



# Violent Crime Threat Assessment & Action Plan



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Over the past decade, Columbia, SC has experienced double the average U.S. rate of violent crime. More specifically, it has a chronic problem with gun violence. The city has had close to 500 person-hit shootings since 2015—that is, incidents in which a bullet hit an individual, whether intentionally or otherwise. In the past six years, one in six shootings victims has died; perhaps more disturbing is the fact that the already-elevated number of person-hit shootings has been on the rise since 2019, in keeping with national trends. Necessarily, formulating a clear understanding of how, when, where, and why these incidents happen is central to bringing some level of ongoing safety to affected communities. This understanding has and will continue to inform the Columbia Police Department’s strategies in dealing with this issue.

## A Description of the Gun Violence Problem

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Based on several years of analysis, there are certain things we do know: that both suspects and victims in person-hit shootings tend to be young, black, and male, and appear to age-in, and then age-out, of involvement in gun violence; that these shootings are geographically concentrated, in that they take place in a limited number of locations, 38% of these incidents take place in just 2% of Columbia’s surface area; and that certain behaviors precipitate gun violence: robbery, illegal drug sales, sudden altercations, long-term disputes, domestic disputes, were all significant causes of person-hit shootings. While nearly half the shootings were not assigned a motive, often because the victim was uncooperative or an innocent bystander—25% were believed to be gang-related. Central to gun violence, though, is the illegal carrying of weapons: over 800 guns were seized both in 2019 and 2020.

## Strategies to Reduce Gun Violence

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The CPD has implemented and is currently implementing a range of strategies to address the problem. These strategies fall under three main categories: people-focused strategies, place-based strategies, and behavior-disrupting strategies.

### **People-Focused Strategies for Reducing Gun Violence: Arrest, Prevention, and Support**

Arresting suspects is a principal way of reducing gun violence. The Violent Crimes Against Persons (VCAP) unit in the Criminal Investigations Division investigates nearly all person-hit shootings in Columbia and has recently improved its arrest rate, thanks in part to support from the Crime Gun Intel Unit (CGIU), which collects, analyzes and disseminates data from other gun-involved incidents and gun purchases.

The Ceasefire Columbia program contributes by liaising with the SC Department of Probation, Parole, and Pardon (PPP) to identify individuals at high risk of committing gun violence. A highly focused deterrent, Ceasefire attempts to dissuade high risk offenders from committing future acts of gun violence by raising their awareness of the consequences of such actions, while simultaneously attempting to address the problems these individuals may well be facing.

### **Place-Based Strategies: Going Where the Guns Are**

Following the lead of other successful programs around the country, CPD is introducing a Place Based Intervention (PBI) program, which focuses on a specific area of 0.5 square miles which has 10% of the shootings. Using data from past analyses, up-to-date information provided by ShotSpotter Technology (SST), and aided by the introduction of a Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) to coordinate intervention, the CPD hopes to focus patrols in this specific area at specific times (and more quickly respond to shootings) so as to reduce gun violence in this high-incidence area. This focused approach is data-driven and is a conscious reversal of the counterproductive blanket-policing formerly undertaken by law enforcement in areas with high rates of gun violence. The program may well be expanded if it proves successful. Changing the locale is also part of the overall strategy: the CPD will therefore work with Columbia Code Enforcement and other non-governmental groups to improve the built environment that appears to make an area particularly conducive to gun violence.

### **Behavior Disrupting Strategies: Getting Guns off the Streets**

Effective prosecution of shooters is an important factor in reducing the number of guns on the streets: it removes a perpetrator from circulation, but also alerts would-be shooters to the consequences of such actions. To this end, the Crime Gun Intelligence Unit (CGIU) coordinates with the ATF and federal prosecutors to bring federal charges when appropriate. The CGIU also produces and disseminates the Violent Offenders List (VOL), which identifies individuals who are active in violent crime and gun crime, and so ensures that prosecutors are fully informed.

### **Conclusion**

Clearly, one person-hit shooting is one too many, but Columbia is currently faced with an unacceptably high rate of such shootings. The goal, therefore, is pressing: to reduce gun violence and limit the terrible social harm wrought both on individuals and the communities in which they live. The CPD is leveraging data and new technologies to hone its strategies so that its policing is both focused and equitable. By going where the guns are, fewer people will be harmed and communities will be able to flourish, free of the fear of gun violence.

