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City of Cambridge

Executive Department

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IN CITY COUNCIL
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To the Honorable, the City Council:

Below is a brief update from the Community Safety Department.

Community Safety Department Update

Cambridge has built a rich set of programs to engage across our community, especially within the Department of Human Service Programs. The Cambridge Police Department has embraced reform efforts and implemented a nation-leading juvenile diversion program and training on trauma-informed care. However, we continue to experience gun violence, which is unacceptable.

Over the last year, we have recognized the need to have greater City engagement to coordinate this work, especially outside of the police department. Working within the Community Safety Department, we commissioned a report to provide recommendations on Violence Prevention that was completed by Niko Emack, Ed.M. and Everett Dickerson, Ph.D. This work engaged across City departments, community organizations and stakeholders, best practices research, and incorporated lessons learned from work being done in the City of Boston on violence prevention. We discussed the recommendations at the February 9, 2026 City Council meeting.

Since then, we have been working on implementing those recommendations and hired our first Assistant Director of Violence Prevention, Kwame Dance, PsyD., MBA, a Cambridge-raised licensed clinical psychologist, mental health advocate, consultant, and educator.

Dr. Dance started on June 1, 2026 and this is an initial update on the work that we are looking forward to discussing with the City Council and the community.

Core Values

Our violence prevention work will be centered around these Core Values:

- **Community-rooted.** Residents, families, youth, community leaders, and people directly affected by violence should have meaningful opportunities to identify needs, name gaps, and shape priorities.



- **Family-centered and trauma-informed.** Support should respect grief, privacy, culture, timing, individual needs, and family preferences. Outreach should be coordinated to reduce duplication and avoid placing additional burdens on families.
- **Coordinated and accountable.** City departments and community partners should have clear roles, responsible leads, next steps, and processes for follow-through.
- **Evidence-informed and locally grounded.** Research, local data, Cambridge experience, community knowledge, lived experience, and expert guidance should be considered together.
- **Equitable, inclusive and culturally responsive.** The CSD's approach should recognize differences in exposure to violence, access to opportunity, institutional trust, and the availability of support.
- **Regional and collaborative.** Violence, relationships, schools, employment, services, and community networks cross municipal boundaries. CSD should build sustained working relationships with neighboring communities.
- **Adaptive and sustainable.** CSD must be able to respond to urgent needs without losing the capacity to build the systems, partnerships, and accountability needed for long-term prevention.

Operating Model

The initial operating model is built on the recommendations of the February 2026 Violence Prevention Report and focused on where we have seen potential gaps in the City's role, and feedback from the community over the last years.

The developing approach is organized around three connected areas of work. Each addresses a different part of the problem, and each depends on the others.

1. Respond & Restore

A repeated concern from families and survivors of gun violence is that navigating a traumatic situation needs greater support, and that while there is sometimes a quick response after a tragedy, there is a need for longer-term relationship and follow-through. This is especially the case when investigations stall and there is a need for greater communication and engagement over time.

Our initial focus is to ensure that this work will:

- Coordinate support after serious violence and help individuals, families, employees, and communities recover with dignity, clear communication, and consistent follow-through over time.
- Strengthen family-centered support, referrals, and designated points of contact
- Coordinate employee and workforce trauma support with responsible departments and partners.
- Support community outreach, listening, healing, and continued engagement.
- Track commitments and conduct after-action reviews so lessons from each response improve future practice.

2. Prevent & Strengthen

Cambridge is a community that has so many City and community programs, and yet, often

people can fall through the cracks. Important moments of vulnerability or high risk may be missed, important information might not be shared, and people that we are in relationship with may not be supported.

An initial vision is for Community Safety to coordinate across both City and community efforts to create a stronger ecosystem that can build community and prevent violence, built on caring and committed relationships.

