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## Escalating crime has Madison leaders offering proposals, criticizing others

ABIGAIL BECKER | The Capital Times | [abecker@madison.com](mailto:abecker@madison.com) | [@abecker\\_4](https://twitter.com/abecker_4) Jul 27, 2017



Michael Johnson, CEO for the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County along with Focused Interruption Coalition members, speaks during a press conference last October.

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As Madison residents grown more concerned over an increase in shootings and homicides this year, Mayor Paul Soglin is calling for a program to build leadership from within communities to foster safer neighborhoods.

But some community leaders are not on board with the mayor's proposal. Hours after Soglin's Tuesday press conference, during which he touted a Placemaking Capacity Building proposal, Dane County Boys and Girls Club CEO Michael Johnson announced the organization would no longer participate in publicly-funded anti-violence efforts.

"With the number of incidents occurring and a contract not executed to hire local grassroots leaders from the community to do this work, I am convinced we are not ready to address this issue and I don't want to be associated with this funding as it stands," Johnson said.

Madison's City Council approved \$400,000 in the 2017 budget to fund the initial steps in a 15-point plan offered by the Focused Interruption Coalition, backed by Johnson, to address violence and recidivism. The funding was initially going to cover a \$50,000 contract with the Nehemiah Community Development Corp. for crisis-intervention support and \$25,000 in rapid response funding for services needed in the aftermath of a violent incident.

Nehemiah plans to subcontract with the Focused Interruption Coalition, with the Boys and Girls Club serving as a fiscal agent. Madison community development director Jim O'Keefe said the contract was circulated for signatures Tuesday, but the language must now be modified because of the Boys and Girls Club's withdrawal. He said he hopes to have a revised contract finalized Thursday.

"Other than causing a bit more delay, we don't expect this to impact this summer's plans," O'Keefe said.

Johnson, who often speaks for the Focused Interruption Coalition, and FIC members have been assisting those affected by recent violent incidents. Though he is frustrated with the city, Johnson said the Boys and Girls Club would continue to work with victims and family with private support.

On Tuesday, Soglin said his placemaking initiative, developed with the Project for Public Spaces, would provide training and technical support to build long term neighborhood leadership, which Soglin said is a key to minimizing violence.

Soglin met two weeks ago with PPS president Fred Kent and Marshall Ganz, a senior lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard University, to discuss the role of placemaking in community organizing. Soglin said in an email to City Council alders that the recent violence, including Tuesday morning's homicide on the city's southwest side, pushed him to accelerate the announcement.

"Those of us in the public sector and the nonprofits must continue to serve communities, but we are not substitutes for community leadership," Soglin said in the email.

Caliph Muab'El, a founding member of the Focused Interruption Coalition and the Brothers Aligned Coalition, bristled at the idea of bringing in outside professionals to the teach residents how to be neighborhood leaders.

"Those people will be rejected by the neighborhood," Muab'el said.

The mayor's proposed initiative would cost \$35,500, plus up to \$5,000 in travel expenses for PPS staff. Soglin encouraged alders to use the budgeted \$400,000 to fund the new initiative.

Muab'el said the Focused Interruption and Brothers Aligned coalitions are actively working in the community and growing their presence, especially on the south side.

"There's a huge momentum that's happening around that and if the mayor doesn't see that, that's a testimonial to the level of disconnect that he has with the community and his office," Muab'el said.

Ald. Maurice Cheeks, District 10, and FIC hosted a community discussion "highlighting bottom up violence prevention strategies" in Worthington Park Wednesday.

Ald. Paul Skidmore, District 9, said he hoped Soglin would have proposed a stronger measures to reduce violent crime. Tuesday's homicide was the city's eighth, matching the total number of homicides in 2016.

Skidmore, an outspoken supporter of the police department, said the city needs more officers in addition to building community leadership.

“We need officers and no amount of peer support and placemaking is going to take away a certain need,” Skidmore said.

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### Abigail Becker

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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## Abigail Becker

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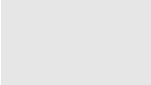
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