# INTRODUCTION

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Over the past decade, Columbia has experienced double the average U.S. rate of violent crime, which is defined by the FBI as those offenses that involve force or threat of force.<sup>1</sup> It is no exaggeration to say, then, that the city of Columbia, South Carolina has a chronic violent crime problem, particularly with gun violence. A large proportion of the murders in Columbia are committed with a firearm, and the city has had close to 500 person-hit shootings since 2015; that is, incidents in which a bullet hit an individual, whether intentionally or otherwise.<sup>2</sup> Understandably, finding a way to resolve this problem is a top priority, both for the communities served by the City of Columbia Police Department, and for the CPD itself. This threat assessment regarding gun violence in Columbia has therefore been prepared with two main goals in mind: first, to better understand what is happening with regard to gun violence; and, second, to outline the CPD's varied ongoing and future strategies for reducing gun violence.

## Part I: A DESCRIPTION OF THE GUN VIOLENCE PROBLEM

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### Past Trends and Current Outlook: Is Gun Violence on the Rise?

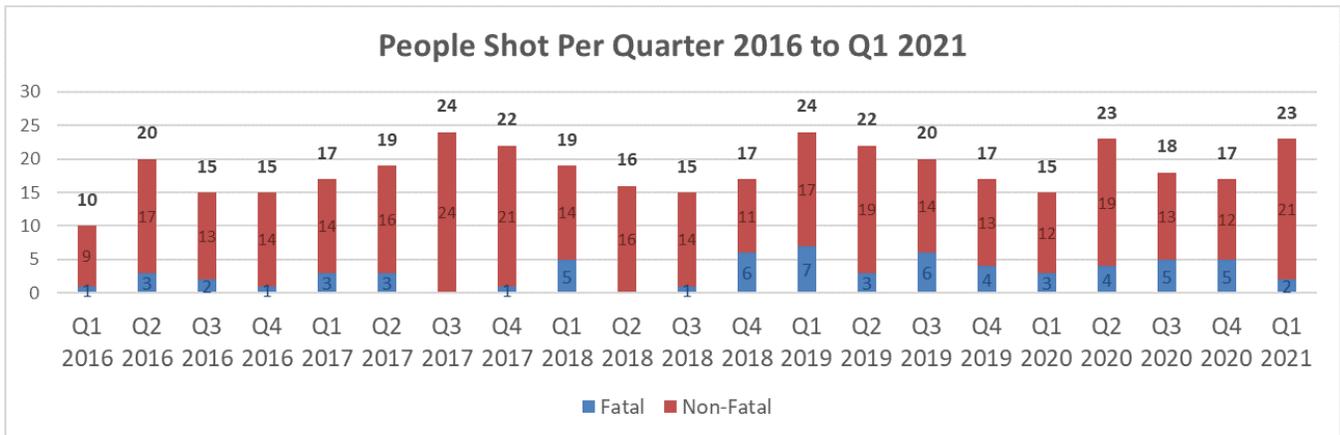
Over the past five years (2016-2020) Columbia has averaged 72.6 person-hit shootings a year, with no year having fewer than 60 person-hit shootings. A look at the number of people shot per quarter over this period shows that, while there is some fluctuation in shooting totals, quarter to quarter, the overall volume of person-hit shootings in Columbia has remained fairly stable. During this period, Columbia has averaged 18.4 person-hit shootings per quarter. The lowest quarter had only 10 person-hit shootings, and the highest two quarters each experienced 24 person-hit shootings.<sup>3</sup> There was also a noticeable increase in the percentage of fatal shootings from the fourth quarter of 2018 onwards (Q4, 2018)

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<sup>1</sup> Data gathered from the FBI's UCR Data Tool and from the Crime in the US reports for relevant years. The average FBI definition violent crime rate for Columbia from 2010 to 2019 was 793.4 crimes per 100,000 residents while the average rate for the US as whole was 378.9 crimes per 100,000 residents.

<sup>2</sup> Between 1/1/15 and 6/21/21 there have been 489 person-hit shootings in Columbia. A general definition of person-hit shooting at CPD is a criminal discharging of a firearm that results in a bullet striking a victim's body. Usually suicides, accidental discharges, or lawful shootings are not included.

