

NEWS



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Mayor Brings Operation Safer Streets Into Communities

More focused policing, more engaged communities, better coordinated delivery of city services, and reduced availability of handguns are keys to plan

Philadelphia, PA – Speaking to large crowds throughout the City, Mayor John F. Street on Saturday unveiled the City’s new comprehensive, citywide violence prevention and reduction plan – Operation Safer Streets.

Flanked by Police Commissioner Sylvester Johnson and an array of city officials, community activists and clergy, the Mayor appeared at six meetings in neighborhoods across the City, delivering the same message at each stop to overflowing, engaged crowds.

“Philadelphia is safer today than it’s been in a long time,” Mayor Street said at Faith Assembly of God Church in Frankford. “Remember Operation Safe Streets? We shut down 309 open-air drug markets. Serious crime declined. However, the recent uptick in gun violence in our City is unacceptable, and we will not allow it to continue. We have a plan to prevent violence, but the police cannot solve this problem alone. Violence is everybody’s problem, and we must all be a part of the solution.”

In addition to his Frankford meeting, Mayor Street unveiled Operation Safer Streets at Triumph Baptist Church in North Philadelphia, Ascension Catholic Church in Kensington, Cornerstone Baptist in Strawberry Mansion, Bibleway Baptist in West Philadelphia, and St. Charles Borromeo in South Philadelphia.

The Mayor was joined at St. Charles Borromeo by Cardinal Justin Rigali, leader of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Cardinal Rigali echoed the Mayor’s passionate messages about violence prevention. “Jesus taught us to treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves,” the Cardinal told an audience of more than 300 people at the South Philadelphia church.

Operation Safer Streets has four main components and furthers the City’s “unequivocal commitment to public safety,” the Mayor said. Those four parts are more focused policing, more engaged communities involved in crime prevention, better coordinated delivery of social services, and reduced availability of handguns. The Mayor elaborated on the new public safety plan at the community meetings by stressing these themes:

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Mayor Unveils Operation Safer Streets in Communities/Add Two

1. **The City will provide a level of police protection that people deserve, including but not limited to getting guns off the streets.** Most homicides occur inside homes – where police officers obviously don't patrol. "We need tougher gun laws for Philadelphia and we will fight for them," the Mayor said – a promise that drew repeated applause and vocal support from crowds citywide.
2. **The City will continue to provide a high level of services to ensure neighborhoods remain decent places in which to live.** "If you have a vacant property causing problems next door to you, call us and we will take it down," the Mayor said. "If you have a pothole, let us know about it – we'll fix it. If you know someone in need of social services, tell us and we'll provide counseling."
3. **The Police Department and other City agencies will encourage neighborhoods to become more involved in violence prevention.** "The Police Department cannot do this by itself," the Mayor said. "We will never abdicate our responsibility to our neighborhoods and communities. But we cannot do this alone. We need communities much more engaged."
4. **The City, community activists, and the faith-based community must raise the level of civility in Philadelphia, so that using violence as a first resort to resolving disputes is no longer an option.** The Mayor cited police statistics showing 215 of the 380 homicides in Philadelphia in 2005 were the result of arguments, some as minor and random as someone bumping against someone in a diner – and being shot to death as a result. "There are far too many guns in our City, and not enough love," Mayor Street said. "With the help of the 4,000 to 5,000 leaders of our faith-based community, we have to begin talking to one another about love, respect and the dignity of man."

Police Commissioner Johnson, speaking after the Mayor at each meeting, outlined the policing part of Operation Safer Streets. Police have already begun implementing targeted strategies to suppress violence, he said. These strategies focus on violent criminals and rely on smarter use of crime data and targeted deployment of police officers in "hot spots" citywide. Commissioner Johnson said the Mayor's budget proposal to add \$10 million in overtime for his Department will enable police to double the amount of time officers spend patrolling "hot spots" to prevent violence.

Other city officials attended the meetings to explain other elements of the new violence reduction strategy. Philadelphia's Division of Social Services will serve an important role in Operation Safer Streets, as violence is often the symptom of other underlying issues, including substance abuse, truancy, mental health and other family problems. The Youth Violence Reduction Partnership (YVRP), a city program operating in five police districts, provides intensive support services to troubled youth in their homes from police, probation officers and street workers. The City has hired a new coordinator to run an expanded YVRP. The City has also created a new program – Adolescent Violence Reduction Partnership (AVRP) – to reach even younger at-risk kids.

Two important phone numbers for citizens to use were explained at the meetings. Operation Safer Streets is encouraging citizens to turn in guns, report lost or stolen weapons, or phone in tips about the illegal sale or purchase of handguns. The police phone number: **215-683-GUNS**. In addition, groups such as Town Watch Integrated Services and Men United for Better Philadelphia will serve as eyes and ears for the police and offer residents the chance to join the violence prevention campaign. A non-police phone number – **215-685-9521** – has been set up to report rumors and tips to city officials as a further deterrent to violence.

"Operation Safer Streets is not a short-term fix," Mayor Street said. "It is a carefully-planned, long-term strategy which partners the Police Department, community activists and our faith-based community to ensure Philadelphia remains a safe and world-class City. Get involved and be part of the solution."