



GOVERNMENT + POLITICS

Charlottesville Civilian Review Board finds its footing

With bylaw submission to council, community members ponder next steps

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CHARLOTTE RENE WOODS AND ELLIOTT ROBINSON

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June 4 marked the one-year anniversary of the installation of the Charlottesville Police Civilian Review Board. In contrast to the small basement room in City Hall that was the setting of a meeting a few weeks prior, the board members settled in on the dais in Council Chambers in front of a crowd of about five people.

While the CRB has met in various locations with varying numbers of citizens during its first year of operation, one constant is food. On this day, board member Katrina Turner supplied fried chicken, sodas and a “birthday” cake she had baked for the occasion.

During the open comment period, an audience member spoke about an injury he suffered during an arrest in 2015 and how his subsequent complaint filed after his sentence is still open. He said he felt like he was “talking to a wall” when inquiring about updates from the police department.

The CRB was not quite yet equipped to help him.

“Just to give you a sense of where we are and what we’re doing, this initial board is tasked with establishing a board,” member Josh Bowers said to the man. “Writing bylaws, creating an ongoing civilian oversight mechanism that will have the authority to act. The sad truth is right now, we don’t have that.”

The final weeks of drafting the Charlottesville Police Civilian Review Board's bylaws and ordinance saw a drop in audience attendance. Meanwhile, the board said it feels interest will be renewed when it becomes fully operational.

Credit: Charlotte Rene Woods/Charlottesville Tomorrow

Also pivoting towards the future of the board, Turner motioned to the nearly empty chambers as she expressed concern for engagement and interest. She worried that there may not be enough willing candidates to apply to be on the next board. Bowers assured the room that after bylaws are accepted and the real work begins, he is certain that more people will get involved.

What is the work of the CRB? It has a goal to be a vessel for residents to discuss interactions with law enforcement so that investigations into those interactions can be done. The CRB also aspires to be a tool to build trust and relationships between law enforcement and the communities it serves.

It aims to collaborate and be assisted by professional oversight staff as it processes complaints by residents, investigates incidents, reviews policing policies and practices, spots policing trends, analyzes data, issues findings, writes public reports and makes recommendations.

But, before that can happen, the CRB must reach the final stage of drafting bylaws for City Council approval as it paves the way for future members. When their terms expire, the board's legacy will be the establishment of a panel that can serve the community, enhance trust and provide a check and balance between residents and the Charlottesville Police Department.

A catalyst for change

The events surrounding the creation of Charlottesville's CRB are somewhat outside of the norm, but it has the potential to be innovative, said Candace McCoy, a criminal justice professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

"They always come into existence after a well-publicized incident, often a series of incidents, often coupled with allegations of corruption," she said.

Such was the case with Charlottesville's board, as events in the summer of 2017 transformed the city into a hashtag.

The understanding of police misconduct was that it's a problem of bad apples, but over the years, we learned [that] no, it's not a problem of bad apples. It's a problem of bad barrels, of bad commanders of the barrels."

Candace McCoy

Professor, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

The process for the formation of the CRB officially began when the City Council passed a resolution in December 2017, but Harold Folley, a community organizer with the Legal Aid Justice Center, said inertia towards its creation stemmed from the Unite the Right rally in August 2017. The rally was composed of various far-right groups and militias, Confederate supporters and white nationalists and led to the death of counter-protester Heather Heyer and the injury of others.

The Charlottesville Police Department's response to online chatter before the rally and the volatile situation on Aug. 12 has been called lacking by some experts and nonexistent by some local activists. The contribution of public outcry to police inaction to the push for a CRB is what sets Charlottesville's apart from others, McCoy said.

"It's always when the police do something, as opposed to not doing something [that leads to the formation of a CRB]," McCoy said. "It's [Aug. 12, 2017] definitely a very well-publicized incident of some sort, and boy, you guys got it in spades."



Harold Folley stands in front of the Legal Aid Justice Center on Preston Avenue in Charlottesville.

