Ron Cannon (CTPF/Act Now)	Nancy Hodges (DJJ)
Nelson Wilson (Juvenile Justice)	Robert A. Swinson (Kinston City Council)
Cathy Rouse (Juvenile Justice)	Preston Harris (Len. County Comm.)
Shadecia Ingram (DJJ)	Bryan Shaffer (PRE)
Cindy Porterfield (DJJ)	Sharon Bell (Wayne Co. Structured Day)
David Nunnery (DJJ)	Rob Konfie (Wayne Co. Structured Day)
Kristy Kelly	Michael Hooker (Eastpointe)
Danny Perez	Erin Passailaigue (SAFE in Lenoir Co.)
Christopher Taylor (Macedonia Church)	Dr. Malcolm Beech (Eagle News)
Shannon Keyes (Meth. Home for Children)	Antonio Hardy (Kinston City Council)
Barbara Sutton (NAACP)	June Cummings (Lenoir County Comm.)
Ryan Vernon (902 Church)	

## **Consider Adoption of the Agenda**

**Linda Rouse Sutton made the motion, seconded by Pastor Ryan Vernon, and upon a unanimous vote, the agenda was adopted.**

## **Action Agenda**

**Consider approval of Minutes from June 8, 2023, meeting----- Debra Thompson**

**Mayor Pro Tem Antonio Hardy made the motion, seconded by Colleen Kosinski, and upon a unanimous vote, the minutes from June 8, 2023, were approved.**

**Discussion Items**

Memorandum of Understanding ----- Mayor Dontario Hardy

Mayor Hardy stated that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been completed and both the City and Lenoir County have a copy. The MOU indicates how we should operate moving forward and Mayor Hardy asked if there were any questions. There were no questions.

**Mayor Hardy recessed the meeting at 10:36 a.m.**

**Mayor Hardy reconvened the meeting at 11:00 a.m.**

Mayor Hardy thanked everyone for coming and introduced newly hired Gerard Tate, Director of the Office of Violence Prevention.

Mr. Tate thanked Governor Cooper for having the vision to create this office and shared that the office was responsible for making sure that they could bring the best available evidence and resources to local and county violence prevention and youth violence intervention programs. Mr. Tate stated it should be led on the community level but they wanted to make sure that there are other programs around the nation. He noted that he will be attending meetings around the state and will be listening to the needs of communities in the beginning. He introduced Chief Goyette, Kinston Police Department.

Chief Goyette recognized the Kinston Police Department VCAT Unit for receiving the Gang Unit of the Year award from the North Carolina Gang Investigative Association. He shared that out of 500 agencies in North Carolina we were awarded the title award. The unit was formed in December of 2022 and in the eight months since its inception murders were down 75%, gang shootings were down 75%, and weapons seizures were up 58%. Chief Goyette said that this team along with the Investigations Unit and the Patrol Unit has done an outstanding job and he could not be happier about what they have done. He said that he looked forward to continuing the aggressiveness of the agency. Chief Goyette recognized Rhonda Barwick, City Manager, the Lenoir County Sheriff's Office, and Sheriff Jackie Rogers, his chief partner helping to reduce crime in Kinston and Lenoir County. Chief Goyette introduced William Lassiter, the Department of Public Safety Deputy Secretary.

William Lassiter, Deputy Secretary thanked everyone for being here and shared his excitement to talk about NC SAFE, which is to Secure All Firearms Effectively. This is a new campaign started across the state of North Carolina to emphasize the point of getting all gun owners to lock up their firearms in their homes and vehicles. Research has shown that 42% of households in NC own firearms and of that 42% of households, 52% do not secure the firearms in their homes. They are left loaded and not secure in a safe or with a gun lock. Mr. Lassiter stated they want to reduce the number of people doing that. The reason is that he is over Juvenile Justice and has seen in the last four years that the number of kids possessing firearms when they commit crimes has grown. We went from about 4% of the population having a firearm-related charge, when they were charged as a juvenile in the state until last year over 13%. In

raw numbers that went from 1,500 incidents of juveniles possessing firearms to 4,500 incidents. The reason they are getting access to firearms is 1) they are taking them from their parents and 2) from vehicles; they are stealing them from cars. He stated he appreciates the Chief for the work he is doing in bringing the guns off the street, but the best thing would be for the illegal guns not to end up on the street in the beginning. One way to do that is that responsible gun owners do not let those guns get into the hands of young people or people who should not possess them. Mr. Lassiter reiterated that he is excited about the campaign and that we are here today to hear a little bit about it. He introduced his boss, Governor Roy Cooper who helped to fund the campaign. He said that Gov. Cooper, after hearing the numbers stated something had to be done about it. There were steps that could be taken in North Carolina without legislative action and the campaign is one of the steps they have worked on. They did get a bi-partisan bill that pushed this campaign moving forward. Mr. Lassiter thanked the governor for his leadership regarding this. The Governor has a great pedigree of working on issues of safety among our school children and was the first one in the country to roll out the crisis response kits. Along with that rapid deployment training was conducted. He referenced the incident at UNC this week and shared that the reason the response was so programmed and done correctly by law enforcement and emergency responders on the campus is because they have trained and practiced. That training and practice started over 23 years ago when the rapid deployment training was rolled out across North Carolina. The Governor was the one who helped to put that training in place when he was Attorney General. He thanked the Governor for his leadership on all the safety issues that have made our communities across the state of North Carolina safer.

