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Taking cover

After a July full of gunfire, Madison officials bicker

BY DYLAN BROGAN AUGUST 3, 2017

news-soglinpaul-gun-violence-08032017.jpg

Paul Soglin: "We are dealing with terrorism."

A **60-year-old woman** was driving near the West District Police Station on July 10 when a stray bullet buzzed through her car, exiting a rear window. **Police say** the woman was "in the wrong place at the wrong time" that morning.

On July 22, a 17-year-old was taken to the hospital with a **single, non-life-threatening gunshot wound**. The teen was determined to have been shot during a disturbance between two groups on Britta Parkway, but he refused to give police any information about what happened.

Two days later, **two vehicles were damaged by gunfire** after a fight between two men in the parking lot of the Econo Lodge on East Washington Avenue. And on July 26, a family on Raymond Road **awoke to find a bullet hole** in the front window of their home.

These victims of gun violence escaped with their lives. Riccardo C. Simms and Ciara Philumalee weren't so lucky. Simms, 29, **was shot multiple times in his car** on Adderbury Lane on July 24. Four days later, Philumalee was gunned down in a parking lot on the city's north side.

And on Aug. 2, a 33-year-old man was shot dead in what Madison Police Chief Mike Koval describes as "a cold, brutal assassination" at a 7-Eleven on the city's south side. It's Madison's 10th homicide this year. The last time the city had 10 homicides in a year was 2008.

Madison police Chief Mike Koval says incidents of "shots fired" are up 63 percent over last year.



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“At the end of the day, access to firearms is easier than it’s ever been,” Koval told reporters on July 28 at the scene of the Philumalee killing. “More and more people are armed. Some lawfully. Many unlawfully. And as a result, some people do the shortcut on old-fashioned conflict resolution or anger management and act more out of impulsivity or compulsivity when angered or provoked. And the guns come out. It’s as simple as that.”

Mayor Paul Soglin has had enough.

“These people are gangsters. They are terrorists,” says Soglin. “When neighbors live in fear, when innocent people can’t drive on a public right-of-way without fear of a bullet coming by, we are dealing with terrorism.”

But what can be done to stop the violence? Depends on who you ask. Koval has been calling for more officers. The Common Council is working on implementing a 15-point plan to address racial disparities, prevent violence and reduce recidivism. The mayor has spearheaded a rapid response team and launched a gun bounty program to generate information on illegal firearms. But officials can’t agree on what’s the best strategy.

Soglin says the city and nonprofits can only offer resources and guidance.

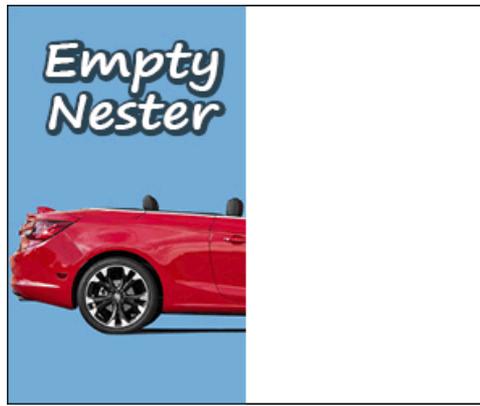
“I’ve got almost 50 years of experience in this area. The most important thing to do is have a powerful neighborhood. A neighborhood that can act on its own behalf and set community standards,” Soglin says. “What I want to do is create neighborhoods where there is no crime, where crime cannot exist. Where criminals and murderers aren’t given cover.”

But Soglin’s latest anti-violence initiative, announced on July 25, sounds a little underwhelming to some: Placemaking. He’s urging the council to spend \$40,000 to bring in experts from the New York-based group Project for Public Spaces to “enhance the capacity of local groups and individuals in targeted neighborhoods to initiate, develop and implement small-scale placemaking projects that build community.”

