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EDITOR'S PICK

Madison community leaders stand by alders in taking 'public stand' against violence

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PHOTO BY MICHELLE STOCKER

Madison Ald. Maurice Cheeks spoke Tuesday about a set of recommendations for the city to reduce youth gun violence.

Ald. Maurice Cheeks and Matt Phair, who represent neighborhoods on Madison's west side in Districts 10 and 20, formally introduced initiatives and budget amendments addressing youth gun violence Tuesday.

These recommendations range from low cost and easy to implement to higher cost and direct interventions. At a press conference Tuesday, Cheeks and Phair referenced six specific proposals for the city to implement in the next year.

These include expanding a youth employment initiative, implementing the Madison Peace Project and fully funding the Communities Against Violence Program. They also recommend adding youth mentoring as a priority in the city's community services funding process, creating a community-based crisis restoration center and expediting the Madison Out of School Time program, which aims to provide high quality programming to all Madison students.

A number of people stood and spoke in support of these recommendations alongside Cheeks and Phair including City Council members, neighborhood representatives and community organization leaders.

"What you see before you today is a majority of your elected city leaders and many grassroots leaders, standing together to take a public stand against violence that shocked our city in the last few weeks," Phair said.

Cheeks and Phair's recommendations follow a set of 15 strategies introduced by Michael Johnson, CEO of the Dane County Boys & Girls Club Monday. Johnson was present at Tuesday's press conference and said two sets of possible solutions are in alignment.

"If we don't act now, we're going to allow another generation to be in harm's way," Johnson said.

Phair acknowledged that gun violence in Madison has been a persistent problem that acutely affects low-income residents and people of color at disproportionate rates.



Ald. Matt Phair and Ald. Maurice Cheeks at the City County Building Tuesday.

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Of the 771 youth referred to juvenile justice services, 227 were placed in secure custody with 80 percent identifying as non-white, according to Dane County Jail officials cited in a report initiated by Cheeks and Phair and conducted by legislative analyst Heather Allen.

The report also found that those 26-years-old and under for arrested for gun crimes from 2000 to 2015 were predominantly people of color.

The recommendations target youth in the community, and Cheeks said he hopes young people recognize that the City Council is working to improve their daily reality.

“We can’t be a city that is both the best city in the world and the worst city in the world depending on the color of your skin,” Cheeks said.

Sina Davis, a longtime grassroots leader and founder of Mothers in the Neighborhood, noted that those involved in the recent homicides are older. She stressed that it is imperative for community leaders to connect with young men who may feel disenfranchised.

“I go out and reach out to the boys on the corner because those are the ones that are getting into trouble,” Davis said.

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Abigail Becker joined The Capital Times in 2016, where she primarily covers city and county government. She previously worked for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and the Wisconsin State Journal.



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