<sup>3</sup> The standard deviation is 3.5, meaning that the average range for person-hit shootings per quarter would be any number between about 15 and 22



It is also important to note that according to the information currently available it appears that there was a significant increase in violent crime (especially murder and gun violence) in the United States. This upward trend began in the first half of 2020 and appears to be continuing in 2021. At the end of 2020, the FBI reported that there had been a 14% increase in murders in the first half of 2020 when compared to the same period in 2019. An informal survey conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum found similar results: 70% of agencies of comparable size to the CPD experienced an increase in murders in from 2019 to 2020.<sup>4</sup> The Washington Post reports that gun violence in 2020 rose significantly compared to the 2015-2019 average, and, further, that the first six months of 2021 have had a higher average rate of gun violence than was the case for the same period in 2020.<sup>5</sup>

The long-term trends regarding gun violence in Columbia indicate that the problem has remained stable across time, but have nonetheless been severe in the past half-decade. In keeping with the upward national trends, Columbia should expect gun violence to either remain stable or increase in the near-term unless there is an effective response to this problem on the part of the City of Columbia and its partners.<sup>6</sup>

## The People Associated with Gun Violence

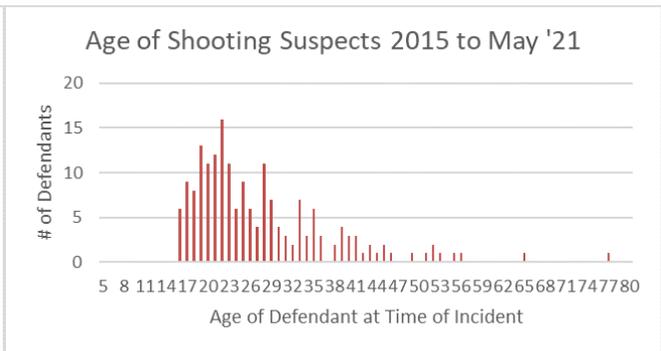
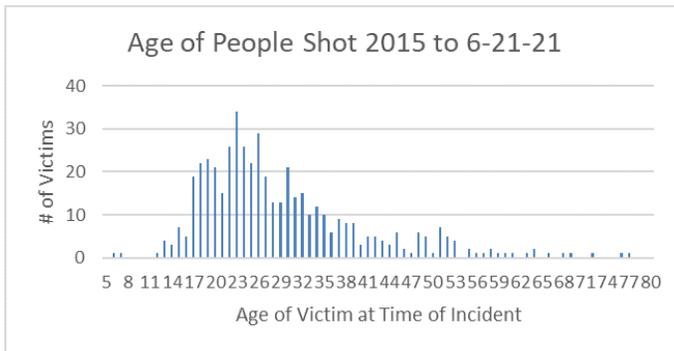
To be better able to address gun violence, it is important to have as clear an understanding as possible of who is involved in such actions. An analysis of the person-hit shooting incidents that involve an individual being struck by a bullet shows that suspects<sup>7</sup> and victims of these incidents tend to be young, black, and male. For instance, in the past six years 85% of the victims and 95% of the suspects have been black, and 85% of the victims and 91% of suspects have been male. The average age of shooting victims over the past six years has been 29 years old. The most common age among these victims is 23 and 73% of shooting victims are between the ages of 17 and 35. The average age of shooting suspects is 28, the most common age among suspects is 22 years old, and 80% of shooting suspects are between the ages of 17 and 35.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/overview-of-preliminary-uniform-crime-report-january-june-2020>; <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissuesnov18>.

<sup>5</sup> See Washington Post reporting on this issue for 2021: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/06/14/2021-gun-violence/>

<sup>6</sup> The fact that gun violence decreased in Columbia in 2020 (12% fewer person-hit shootings) while it apparently increased in many other places throughout the country may be a cause for cautious optimism regarding effectiveness of the strategies we have already begun implementing.

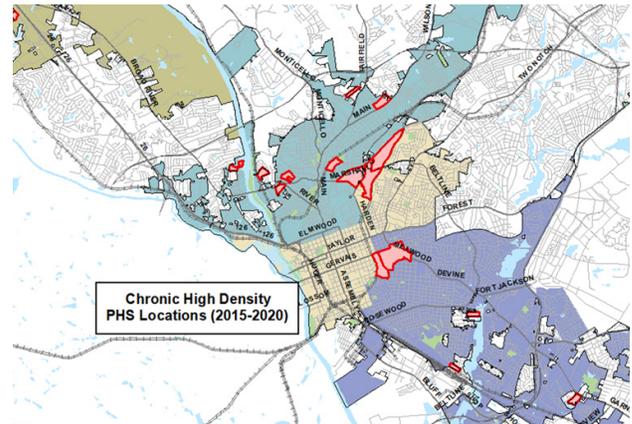
<sup>7</sup> For this discussion, “suspect” means someone who has been charged on a warrant for being a shooter or direct accomplice to a shooter.