Elena Madison, vice president of Project for Public Spaces, says placemaking helps people take ownership of their communities. It can mean anything from installing a basketball hoop in a park to starting a summer youth program at a library. “What we would hope to achieve is ideas that are very particular and feasible that the city and community can work together to accomplish,” says Madison. “So you can build the long-term plans, but there are also short-term actions that can get the ball rolling.”

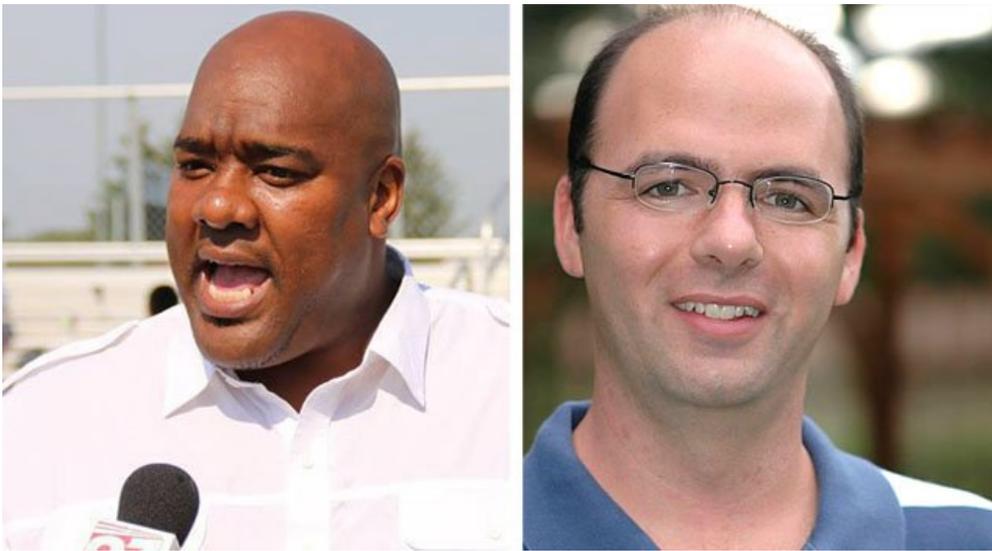
Madison says her group will partner with existing neighborhood resource teams and local nonprofits. “It is a collective process and we may have some methodology, but it’s really about what local people and organizations want to do and what makes sense for them.”

Ald. Paul Skidmore sees value in Soglin’s placemaking program but thinks a better approach is more cops. “[Placemaking] is not your first tool in the toolbox when you have people shooting at you. I don’t see that stopping any violence in the foreseeable future. We need additional enforcement,” Skidmore says. “You don’t bring a pillow to a gunfight. Not every situation calls for a police response. But weapons violations, to the extent we have been seeing them, do.”



But Soglin says more cops “won’t make a difference.”

“What we need is people in the neighborhood to come forward, speak up. To know they are not alone,” Soglin says. “[Neighbors] know who these gangsters are, they know who these murderers are. They know where the guns are.”



Michael Johnson (left) says “People are dying. Kids are traumatized. And we just aren’t prepared.” Matt Phair says “The way the mayor plays ball, it’s all about himself.”

Meanwhile, Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County, is fed up with the mayor’s response to the violence.

In May, Johnson criticized another Soglin initiative — to create rapid-response teams to help people deal with violent incidents — as “**window dressing**.” After hearing about Soglin’s placemaking initiative, Johnson announced that his organization would no longer participate in the city’s anti-violence efforts.

“There are too many initiatives that are being announced that have not been vetted by the community. Every week, [Soglin] seems to come out with a new plan. People are dying. Kids are traumatized. And we just aren’t prepared,” Johnson says. “For somebody to come here — who’s not from this city — I’m just not buying it.”

But Soglin calls Johnson’s complaint “bullshit.”

“[Project for Public Spaces] is going to do training. But engagement from residents is what’s really going to solve this problem,” Soglin says. “People that don’t see the value of that, they are either blinded by their own pocketbook, wanting access to money, or they genuinely do not want true neighborhood empowerment, which might scare them.”