Credit: Emily Hays/Charlottesville Tomorrow

Four months after Aug. 12, 2017, the chief at that time, Al Thomas, retired. Then, the department was under interim leaders until RaShall Brackney was sworn in as the city's first African American woman chief on June 18, 2018.

But while some began critiquing city officials and the police department's preparation and response to the event back in 2017, Folley said nonwhite city residents have been feeling a sour relationship with law enforcement for a while.

"What happened on Aug. 11 and 12[, 2017] was the catalyst to this Civilian Review Board," Folley said. "A lot of folks in the black and brown community always felt the harassment and the following of the police. So, when Aug. 11 and 12 happened, people just got tired and they wanted something to be there for people who felt like they're not wanted in the community."

Folley has been involved with the board through a support role, as LAJC has offered insight and guidance during the bylaws process. He is also an organizer with the People's Coalition, of which many members frequent Council Chambers as advocates for the CRB.

"The CRB that's here now is the initial CRB," Folley said. "They're there to create the bylaws for the CRB that's gonna be there forever."

After the December 2017 resolution, residents within the city of Charlottesville applied to serve on the board, and the selection process wrapped by June 4, 2018, with the current members: Gloria Beard, Josh Bowers, Sarah Burke, Rosia Parker, Katrina Turner and Guillermo Ubilla. Don Gathers also was on the board, but due to his intentions to run for a seat on the City Council, it became a conflict of interest. He has since regularly attended board meetings as a supporter. Juan Gonzalez was also on the board but resigned during the year.

As for the usefulness of the board once it is fully operational, Folley cites multiple reasons for why a CRB could be helpful in Charlottesville. One such reason is the evolution of neighborhoods as

"They should get involved with adults ... and see each other as humans. We're all human."

Gloria Beard

Civilian Review Board member

redevelopment is happening. He cited 10th & Page as an example.

“The police patrol those areas for drugs, then they patrol those areas because more white people are living there and calling the police and saying, ‘Oh hey, I see this guy walking,’” Folley said. “What happens though, is [new] people in the community maybe don’t know the ins and outs of a community. I would say somebody could be in the community for years that we know has a mental health issue and we know that he might make some noise in the morning ... and someone else who moved to that community is like, ‘Oh my God, it’s a guy; police, come.’”

Folley said that beyond police patrols, “it’s the community, how it is changing [to] where people feel unsafe, but they don’t know the community.”

Folley also said that often in such situations, by the time the police arrive, the person they were called for may not be there, and then officers end up stopping someone else.

“The person they are looking for is probably already gone, and the reason someone else fits the description is because they are black,” Folley said.

Looking at the policies that lead to some of the patrols Folley described is what McCoy said is rare among CRBs.

“That’s not something you blame on individual officers. Individual officers are being told to do that. They’re following orders, so the question is who’s giving the orders? And why are they saying this?” she said.

In response to learning that policy review is among the duties enumerated in the Charlottesville CRB’s bylaws, McCoy said “that would be extremely useful. That would be state of the art. The understanding of police misconduct was that it’s a problem of bad apples, but over the years, we learned [that] no, it’s not a problem of bad apples. It’s a problem of bad barrels, of bad commanders of the barrels,” she added.

Folley said there has been a growing disconnect in officers knowing residents in communities, a sentiment CRB member Gloria Beard also expressed . Beard, who has lived in the city for 45 years and in her 10th & Page home for 25, said that the city is too small for residents and police officers to not know each other.

“I don’t know any of these policemen,” she said. “Back in my day, ... I knew the policemen. They knew my name; I knew some of them by name. ... Back in those days, we had quite a few black cops who took interest in our children. If [children] did wrong, they didn’t mind bringing them home, [and] if I called them, to come to talk to my sons.”

She suggested informal meetings with citizens of all ages and police, as well as the families of officers, to extend trust.

“They should get involved with adults ... and see each other as humans. We’re all human.”

The meetings also could help foster communication among neighbors as city neighborhoods continue to change rapidly. Beard said rising prices have driven a lot of longtime residents out and newcomers aren’t as friendly.

