

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Homeland Security Commission



Muriel
Bowser
Mayor

HOMELAND SECURITY COMMISSION
QUARTERLY MEETING
Monday, June 21, 2021
3:45 p.m. to 4:45 p.m.
Virtual Webex Meeting

Commission Member Attendees: Brad Belzak, Ed Pearson, Phil McNamara, Joanna Turner, Brian Baker, Wendy Villatoro

Mayor's Office of Talent and Appointments Attendees: Adanna Mbanugo, Booker Roary

HSEMA Attendees: Jason Rubinstein, Emile Smith, Nicole Peckumn

Meeting starts at approximately 3:45 pm. No members of the public are present.

*MOTA provides swearing in ceremony for Commissioners Villatoro, Pearson, and Turner. Following the swearing-in ceremony, the Commissioners provide introductions.

Brad: I would like to propose we keep today's session open.

Commissioners unanimously decide to keep meeting open.

Brad: We just finished our mass care report, and this Commission has previously completed two cyber reports and a pandemic report. The last report on mass care was shorter and action focused, and I would like to keep that method for this upcoming report.

On the share-screen we have some key takeaways from the meetings with HSEMA leadership, the Executive Office of the Mayor, and D.C. Council. We asked them what they were focused on. Our Commission operates similarly to a thinktank. We look at pertinent issues across the city that requires additional bandwidth and support.

(Brad provides brief overview of the priorities discussed in previous meetings).

The Council meeting highlighted resiliency, COVID-19, relationships with first responders, and January 6 events.

Fusion centers are certainly a hot topic for HSEMA leadership. I'm going to pause here, and I'd like to hear everyone's thoughts. Joanna, do you want to go first?

Joanna: The resiliency issue has come up several times. Certainly, pursuing this topic is relevant to our mission statement. HSEMA has raised the topic of fusion centers. I do think we should also give that topic consideration. I'm hesitant to address HR topics, as I feel those are outside the Commission's

expertise. I also am interested in a hot wash from the January 6 attack, but I want to be mindful of partisanship with respect to this issue. I would say my top two are resilience and fusion centers.

Brad: Thanks Joanna. What would your top vote be?

Joanna: Resiliency with focus on new development in the city. My second is fusion centers.

Emile: Georgetown may be relevant – they have had flooding problems in the past.

Wendy: Waterfront development in all locations should be our focus. I've been out in the past couple of storms we've had. Traffic and flooding are a big issue. The Army Corp, I believe, published a report on the rise of water levels in the city. Resiliency is tied to our infrastructure. If we do resiliency and waterfront security, we should do D.C. as a whole and not just the Southwest portion.

Phil: Fusion centers are tough for me, in the sense that while there are national standards, if you've seen one fusion center, you've just seen one fusion center. The challenges HSEMA is facing is probably unique to D.C., so developing best practices might put us in a situation comparing apples to oranges. So, the fusion center topic is a bit tough for me. I do love the topic of resiliency. It was brought up repeatedly by Council and Commission members. Anyone with waterfront land is experiencing these same issues, so there is a lot to draw on. I would probably go there. I get Joanna's point on January 6., but I agree that we need to be careful about partisanship. It would be difficult to look closely at the District's response. I would vote resiliency.

Brad: Well said. The fusion center is of big importance to D.C. It is a sensitive issue in terms of autonomy, complexity, etc. If we as a commission were full time and had a huge staff, we could do all these topics. We want to do more, sometimes. Phil, I'm marking you down for resiliency.

Brian: I completely agree in terms of resiliency. I am privy to flood hazard data and have been in leadership roles that have had to deal with these issues. I think there is a lot of need there.

On the fusion center side, when we established the Commission the vision was that it could assist with some tough issues the District needs help evaluating. I spoke to Director Rodriguez many times and Deputy Mayor Geldart. I was there when we established the fusion center. I think there is a big question internal to the District as to what the fusion center should be doing. I know this has been a continued challenge for the Director and I think he is at a point where he just doesn't know where to go, and I think we could provide some recommendations that could be useful. It is hard when you are there. Director Rodriguez and I had separate views on what the fusion center should be. The events in the past year (COVID-19 and Jan 6.) does give us an opportunity to focus, in terms of fusion centers and the information sharing side. So again, I am a fan of resiliency, but I think HSEMA and the Deputy Mayor have pretty much reached out to us and asked for help regarding the fusion center. I know all fusion centers are unique, but I think D.C. is at a point where they are carefully thinking about where they should be.

Phil: Brian raises good points. We are here as appointees of the Mayor. The Deputy Mayor for public safety and HSEMA implored us to do fusion centers. In light of that and Brian's reminder, I am switching my vote to fusion centers.

Brad: Okay changed.

Ed: I compiled a short list of my topics and I'd like to give you that list, elaborate, and provide

conclusions:

1. Fusion center (number one)
2. Looking at Affordable Care Act (ACA) for all D.C. residents. I think this is going to impact D.C. residents and this Commission could collaborate with agencies to foster or support.
3. Waterfront and resiliency – I'm in agreement with Wendy that if we look at it, we focus on all of the waterfront, not just a certain area.

Brad: Thank you. That's a great list. These are critical issues. Fusion centers and resiliency are within our mandate, which is homeland security. I think the affordable care act is critically important. I'm not an expert on it. I don't think ACA it's in our mandate. I would focus on either fusion centers or waterfront and resiliency.

Everyone brings up good points. We dealt with a lot of deliberative issues. We work for everyone. We don't have a huge research arm. We need to consider logistics and be realistic with our path forward. I think fusion centers and resiliency are very important topics. I would love to do something on Jan 6., but it's highly political and we may not be structured to handle a study of that magnitude. I think we need to thread the needle. We spoke a lot on fusion centers, last year. I heard interest in finding the gold standard and national best practices for fusion centers. My vote is fusion center or resiliency. We would need to consider what we have bandwidth for and ensure we will be able to get to the right people to develop an effective study. Director Rodriguez has offered to get us more support if we need it.

Phil: If we decide we are going to do fusion centers, let's just say the next report is resiliency and put it on deck. Before we embark on the fusion center topic, I'd like us to focus our charge in consultation with the HSEMA Director. We want to talk to internal D.C. agencies like we did with the cyber report. If we do fusion centers, I would like a tight charge, reviewed by the HSEMA Director and help focus our conversations with external and internal groups.

Brad: Thanks Phil. Also, Jason and Nicole and Emile, we didn't get a chance to introduce you in the onset. We appreciate everything you do.

(HSEMA staff provides brief introductions to Commissioner Villatoro).

Brad: My vote is fusion center this year. Next year is resiliency. Can we vote and come to a consensus?

Ed: I support that, but I still want to talk to Chairman Allen to see if we could be of assistance with the ACA. My main reason is because Chairman Allen headed COVID-19 response for the city, so I know something like this would be important to him. It almost goes hand-in-hand and I think it's something we need to look at. In terms of the fusion center topic, with the push on police reform, that is probably going to take some serious work.

Brad: Great. Ed, Brian, and Phil have voted fusion center. Wendy do you support this?

Wendy: I do.

Brad: Great. This year is fusion center, next year is resiliency. I will develop a write up and share with the group. Jason let's set up a string of meetings. I'll get with you offline. Thanks everyone.

Meeting ends at approximately 4:55 pm. No members of the public are present. Adjourn.