Last September, the Common Council approved \$400,000 to begin implementing a 15-point plan developed by the Focus Interruption Coalition — of which Johnson is a member — and Aids. Maurice Cheeks and Matt Phair. On Aug. 1, the council approved requests for proposals seeking organizations to carry out two of the plan’s initiatives. One is a peer support program for young adults who have been affected by violence or deemed at risk of engaging in future violent or criminal behavior. The other is a youth and adult employment training program for low-income individuals, residents of color and other vulnerable populations.

Soglin has been skeptical. In a July 25 email to alders announcing his placemaking initiative, he wrote, “Right now we have a number of young

men, actively engaged in gang activity who have no hesitation to murder, to assassinate, to kill. They are not interested in employment programs or a safe community.”

But Phair says the employment program is just part of a comprehensive strategy. He also accuses Soglin of “stalling” the effort.

“He has not been supportive and he’s said so publicly,” Phair says. “The way the mayor plays ball, it’s all about himself. He’s always the brightest guy in the room. And unless it’s his idea, [Soglin] will find a way to manipulate it and bring it down.”

Nevertheless, Phair is keeping an open mind about the placemaking program. Soglin wants to pay for it using some of the \$400,000 allocated to implement the council’s anti-violence initiatives.

“So there probably will be money available,” Phair says. “Whether the council decides to approve [the mayor’s] idea, we’ll see.”

Johnson is also frustrated by the mayor’s lack of support for the council’s 15-point plan. He says the underlying causes behind the violence stem from racial disparities in education and employment in Madison.

“We do need to condemn anyone who picks up a gun and decides to use it. But what happens is these young men can’t find employment. The streets become their employer and we don’t have enough boots on the grounds to help mitigate these issues,” Johnson says. “The fact that we are still announcing initiatives heading into August, it’s too little too late.”

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Comments (2)

They can't find employment....

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Because they know they can't pass an employment drug test, or don't want to work the shift offered ask hiring managers why jobs go unfilled & work from there.

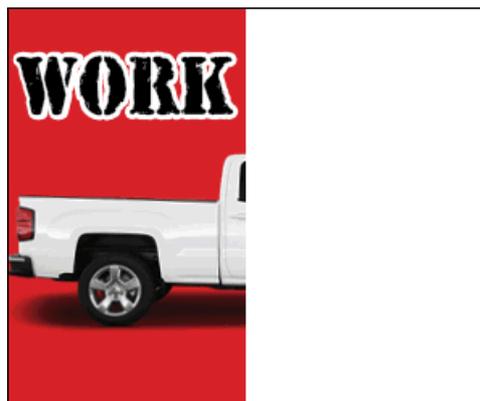
Mark 3 days ago

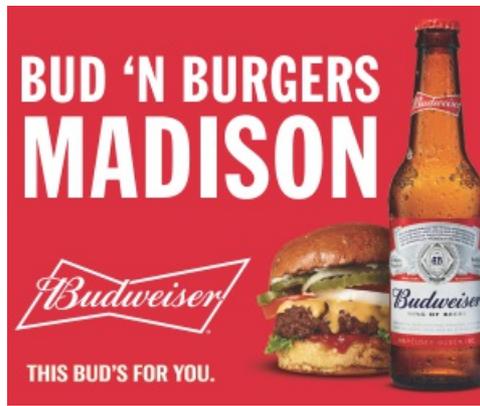
Actually building places

Operation Fresh Start, which does provide job training to older youth and young adults, is willing to dedicate 1.000 hours of labor towards carrying out the designs of community place making teams, Whether this is installing basketball hoops, refurbishing playgrounds or creating ice rinks.

Maybe this is a way to have both place making and job training all happen at once and this will turn this into an opportunity for agreement.

Gregory Markel 3 days ago





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