“All the people that I knew, if they haven’t died, they’re not here anymore ... It’s not a sense of community or neighborhood because I don’t know half of these people,” she said. “... If you live in a place for 45 years, you would like to have relationships in your neighborhood. And, with the realtors knocking at my door all the time, trying to get my house, or the city taxing us out of our homes, something’s got to give.”

Establishing parameters

The work of the current board has been to create documents that will detail perimeters of responsibility and authority for the governance of the next board.

In the board's current drafted bylaws and an ordinance for the City Council, criteria are suggested to ensure that the next members can reflect and represent various perspectives within the city. If the suggestion is adhered to, the board is expected to have at least one member who is a resident of public housing, at least four members who represent historically disadvantaged communities and at least one member who represents an organization, office or agency that seeks racial and social justice or advocates for disadvantaged communities. There also may be a city councilor and a person with policing experience who are non-voting members.

Outside of the initial board, members' terms can be for three years and no more than two consecutive terms. As for handling the next board, they suggest that the City Council stagger the appointments so that three voting members serve 18-month terms and four voting members have three-year terms. Within the first two months of the first meeting, the inaugural board under the bylaws will appoint a chair and vice chair who will serve 18-month terms as people responsible to run meetings, draft agendas, organize board communications and be the media point of contact.

The current board also wants at least one professional oversight staff member, hired by the city manager, to serve as liaison between CPD and CRB to ensure there is compliance between both parties. This person also would communicate with the Commonwealth Attorney's Office and other city staff. The oversight staff will supervise board activities, develop data-keeping procedures and communicate or disseminate information with the public.

The position also calls for the ability to audit ongoing investigations by the CPD's Internal Affairs unit. The person or people in the role will also be responsible for analyzing long-term patterns that may warrant public input along with analyzing data regarding investigative-detention practices and instances of use-of-force or officer-involved deaths.

So, while the council can approve bylaws and the ordinance, it is new City Manager Tarron Richardson, under the city charter, who will have hiring authority of the positions the board is asking for.

While neither the city charter nor the Virginia Constitution refers specifically to civilian review boards, other localities in the state have created their own on an as-needed basis.

"What [the Virginia Constitution] does do is give the General Assembly power by general law or special act to provide for organization and government powers in counties and cities in Virginia," University of Virginia professor and constitutional law expert A.E. Dick Howard said. "It means that cities have only those powers that are given to them by state law. I don't think the Dillon Rule or anything else that I know about would stand in the way of the city of Charlottesville creating a CRB that only had advisory powers. That would be authorized by state law. If it is purely advisory and can make recommendations, I can see that kind of review board."

Presently, the CRB aims to be advisory in making recommendations, as it will report to the City Council, after reviewing completed investigations and complaints by residents. It does, however, state circumstances where it aims to have independent investigative authority.

As of the time of this publication, the board does seek to conduct investigations, with oversight staff assistance, in the instance that the CPD's internal affairs investigation is deemed unsatisfactory or not handled timely. If the board determines an internal affairs investigation is unsatisfactory, it will provide written reasons to the city and CPD.

Calendar Clearing



Charlottesville Police Chief RaShall Brackney

Credit: City of Charlottesville

Beginning on April 26, a series of press releases graced the inboxes of reporters around town insinuating that some CRB members “inaccurately characterized ... Brackney’s availability and willingness to meet with board members in public and private” and added that the terms of the initial board members would not be extended.

The board and Brackney had been in communication to arrange a meeting to discuss the memorandum of understanding between the board and the police department. After the April 23 CRB meeting, The Daily Progress published an article indicating the chief had told the board she was unavailable for a meeting in June despite the appearance of open time slots on her calendar, which the newspaper obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request.

On May 9, Charlottesville Tomorrow sat down with Brackney and public affairs officer Tyler Hawn to discuss the situation.

