



Community leaders ask for more action & less talk to fight gun violence

By Hunter Saenz | [CONNECT](#)
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MADISON (WKOW) -- The Madison Common Council took a first step to try to end the deadly gun violence that's on the rise. But some community leaders say it's taken them too long to spend some of the money the council pledged to end the problem.

On Tuesday, after much discussion on language and a separate amendment, the council approved \$75,000 to fund peer support specialists and emergency response to shootings in the city. Members of the peer support group respond to shootings or other attacks to offer support and services to the victims and their families.

"We are losing a life almost weekly right now," said Zandra Hagberg, the assistant director for a grassroots group called the Focused Interruption Coalition.

With summer just beginning she worries the amount of shootings in Madison will only rise with the temperature, as it did around this time in 2016.

It's one reason Hagberg has been trying to get the city to act.

"We are reacting and there's no prevention in place," she said.

Both she and community leader Michael Johnson, who is the president and CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, helped author a prevention plan called the 15-Point Plan. The first introduced the plan to city leaders nearly a year ago. Johnson said the ideas were brought forth by community members.

"This issue is not going to fix itself. This is now an urban community, the police department can't do it themselves, the mayor's office can't do it by themselves," Johnson explained passionately.

As of Tuesday night, the city council has only approved funding for two actions.

"We've had a series of meetings with the mayor's office and with other city departments and alders. So, behind the scenes it's been a lot of work," Johnson said.

He believes the city needs to talk less and take action.

"We need more action. [There's been] a lot of conversation but now it's time to put the talk behind us," Johnson added.

The slow response has come too late for many families whose loved ones have died in the violence.

"Shame on us," Johnson said as he was asked what he would say to those families.

For Hagberg, the fight for a prevention plan has been exhausting.

"I've never put so many hours into something that has moved so slowly," she said.

But the effort will be worth it for both Johnson and Hagberg. They Tuesday night's approval of funds will give the momentum needed to fund other parts of the 15-Point Plan in order to try to make Madison the city they both once recognized.

"As a city, we have a responsibility to address this issue. We have a responsibility to have a plan in place to help resolve these issues," Johnson said.

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