

Dr. Hallett's background

Have worked on Jacksonville violence issues for many years now, served on the management team of the JCCI homicide study, and have worked with many governmental and non-profit agencies in creating intervention programs of all kinds, for both adults and children. Because the main focus of my work is developing rehabilitation programs, privatization of criminal justice services by state and local governments strapped for cash is something I've been focused on for over 10 years. I'm a member of the Intervention & Rehabilitation subcommittee.

Focus

As was pointed out yesterday, we're in new and unprecedented territory as a city—at a critical juncture in our history and in the evolution of the Journey project, with recommendations about to be put forward and voted upon—and there are some good things on the table already. At the same time, as we move toward implementing specific agendas, we can't lose focus on the big picture.

I was heartened to hear Michael Bloomberg yesterday describing much the same infrastructure we're contemplating now: focused law enforcement efforts combined with community-building and civic infrastructure.

Millage Rate Comparison and Challenges

Sheriff Rutherford made a really important point recently to the Steering Committee: that Jacksonville's millage rate is the second lowest in the state, but still again 18% lower than our closest peer--Orlando. The only city in the state of Florida with a lower millage rate than ours is Cape Coral, which has a population of about 150,000 snow birds.

As you know, Orlando has infrastructure and revenue streams from tourism that rival any city in the world. They don't need property taxes. Orlando's artificially low millage rate is the product of Magic, literally. Orlando does not need a high millage rate to generate enough revenue to maintain infrastructure. In the state as a whole, moreover, SUBURBAN INTERESTS are driving policy agendas in Florida, with urban voters being in the minority—and the Duval delegation itself being only 10 votes. Amendment 1 did not pass in Northeast Florida. We are outvoted. *People who speak privately are fearful of where Jacksonville will be in 5 years. In the midst of this homicide crisis, we are in new fiscal territory as a city among cities in Florida: we've already got by definition comparatively fewer resources than any comparably sized city in the state—and we seemingly no longer control our own destiny.*

Fighting Homicide

The Sheriff's Office has correctly pointed out that the second half of 2006 saw a 38% reduction in homicide, in coordination with the overtime deployments from Operation Safe Streets. A closer look at the data, however, reveals a more complex picture.

If you delineate a pre-post comparison of 05-06 pre-deployment homicide levels and 06-07 contemporaneous homicide levels—to cover the full timeframe of the deployment, you see not a 38% reduction, but less than half of that, an 18% reduction. Moreover, you see little spikes within the timeframe of the deployment.

By comparing overtime deployment manhours by month and homicide, you get an even fuller view of what I consider to be displacement of violence rather than elimination of it—and thereby the limitations of over-relying on surges to combat chronic underlying problems that we've been struggling with for a long time.

Such efforts at so-called “pulling levers” law enforcement really only work because of consonant efforts at community building and outreach—not just arrests, according to the research. During the initial overtime deployments in Aug-Sept 2006, we had the help of the State Police, FDLE, and I believe DEA. Moreover, a lot of outreach was undertaken for purposes of community building by ministers, police, the health department and volunteers—a byproduct of which was a successful effort in garnering information.

TARGETING RECIDIVISM IS THE IMPORTANT FACTOR IN LONG TERM SUCCESS—AND THE SINGLE BEST MEASURE OF CRIME CONTROL EFFECTIVENESS. CRIME RATES ARE ONLY A SNAPSHOT; RECIDIVISM MEASURES A LONGER WINDOW.

Budget Elements

JSO currently constitutes the city's single-largest budget item, with a budget of over \$322 million in fiscal year 2007-2008.

The JSO budget increased over \$107 million in 5 years, or 50%. In terms of specifics, personnel expenses have increased 48.8%, operating expenses 53.4%, but retirement and benefits 516%. The single largest portion of JSO expenditures is for pensions, benefits and salaries—which as in most civil service jobs, are generous in exchange for modest salaries.

Now, despite the dramatic increase in budget allocation, not one new officer—actual new position—has been hired and only a modest number hired overall, in lag time with attrition through retirements.

The biggest single source of increase in the cost of JSO to the City has not been for putting more patrol officers on the street, but for retirement and benefits of existing officers.

We need to look for ways to economize in the numerous ancillary projects of JSO and the SAO.

Establishment of bond schedules

2006 JSO DOC Annual Report points out, “two-thirds of the average jail population is for misdemeanor crimes such as retail theft, minor drug crimes, battery or drunken driving. The majority of the felon jail population - 6,806 people - was admitted in 2006 on drug charges. Only 97 people were admitted on murder charges in 2006.” (Times Union).

At minimum, the bail issue needs to be studied objectively—because a hidden cost of increased law enforcement is higher jail costs. Appropriate bond amounts offer enormous potential for savings that could be used to fund programs or hire officers

Realignment of responsibilities

JSO should be fully funded for core law enforcement functions, but I think that in part because of consolidation, we have tended to overload JSO—and to a lesser extent the state attorney—with such a sprawling array of duties that I think in the new times we’re living in, need to be reexamined. In addition to municipal law enforcement, of course, JSO does everything from provide courthouse security, operate the jail, taken on the new responsibility—because we asked them to—for the JAC, deploy a sizeable force of School Resource Officers, sponsor athletic programs through PAL, provide counseling and drug treatment and job referral services for ex-offenders, and manage to provide supplemental security for private businesses.

Many of these social service functions now being provided by the city at great expense due to civil service level salary and benefits can be more cost-effectively provided by the private, non-profit sector.

Financial and resource allocation recommendations

Passage of a small, targeted Safer Jacksonville Plan, to fund public safety and the initiatives being identified by the Jacksonville Journey Project. A small but targeted millage rate increase directed specifically to Jacksonville Journey projects to selectively target the most at risk offenders is the top priority. Given the limited proportions of our funding stream described above and the enormity of our problems, we might call it the “Saving Jacksonville Plan” instead of “Safer Jacksonville.” But there’s an additional reason we should expand the non-profit sector here in Jacksonville: it presents the opportunity to focus our Jacksonville Journey resources into the Northside—by identifying qualified leaders and workers from Northside who can lead—or be trained to lead—non-profit organizations that utilize best practices to provide needed services.

To truly take the next step on the Journey, we need to build a civic infrastructure for prevention. In the last many years, up to 40percent of the people who left Duval county were high wage earners now living in surrounding jurisdictions—and we know why: our failing civic infrastructure makes it more and more challenging to attract and retain a wealth-building class of workers and professionals we need. We’re going to have to grow it ourselves. If the best social program is a job, and I think it is, the Jax Journey project is exactly what we need—and the people on the Jacksonville Journey project are exactly who we need.