Governor Roy Cooper stated he always feels welcome when he comes to Kinston/Lenoir County. He congratulated Chief Goyette and his team on his leadership and the work he is doing. He thanked Sheriff Rogers and his team for continuing to work together with folks in this community. He said that he is grateful to have established the Office of Violence Prevention through work using data-based, evidence-based methods to reduce violence in our communities. Gun violence is a public health issue. Governor Cooper acknowledged the attendance of Dr. Betsy Tilson, State Health Director and Chief Medical Officer for North Carolina, and P.J. Connolly, Director, Governor's Eastern Office. The mayors, city council members, and judges gathered here because many of you in what you do, see these issues every day. He stated that on Monday in Chapel Hill a student walked into a classroom building and shot a professor and an incident like that is horrifically commonplace in our state and country right now. This made headlines, but people are lying bleeding in the streets, or at home that never make a headline. Governor Cooper gave the facts that an average of five people every day in North Carolina die as a result of a firearm. The number one cause of injury and death for children in this state and country is being shot by a gun. This surpasses car accidents, suicide, and accidental injury and death in our state. He shared an emergency room doctor's recount that it changes your life when you are putting pressure on a bullet wound of a 4-year-old. Governor Cooper said they have seen a significant increase in the number of guns that have come into our communities over the last few years, beginning during the pandemic. Many of the people who went out and bought them are inexperienced when it comes to how to use guns and how to use them safely. He shared that he believes in the Second Amendment and also believes that we must take strong steps to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, children, and those who are a danger to themselves or others. He understands that there is probably disagreement in the room on whether we do that and if you think we should, how we do that. He believes that the Sheriff's gun permitting system was highly effective; we do not have it

anymore. He believes in strong background checks and red-flag laws where judges can make decisions in due process about people who are a danger to themselves or others. He believes in banning military-style assault weapons and some disagree with that. One thing we can agree on is why we are here today; gun owners must be responsible for the guns that they own. They must work to keep them from being stolen, to keep them out of the hands of young children, to keep them away from people who are considering suicide, to keep them away from people who are a danger to themselves or others. Responsible gun ownership is patriotic, being a good citizen, and looking out for your neighbor. That is what we want to instill in people today. All law enforcement officers are at risk when they step out the door and the more guns that are in our communities, the more at risk they are. He said Sheriff Rogers' deputies have to deliver domestic violence summons or orders to houses and do not know what is going on in the house. There is an increasing chance that somebody in the house has a gun who did not have one before and will be mad. The least we can do is come together as a community to educate people about how to safely store these guns. That is what NC SAFE is about. We are getting the word and education out. Everybody is coming together to make sure we get the word out in the communities. You can take steps to keep your gun safe. Some ways to do that are gun locks and personal gun vaults.

Governor Cooper said Mayor Hardy is one of the most energetic mayors he has ever met. He stated that Mayor Hardy is always advocating for Kinston and Eastern North Carolina everywhere he goes. He thanked Mayor Hardy for creating this Task Force and thanked him for his leadership.

Governor Cooper asked Chief Goyette and Sheriff Rogers to come forward to formally receive the presentation of a gun safe lock.

Mr. Lassiter shared that they have distributed 25,000 of the locks across the state and have brought along another 200 to distribute in Kinston today. He then asked Ms. Nancy Hodges to share the PSAs that are being used across the state. The drawing for a gun safe was won by Robert Swinson, a City Council Member.

**Closing Remarks/Adjournment .....Mayor Dontario Hardy**

Mayor Hardy thanked everyone for coming today. He thanked Governor Cooper and his team and noted that he looked forward to the collaboration and the opportunity to call them to look at resources available at the State level or some direction on how to move forward. Mayor Hardy again thanked everyone for attending and for their service to the city.

Mr. Lassiter announced that there were cable locks available for those who would like to have one.

**Colleen Kosinski made the motion, seconded by June Cummings, and upon a unanimous vote, the Mayor's Crime Intervention Task Force meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.**

Respectfully submitted by,

Debra Thompson, City Clerk