The age distribution of shooting victims and suspects has also remained stable from year-to-year. For example, over the past six years, the average age of shooting victims has only risen by one calendar year: it went up from 29 in 2015 to 30 in 2020. The same is true of shootings suspects, whose average age rose from 28 in 2015 to 29 in 2020. This may indicate that gun violence is not occurring among one single cohort of individuals, but that people are routinely aging into, and then aging out of, involvement in gun violence in Columbia.

## Locations Associated with Gun Violence

In spite of the fact that Columbia has a chronic gun violence problem, very few locations in the city are actually affected by the problem. For instance, in 2020 77% of the police department's report areas did not experience a single person-hit shooting. Furthermore, in that same year, just 9% of the report areas contained 63% of all such shootings. This data is also consistent with the distribution of shootings in 2019.



Further analysis of the geographical distribution of person-hit shootings shows that the areas that have the most acute and chronic concentrations of such shootings have a combined surface area of just 1.34 square miles. Over the past six years these areas have accounted for 38% of all person-hit shootings, even though they comprise just 2% of Columbia's surface area. These areas consistently represent a disproportionate number of shootings, accounting for no less than 28% of person-hit shootings in any given year, but at times accounting for **more than half** (54%) of such shootings.

## Behaviors Associated with Gun Violence

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Clearly, gun possession is associated with gun violence and, more specifically, illegal gun possession. CPD officers seized more than 800 guns in 2019 and 2020, which is a clear indication of just how common illegal gun carrying is in Columbia.

Past analysis bears out in-the-field experience when it comes to identifying additional factors that are connected to gun violence. An analysis of shooting incidents occurring in the 12 months prior to the end of June 2019 indicated that shootings are generally precipitated by one of four categories of events: robberies (22% of incidents); sudden altercations (15% of incidents); long-term disputes (12% of incidents); and domestic disputes (6% of incidents). In a large number of cases (45%) it was unclear what exactly precipitated the shooting. This was often found to be the case when the victim was uncooperative or when the victim appeared to be an innocent bystander and not the intended target of the shooting.

Approximately 25% of the shootings occurring during the above-mentioned time period were believed to be gang related,<sup>8</sup> and about 20% of the shootings during this period involved illegal drugs. Gang involvement was common in cases motivated by a long-term dispute (77% of such cases fell into this category) or in shootings in which the motivation is unknown (28% of such cases). Illegal drugs were commonly associated with shootings precipitated by robberies (76% of such cases).

## Part II: STRATEGIES TO REDUCE GUN VIOLENCE

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### Why Reducing Person-Hit Gun Violence is a Priority

An incident in which a bullet hits an individual, whether intentionally or otherwise, is the quintessential act of gun violence. In the past six years almost one out of six person-hit shooting victims has died as a result of his or her injuries.<sup>9</sup> Tragically, these cases sometimes involve children, as was the case when seven-year-old Knowledge Sims was murdered in April 2020 after bullets were fired into his family's home. While many people do survive such shootings, they are often left with life-altering injuries. Martha Childress, a USC freshman, lost the use of her legs after a shooting; similarly, Howard Boone, who was soon to enter the US Army as a Second Lieutenant, was paralyzed from the neck down after being shot while visiting his Omega Psi Phi brothers in Columbia.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, one person-hit shooting is one too many, but Columbia is currently faced with an unacceptably high rate of such shootings. The goal, therefore is evident: to reduce gun violence and limit the terrible social harm wrought both on individuals and the communities in which they live.

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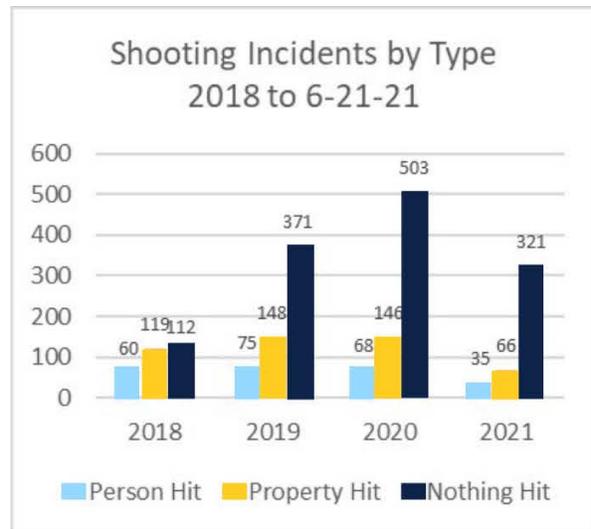
<sup>8</sup> Note the distinction between gang related and gang motivated. A gang related incident might involve a gang member, but is not undertaken in order to forward the objectives of the gang, whereas a gang motivated incident is undertaken to fulfil the objectives of the gang.

