

The City of Boston is at a crossroads with regard to problem of violent crime among our youth. The police department is undergoing a major shakeup. The patience of advocates, activists, and community leaders is wearing thin. Public confidence is being eroded with the news of each new shooting. And in the background, budget hearings continue at the City Council in an atmosphere of scarcity and tightfistedness.

Every member of the city council, regardless of where the shootings take place, has been affected in one way or another. Many of us have attended funerals and visited homes. All of us have all been working toward solutions in a variety of ways.

At our very first council meeting this year, Council President Flaherty called for 350 new police hires. Councilor Murphy, as chair of the Committee on Public Safety, has closely monitored developments at the police department. Councilors Yancey and Turner, along with Councilors Yoon and Arroyo have been working with their elected counterparts of color at the State House to create dialogue between communities of color and the Mayor's administration.

And Councilor Ross has been chairing, with Councilor Arroyo as vice-chair, a special committee on Youth Violence Prevention which has carried out over sixty interviews of public officials and community leaders. Councilor Ross will present his committee's findings and a comprehensive set of action steps at four forums to be held in the neighborhoods.

Through this special committee process, Councilor Ross reached at least one inescapable conclusion, and all of us on the City Council agree with it. We need to make a serious public commitment of resources to tackle this problem. In general, many of us on the council often disagree on the method and means to solving public problems. However, on this issue, we are united by the sheer urgency of the circumstances, and we agree on the basic features of a solution.

1. We need strong leadership. The leaders we need are among us in our city. We have tackled the problem before, during the 1990's, as is well-known, under Mayor Menino's leadership. Many of the problem-solvers of that era are still in our midst. New and talented leaders, who can bring fresh and updated perspectives, have since emerged.

However, we have not seen the Mayor exert the necessary leadership to bring these actors all together, and to get them working on a regular, consistent basis. We have been impressed by the Mayor's day-to-day responsiveness to the crisis, and we as a council commend him for that. But the Mayor needs to convene all the key actors, not in order to discuss the problem, or simply to listen, but to create a solution.

2. We need a strategic plan. To date, we have no idea what is the city's plan for tackling the problem at hand. If there is one, we need to see it. If there is none, a plan needs to be written down, vetted widely with our partners and collaborators, and shared with the public.

The absence of a plan cannot be blamed on the lack of ideas. Councilor Ross's special committee report is rich with recommendations, many of which can be implemented

now. There are scores of plans from the “Boston Miracle” era that are even available to the public at www.bostonstrategy.com.

We need not re-invent the wheel, but we do need someone from the Mayor’s office to be able to articulate a clear, operational plan for tackling the problem. Without this, we cannot have faith that the complex work of solving youth violence will be carried out in any organized, systematic way.

3. We need to commit resources. Most importantly for us, the city council recognizes that all of the above will not only require hard work, but will also require money. Furthermore, we believe that we are in the midst of a crisis, and crises require emergency measures.

The city council therefore calls upon the mayor, as an emergency measure, to spend an additional \$1 million of the city’s free cash in order to do two things: to start, or to re-start a collaborative, partnership-based strategic planning process. Secondly, to put into place one-year contracts for services, especially youth workers, to stem the tide of violence that is set to batter our city this summer.

The city has already committed \$8 of the \$54 million in certified free cash toward our operating budget for FY07, due to projected revenue shortfalls. We believe it is absolutely appropriate, even imperative, to inject another \$1 million of one-time free cash into this effort as a means to stop the bleeding at least temporarily, and then kick start the problem-solving process that needed to begin long ago, but cannot wait a day longer.