“I have nothing to hide about the amount of time and commitment I put into this community. I’m here on average about 14 hours a day. I just don’t understand where the controversy exists and why there’s a desire to have controversy,” Brackney said. “That’s what it feels like. I just think that with a community that has been so wrought with so many things, you would think it would want to move towards a desire to coalesce around a common theme of trying to change our words into action.”

Brackney also explained how busy her schedule can be.

“I just thought it was disheartening that there’s the assumption that every single minute of my day has to be available for the public. I answer phone calls, I answer emails. We have police work that we’re trying to do. We’re discussing cases. There’s policies. There’s personnel. We just came off of [the] budget,” Brackney said. “I just finished up NCAA planning for Final Four, which no one would have put on my calendar months out, because it didn’t exist. Then there’s an assumption that I don’t even get the opportunity to get something to eat. If The Daily Progress is comfortable with finding three hours on my calendar in a month, I’m comfortable with that, if that’s what they want to put out there.”

In a subsequent news release on April 30, the city retracted a portion of its April 26 statement, saying “there is no record that a member of the CRB made a statement Chief Brackney could not meet for the entire month of June. ... The city regrets suggesting in its previous communication that a CRB member made such a statement or that they inaccurately characterized Chief Brackney’s availability for the entire month of June.”

It went on to say that the city had asked The Daily Progress to issue a correction to its article. In an article published on The Daily Progress’ website that same day, Managing Editor Aaron Richardson asserted that the newspaper stood by its reporting.

Brackney also noted the fact that sometimes calendars fail to indicate meeting end times, many of which she and Hawn assert often run over the allotted time. She said she has since budgeted wiggle room for certain standing meetings she expects may continue to run over. Brackney also mentioned

that, due to the nature of police work, there are often occasions when meetings spontaneously happen that aren't necessarily indicated on a calendar.

[As the CRB finalizes its bylaws](#) in its attempt to turn words into action, Brackney said she is supportive. Charlottesville Tomorrow obtained emails that show the chief connecting the board to the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement in mid-December to facilitate training.

NACOLE is a national organization that supports civilian review boards around the country and provides training and information to government officials and community representatives to promote oversight.

Last fall, Brackney met NACOLE members at a conference in Orlando, Florida, and became inspired to try to connect the board to the organization. After some back and forth, the team was able to receive a daylong training session.

According to board member Sarah Burke, the CRB had been considering NACOLE since August 2018, when the board had its first meeting. Burke said members also circulated a NACOLE guidebook. By September, the CRB hoped to facilitate training.

"We discussed the possibility of CRB members attending a national NACOLE training and/or bringing a personalized training by NACOLE to Charlottesville," Burke said. "Unfortunately, the national training was already scheduled to take place, and it was days or weeks away from the date we learned of it, so no member from our CRB attended."

The board did, however, end up receiving a day of training by February 2019.

"We have been in ongoing communication with them as needed and they have graciously provided us guidance and assistance when we have questions," Burke said of the two facilitators who lead the day of instruction.

"That was awesome," Beard said. "I learned a lot. They gave us pointers. We needed them. ... Some of us, we didn't know what was what."

Though there was the calendar and meeting imbroglio in early May, Beard and Burke were able to meet with the chief later in the month. Beard said the meeting went well and they discussed a draft of the CRB bylaws and more diversity in the police department.

"[Brackney] said she was in the midst of hiring," Beard said. "I guess you have to hire what you can because she said she was down policemen. And I guess you read they tried to blame us [the CRB]. At one point, it was our fault that they were short."

In December, Brackney is quoted in The Daily Progress as saying "vocal and biased" members of the CRB ranked fourth in the reasons why officers leave the department.

McCoy said open disagreements between CRBs and police departments like this are typical.

"The concept is very, very threatening to a lot of people," she said. "... A lot of political posturing goes on."

Brackney also has experience with a CRB during her last job in Pittsburgh. While there, she interacted with its long-established board, though, in a statement through Hawn, she indicated the differences with this newer board in Charlottesville.

"Although Chief Brackney engaged with the CRB in Pittsburgh, and worked closely to deconflict issues, policies and practices within the city of Pittsburgh Police Department and the citizens they served — her interactions with Pittsburgh's CRB are vastly different than her experiences in Charlottesville," the statement said.