An initial picture of this would look like:

- Build a coordinated community prevention ecosystem that addresses immediate risk while strengthening the conditions that support long-term safety and well-being.
- Bring together community-based violence prevention organizations, schools, out-of-school-time programs, public health, human services, housing, behavioral health, libraries, youth and recreation programs, arts and cultural organizations, faith communities, business associations, workforce programs, and public-safety partners.
- Map current programs, target populations, strengths, service gaps, and referral pathways.
- Engage residents, youth, families, community leaders, key community-facing individuals, and people with lived experience.
- Develop shared benchmarks, organization-specific deliverables, clearer reporting expectations, and practical accountability structures.
- Use the FY26 report, local data, community input, expert consultation, and evidence-informed models to refine priorities and investments.

3. Partnership and Regional Connection

We recognize that Cambridge is not an island, and that so many of the incidents of gun violence we experience include relationships across communities. It is critical that we are building greater integration across neighborhood safety efforts not just in Cambridge, but also Somerville, Boston, and other communities. This also includes learning from partners and finding ways to share best practices and resources.

An initial set of work includes:

- Build stronger relationships with neighboring communities because many risks, relationships, services, and opportunities extend beyond Cambridge.
- Continue peer learning with Boston and Somerville and initiate outreach to Malden, Everett, Lynn, Chelsea, Lowell, Lawrence, Brockton, Revere, and other neighboring cities in Massachusetts as well as cities across the country with similar populations and resources
- Engage dedicated violence prevention offices and community-based organizations and community members, rather than relying solely on law-enforcement contacts.
- Compare governance, staffing, funding, data, community engagement, response, and intervention models.
- Identify opportunities for regional referrals, shared training, technical assistance, funding, and coordinated problem-solving.

While Dr. Dance only began on June 1, he has moved quickly to respond during this recent tragedy and was involved in the immediate and ongoing neighborhood response to the Memorial Drive shooting. These efforts align with the initial operating model.

Following the July 4 homicide of Xavier Bautista, Community Safety has collaborated with other City departments, individual community members, and community organizations to provide a

range of support for the family, Department of Public Works employees, and the broader community. The Community Safety Department supported this work in coordination with the City Manager's Office, Cambridge Police Department, Department of Human Service Programs, Department of Public Works, Riverside Trauma Center, Communications, Cambridge Health Alliance, Office of Equity and Inclusion, and other partners.

This has also included:

- Supported coordinated outreach, trauma response, referrals, and follow-up for the family and affected employees.
- Assisted with family follow-up related to housing and behavioral health needs through appropriate municipal and community channels.
- Helped prepare for the July 8 community meeting and participated in debriefing and continued planning.
- Continued engagement with residents, community partners, violence prevention grantees, and other community-facing individuals.
- Participated in community outreach and follow-up in the neighborhoods and spaces affected by the incident.
- Began documenting lessons from the response that can strengthen future coordination, communication, and community support.
- Consulted regional and national violence prevention experts and reviewed additional literature and practice guidance.
- Consulted several restorative justice experts regarding approaches that may support community healing and longer-term trust-building.

Update on Existing Programs

Community Safety has provided five violence prevention grants to community organizations. We are currently reviewing how to continue to support existing work as well as how to align with an updated operating model.

FY26 Violence Prevention Grants

Community Safety Department distributed Violence Prevention grant funding totaling \$300,000, with \$60,000 each to the following local organizations during spring 2026:

- **Inner-City Weightlifting:** Provides relationship-based violence prevention through its Personal Training Apprenticeship Program, paid workforce opportunities, individualized advancement planning, mentorship, and wraparound case management supporting employment, education, housing stability, health, and long-term economic mobility.
- **Cambridge HEART:** Provides culturally rooted, non-carceral outreach and sustained support for residents at elevated risk of experiencing harm, including conflict de-escalation, crisis response, safety planning, case coordination, basic-needs assistance, and connections to housing, employment, behavioral health, and other services.
- **Community Conversations: Sister to Sister:** Develops and pilots the Sister to Steward training and certification program, building a community-based network of peer supporters and resource navigators grounded in healing-centered engagement, community connection, and trauma-informed violence prevention.
- **My Brother's Keeper Cambridge:** Provides an empowerment program for young adults

that combines life skills and career exploration, financial education, healthy-relationship programming, mentorship, therapeutic support, and individualized pathways toward education, employment, and long-term stability.