Fairfax County's civilian oversight body is serving in part as a guide for Charlottesville.

Fairfax County's board as a model?

Fairfax's civilian board has been referenced in conversations around the Charlottesville CRB. Its board, referred to as a panel, was established as the result of a commission formed in 2015 after the 2013 shooting of John Geer that put the state's largest county in a negative spotlight.

Sharon Bulova, chairwoman of Fairfax Board of Supervisors, established the Ad Hoc Police Review Commission with more than 70 members among various subcommittees who focused on various areas of police to civilian interactions. The committee made about 200 recommendations, of which Bulova said about 90% already are being implemented.

Some results of the commission have been an adjustment in some policing policies, the formation of a Civilian Review Panel and the hiring of an independent auditor.

Like the separation between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the federal government, Fairfax's Civilian Review Panel, independent auditor and the police department work separately but connect to each other.

Bulova said the auditor reports to the Board of Supervisors and investigates critical cases involving the use of force.

"His job is to make sure that nobody is dropping the ball, that an incident is getting the vetting and process it requires," Bulova said. "That may be in the police department with an internal investigation or something [that] may go to the commonwealth attorney. But the job of the auditor is to make sure that goes smoothly and fairly."

Bulova noted that the various positions within the CRP, police department and Board of Supervisors are deliberately separate.

"We've been careful to separate the two bodies," Bulova said. "The independent police auditor, who deals with more serious offenses, and the Civilian Review Panel, which deals with how people are treated or what people think happened that was not fair or not right."

The CRP is what Bulova refers to as a "portal" for people to voice their everyday concerns in matters of police to civilian interactions.

Bulova said it was created "for when people are not happy with police."

"It could be a rude officer or 'I think I've been racially profiled,'" she said.

Previously, county residents would take their grievances to the Board of Supervisors, which would forward the claim to the police department to investigate.

"That individual may be left with the thought 'That sounds a little bit like the fox guarding the hen house. How do I know that the investigation is going to be fair and thorough?'" Bulova said. "So that is the job of the Civilian Review Panel."

Bulova said the panel can bring incidents to the attention of the police department to investigate the conduct. Supervisors can then offer feedback of investigations or suggest further action if they feel more should be done.

Another thing the panel is tasked with is noticing any emerging trends of behavior and creating reports for the Board of Supervisors.

“They create reports to the board to let them know what they’ve done and what they’ve noted requires a little more oversight or work on the part of the board and the police department to make sure that we are being fair and that we’re conducting policing as fairly as it should be in Fairfax County,” Bulova said.

Bulova credited the police chief, Ed Roessler, for instituting a policy called “Sanctity of Life,” which has an emphasis on officers’ response to a critical incident.

“No. 1 is trying to slow down what’s happening and try to really focus on the sanctity of life and trying to talk someone down, bringing additional resources to the table when something is happening,” Bulova said.

Another policy, called “Diversion First,” deals with how civilians with mental disorders are handled by law enforcement. Such individuals are taken to the Merrifield Mental Health Center in the county for treatment, rather than incarceration.

According to Bulova, the building had recently been constructed when the policy came to fruition.

“It was as if the stars had aligned because we had a safe place for someone who had broken the law where there was security and they could be handed over to someone who could provide them treatment,” she said.

Another change that the Fairfax County Police Department has made has been increased transparency to the general public. Roessler created a page on the county website where people can track how incidents are being handled and information from investigations.

“This all came out of the John Geer shooting, and the county was not proud of the fact that we did not share information about who did the shooting and where the investigation was going,” Bulova said. “It just turned into a bad situation, so our police chief is with us on needing to make improvements and make changes that help deal with the transparency issue, as well as how incidents are approached and what kind of training is taking place.”

The John Geer shooting occurred in August 2013, when law enforcement responded to a domestic dispute between Geer and his wife. It resulted in an officer shooting and killing Geer, who was unarmed. The officer ultimately was convicted of involuntary manslaughter, but as the news cycle churned in the early days of the shooting, information was not communicated to the public and outraged ensued.

Bulova said that there is now a policy to release information within 10 days of an event, along with the name of police officers involved. However, there is a caveat that allows the chief to exercise discretion should there be security reasons for doing so.

The police department also has launched a pilot program with body cameras on some officers in three of the county’s districts: Reston, Mason and Mount Vernon.

Bulova said she is proud of the work that the commission did and the groups that have stemmed from it.

“Never doubt the power of the community to come to the table when there is something to be dealt with,” she said. “It helped us [the Board of Supervisors] to frame the issues that needed to be addressed.”

So, what’s next?



Though June 4 marked the anniversary of the majority of the members of the Civilian Review Board, the resolution establishing it passed in December 2017. The "birthday cake" member Katrina Turner made also includes the initials of board members.

Credit: Charlotte Rene Woods/Charlottesville Tomorrow

Fairfax's CRP took three years to morph from the ad hoc commission it stemmed from, holding to its first official meeting on Jan. 4, 2018. As Charlottesville's CRB establishes its bylaws and recommendations to be approved by council in roughly a year, when full operation of the next board will occur is still uncertain.

"I don't think it is a stretch to say the board can be up and running in a year, providing there are no delays or challenges to their authority and responsibilities that would drag on appointing the members and hiring staff on the city's end," said Liana Perez, director of operations at NACOLE.

The majority of the board's terms technically expired on June 4. Rosia Parker, who was appointed after the City Council faced criticism about people who were left off the CRB, will see the end of her term on July 2. Because of that, the rest of the board has been able to continue contributing to drafting the bylaws and ordinance.

The current board will meet a final time at 10 a.m. Monday to vote on final materials to be sent to the City Council, which also has a session later that day. The action would be too soon to be on that council agenda.

"Council looks forward to receiving the Police Civilian Review Board's final recommendations. An update on the CRB and/or any discussion of term extensions is not on the Council agenda for Monday, July 1," Brian Wheeler, Charlottesville's director of communications, said. "The next Council meeting is Aug. 5, and that would be the first opportunity for the item to be discussed by [the] council after the CRB completes its work."

After the June 25 CRB meeting, Burke emailed the council to request that the CRB be able to present at the Aug. 5 meeting.

According to Wheeler, the possibility for the CRB to present that day is up to the council. He also said the council could decide to take more time to deliberate before voting on the bylaws.

That June 25 meeting drew a larger crowd than it has in recent weeks, and it was where the nitty-gritty of bylaw language was discussed. A couple of audience members and board members

expressed concern that the bylaws and ordinance could linger on a back burner for too long, delaying the establishment of the next board.

Burke said she hopes the materials can be voted on by the current council before the end of the year, since it will take time for applications, selection and training of the next board while the three new council members settle into their new positions.

As the meeting was ending, members reflected on their year of working together and the effect a fully operational CRB could have.

“We didn’t tell them [police officers] to choose to protect and serve us. Y’all chose that career. So, if you’re taking that career up under your belt, you should already know how to deal with the public,” Parker said.

She then discussed a particular officer that she said has been antagonizing residents who are not white.

“That’s the thing, it is about making sure that individuals are held accountable, but we also have a much bigger systemic problem, and I think that this year has been embroiled in personal conflict and that’s real,” Burke said. “But that’s not the narrative of this year in my mind. This year, the city asked us to do meaningful and important work and recognizes that can be invaluable to this community and it wanted us to create something bold. We did all that. In my mind, it’s all about working to address these systemic problems that are bigger than one individual, bigger than a police chief or officer, bigger than a city councilor, bigger than anybody.”

An audience member said that she hopes the concept of a CRB is not performative and that community members should continue to advocate for it so that the work can continue.

Councilor Heather Hill acknowledges that August could be the first time the council can discuss the CRB, and she said she feels that the next steps could roll out by or before the end of the year, especially since the sitting council is the body that has been working with this initial board.