- **On The Rise:** Provides trauma-informed, relationship-based violence prevention services for unhoused and formerly unhoused women, transgender, and nonbinary individuals through day-shelter access, individualized advocacy, safety planning, community accompaniment, housing stabilization, and sustained follow-up support.

Beginning July 1, 2026, Community Safety has also contracted with Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House to establish a locally embedded Violence Intervention Coordinator and support the Skill Builders Academy, providing credible-messenger outreach, conflict mediation, trauma-informed support, workforce development, and wraparound services for Cambridge residents at highest risk of violence.

The existing contract with ROCA from CPD was relocated to CSD to bring its regional, long-term intervention model to Cambridge through a full-time youth worker providing intensive outreach, cognitive behavioral intervention, and sustained support for up to 25 high-risk young men. This has been an initiative that the Police Department has supported for many years through the Family and Social Justice Unit and has been an incredibly valuable model for reducing the risk of violence. Shifting this contract to Community Safety was a way to bring more of our community resources together. The relationship that CPD has built over the course of their longstanding relationship has allowed for this transition to be seamless with all parties agreeing to continue working collaboratively.

Community Safety Department's Summer 2026 Priorities

During the summer, the CSD will focus on follow-through and restorative efforts with relationship-building, community engagement, peer learning, and a clearer understanding of the systems already in place.

- Continue appropriate family, employee, and community support and follow-up.
- Convene violence prevention grantees and financially connected organizations to clarify strengths, needs, roles, and opportunities for collaboration.
- Engage and uplift the voices of residents, youth, neighborhood leaders, and key community-facing individuals.
- Learn from community members lived experiences and provide recommendations to City Leadership, while encouraging civic engagement and reciprocal communication between City leadership and community members.
- Strengthen and support community-based organization led violence prevention initiatives.
- Bring additional City of Cambridge and external community-based systems into the developing framework, including human services, housing, public health, schools, libraries, arts and culture, business associations, behavioral health, and workforce partners.
- Review local reports, community feedback, expert guidance, evidence-informed models, and peer-city approaches.
- Begin mapping programs, resources, service gaps, and referral pathways.
- Advance regional outreach and identify practices that may be relevant to Cambridge.

Next Steps

The discussion with City Council and continued engagement with the community on this update will inform our next steps.

In addition, over the fall, Community Safety will move from assessment toward a clearer structure for coordination, accountability, and implementation.

This will include:

- Complete initial ecosystem, service-gap, and referral-pathway maps.
- Draft a Cambridge Community Violence Prevention and Safety Framework.
- Collaborate with City departments and community partners to develop a critical-incident community response and recovery framework informed by after-action learning, community input, and restorative justice guidance.
- Propose a governance and coordination structure that clarifies roles across City departments and community partners.
- Refine shared benchmarks, partner deliverables, reporting tools, and accountability expectations.
- Identify short-term actions that can begin within existing resources and longer-term priorities that require additional planning or investment.
- Develop a six-month implementation plan and recommendations for a multi-year planning process.
- Develop recommendations for sustained regional coordination and partnership.

Progress will be assessed using both activity and outcome measures. Early indicators will include the reach and quality of community and partner engagement; completion of program, service-gap, and referral maps; clearer roles and follow-up expectations; development of shared benchmarks and partner deliverables; completion of the response and recovery framework; and implementation of short-term actions.

Appendix: Selected Violence Prevention References

Cambridge Community Safety Department. Draft Violence Prevention Report, July 2024-June 2025.

CVI Ecosystem. Hartford, Connecticut city profile.

<https://www.cviecosystem.org/cities/hartford-connecticut>

National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform. Community Violence Intervention resources.

<https://nicjr.org/CVI>

Cities United. Resources and planning frameworks. <https://citiesunited.org/resources>

Multisystemic Therapy Services. Multisystemic Therapy model information.

<https://www.mstservices.com/>

Alliance for Inclusion and Prevention. Multisystemic Therapy program information.

<https://aipinc.org/our-work/community-based-mental-health/multisystemic-therapy/>

Multisystemic Therapy facts and information documents provided for local planning.

Comprehensive Public Safety Ecosystem presentation and related local planning materials.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yi-An Huang'.

Yi-An Huang
City Manager