“I would say by the second September meeting, we should be in a position to be looking at whatever version we are going to consider for a vote,” Hill said. “At that point, we have the rest of September and we have three more months until the end of the year, and I think it’s all of our goal to make sure that this council seats the permanent CRB. So, that’s the timeline I would project, as a person of one.”

Ahead of the final vote on materials to be submitted to city council, Parker and Turner attended a meeting with City Manager Tarron Richardson at LAJC. It was not open to the press.

The vote is set to occur in City Hall’s basement conference room.

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PUBLIC EDUCATION

Charlottesville educators bring school to students after threat



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Friday, March 22, 2019, at 7:08 PM



Students play games outside the community picnic and gathering at Westhaven Community Center amidst school closures due to an online threat.

Credit: Charlotte Rene Woods \ Charlottesville Tomorrow

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17-year-old Albemarle resident facing charges for online post

With school closed due to an online threat, Charlottesville City Schools employees came together Friday morning to march through neighborhoods and provide lunch at Westhaven Recreation Center.

“It was kind of an organic thing. We didn’t have a plan past that, really,” said Charlottesville High School Principal Eric Irizarry. “We started to tweet things out and had more folks join us along the way. As we walked through our communities, we had kids and families join us. It was awesome.”

Irizarry said city school officials emailed each other Thursday night to organize the event. Irizarry also called Denise Johnson, program director at City of Promise, who informed him of a planned lunch

orchestrated by City of Promise and Burnley-Moran Elementary School. A crowd of roughly 250 people passed through the community center between noon and 2 p.m.

“We know that any days out of school that are unexpected, we need to make sure that our kids are eating,” Johnson said.

City of Promise also coordinated with Mellow Mushroom, Domino’s and various city officials to deliver pizzas at public housing community sites on Thursday.

“The amount of effort that it took to bring this together, City of Promise was fortunate and blessed enough to be at the helm of it, but it could not have happened without everyone else,” she said.

The efforts come as city schools were closed a second straight day due to a threat targeting black and Hispanic students at Charlottesville High School posted online on 4chan. A 17-year-old male from Albemarle County [was arrested early Friday morning](#).

The juvenile was charged with threats to commit serious bodily harm to persons on school property, a Class 6 felony, as well as harassment by computer, a Class 1 misdemeanor.

Police Chief RaShall Brackney said more charges could come, and the teen could be tried as an adult.

After thanking the Charlottesville and Albemarle police departments, Virginia State Police and the FBI for their work on the case, Brackney said at a press conference Friday that hate, violence, and intolerance are not welcome.

“In Charlottesville and around the globe we stand firmly in stating there are not very fine people on both sides of this issue,” she said, referring to President Donald Trump’s 2017 comments on the white nationalist Unite the Right rally in 2017.

“Our School Board has stood strong during these past few days,” said Rosa Atkins, superintendent of Charlottesville schools, as she noted the volunteer efforts among school staff and City of Promise to organize meals and social gatherings to boost morale.

“I feel like I should be in school. I’m angry that there was a threat and that school was canceled,” said Lincoln Shaw, 9, a fifth-grade student at Burnley-Moran Elementary.

Having said that, he appreciated how communities made the most of the cancellations.

“I’m spending the day with friends instead of sitting at home the whole time, and it’s a nice day,” he said.

Irizarry noted that demonstrating support and love for the students was inspirational.

“We wanted to get out and let our kids know we’re here, we love them. It’s hard to sit home, and stay home when things are happening like this,” Irizarry said.

That sentiment resonated for many city officials and residents in the wake of recent white supremacist rallies and violence in Charlottesville.

“These past three years since Aug. 12 have been really tough for this city. I think it just shows that there’s still a lot of work to be done,” Irizarry said. “Unfortunately, I think Charlottesville is still a target for white supremacists since Aug. 12. It’s something that has become more familiar to us. Anytime like this happens in Charlottesville, the good thing is that our community rallies around itself. It’s making us stronger.”

“As for the nation, this is another example of where we are in this fight against injustice and hatred in our country,” Mayor Nikuyah Walker said. “I hope, as Chief Brackney stated, the world is aware that this will not be welcomed in Charlottesville, and that we wake up every day with the hope, purpose and the passion to make sure that we are leading this fight for justice globally.”

GOVERNMENT + POLITICS

General Assembly adjourns early with commission to study proposed bills; legislators to reconvene in November



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Virginians from across the state assemble outside of General Assembly with signage as they cheer on various legislators entering the building.

Credit: Charlotte Rene Woods | Charlottesville Tomorrow

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RICHMOND — In what amounted to a legislative standoff, Virginia’s General Assembly adjourned 90 minutes into a special legislative session to address gun violence. The proposed bills are now stalled until after the November general election and will be studied through the State Crime Commission.

Gov. Ralph Northam called for the special session in the wake of a mass shooting in May at the Virginia Beach Municipal Center and the death of a 9-year-old girl in Richmond last month. He summoned the General Assembly to vote on eight gun-control measures he put forth and a handful of resolutions to honor the victims of the May 31 mass shootings. As the legislative body has a history of addressing gun bills in subcommittees, advocates called for a floor vote that never happened.

The session came a couple of months in advance of the Nov. 5 election, in which all 140 seats of the House of Delegates and Senate are up for grabs. In the motion to adjourn, both chambers agreed to resume the session on Nov. 18.

“I called legislators back to Richmond for this special session so we could take immediate action to address the gun violence emergency that takes more than a thousand Virginians’ lives each year,” Northam said in a statement. “I expected lawmakers to take this seriously. I expected them to do what their constituents elected them to do — discuss issues and take votes.”

The consensus from several Democratic lawmakers was disappointment with Republican legislators. Speaker Kirk Cox, R-Colonial Heights, likened the special session to a political stunt during an election year.

Del. Todd Gilbert, R-Shenandoah made a motion for adjournment, with the votes tallying Yea-50 to Nay-46. It was mostly Republican legislators who voted to adjourn and pick the session back up on Nov. 18, after the Crimes Commission study.

Hurst was one of the 46 delegates who opposed adjournment. The Senate had adjourned just minutes earlier.

“Republicans proved again today that progress in Virginia hinges on Democrats taking back our House and Senate,” said Sally Hudson, the Democratic primary winner who is Toscano’s presumptive successor. “Voters in Charlottesville must stay laser-focused on that goal.”

Various city and Albemarle County groups carpooled to Richmond to demonstrate support of gun reform, including the Charlottesville chapter of Moms Demand Action and the Charlottesville Coalition for Gun Violence Prevention. Buckingham County residents Marie Flowers and Frank Howe attended the pre-session rally, as well.

“These people will not pass the laws, so we’ve got to vote them out,” Howe said. “Time and time again people say, ‘oh we’re going to vote,’ even after tragedy and then they never do.”

During the pre-session rally, a common refrain from participants was “You vote today, we vote in November.” Much of the crowd cheered as legislators who have taken pro-reform stances entered the building and shouted “shame” as people donning NRA merchandise and “Guns Save Lives” stickers passed.

Among the Charlottesville- and Albemarle-area candidates who attended the session and rally were City Council candidate Sena Magill and Amy Laufer and Elizabeth Alcorn, who are challenging incumbents Del. Rob Bell, R-Albemarle, and Sen. Bryce Reeves, R-Spotsylvania, respectively.

Both Reeves and Laufer pulled similar voting numbers in the June primaries, speaking to the potential for the November election to sway either direction.

Some Republicans somewhat broke from the party’s usual stance on gun control legislation. Davis filed a bill that would allow municipalities to ban guns in government buildings, but he then voted in party line to adjourn the session until November. In the Senate, Majority Leader Tommy Norment, R-James City, filed similar legislation on July 8. This prompted the Senate Majority Whip, Sen. Bill Stanley, to resign in protest, though the Senate swiftly voted to reinstate him. Norment also went on to retract his bill.