<sup>9</sup> That is, 16%.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.wistv.com/2018/10/19/man-paralyzed-five-points-shooting-hopes-prevent-more-gun-violence-with-vigil/>; <https://www.wistv.com/story/37760460/college-student-identified-as-1-of-3-victims-in-the-five-points-shooting-remains-hospitalized/>

There are other types of criminal events that could reasonably be categorized under the heading of gun violence, including incidents in which only property is struck by gunfire or in which a firearm is discharged but nothing is hit. While the number of these incidents is much greater, the social harm of these incidents is significantly lower. In the past three-and-a-half years, there have been two property-hit shooting incidents for every person-hit incident, and more than four times as many incidents in which nothing was hit.<sup>11</sup> However, reducing the problem of property-hit and nothing-hit shootings is both more difficult, and less urgent, than reducing the problem of person-hit shootings.

Necessarily, the latter must remain the priority for the CPD because of the individual and social harm they bring.<sup>12</sup> While the CPD's gun violence reduction plan should and does have one primary goal—the reduction of person-hit shootings—there is no singular strategy available to attain this goal. Rather, the CPD has implemented and is currently implementing a range of strategies to address the problem. These strategies fall under three main categories, which will be discussed below: people-focused strategies, place-based strategies, and behavior-disrupting strategies.



## People-Focused Strategies for Reducing Gun Violence: Arrest, Prevention, and Support

The primary person-focused method for reducing person-hit shootings is the arrest and successful prosecution of shooters. This is done most frequently and successfully by the Violent Crimes Against Persons (VCAP) unit in the Criminal Investigations Division. VCAP is responsible for investigating nearly all person-hit shootings in Columbia. Since fall 2019, VCAP's person-hit shooting investigations have been supported by the work of CPD's Crime Gun Intel Unit (CGIU). The CGIU collects, analyzes and disseminates NIBIN data (linking guns to multiple incidents), eTrace data (which identifies the last known purchaser of every seized gun), and otherwise offers case support for incidents involving firearms. An initial analysis indicates increased success in VCAP investigations. In 2020 49% of person-hit shooting incidents resulted in the arrest of a shooter or accomplice. Only 22% to 36% of such cases were cleared in this manner between 2015 and 2019.<sup>13</sup> This significant increase in arrests attests to the effectiveness of the strategies in place and represents a step forward in combating gun violence.

<sup>11</sup> In 2019 there was a dramatic increase in the number of identified nothing-hit shooting incidents due to the implementation of ShotSpotter.

<sup>12</sup> Also, some criminological research has shown that it is reasonable to expect a reduction in property-hit and nothing-hit shootings, as well as other types of gun crime, if person-hit shootings are effectively addressed. This outcome is called a "diffusion of benefits."

<sup>13</sup> This analysis only takes into account charges made on a warrant, not juvenile petitions or grand jury indictments. Also, cases that have been expunged cannot be included.

In addition to the prosecution of known shooters, the CPD also deploys a program—Ceasefire Columbia—which identifies individuals who are assessed as being at high risk for committing acts of gun violence and sets out to intervene before a shooting occurs. The Ceasefire Columbia coordinator works with the SC Department of Probation, Parole, and Pardon Services (PPP) to identify people currently under PPP supervision who are at high risk of committing future violent acts. Once a suitable group of offenders is identified, a notification meeting is conducted. At the notification meeting, the selected offenders are made aware that they are under special scrutiny vis-à-vis local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies regarding any acts of gun violence or related crimes. The offenders are also put in direct contact with community and government-based service providers. These providers help offenders to overcome any number of problems they may be facing in their personal lives, and which may be contributing to the possibility that they may engage in future acts of gun violence.

After the notification meeting, the Ceasefire Coordinator keeps track of any arrests of Ceasefire offenders in order to be sure that CPD and its law enforcement partners are always prepared to take appropriate action against those who re-offend. The Ceasefire Coordinator also stays in regular contact with the selected offenders. This provides offenders with assistance in the event that problems arise that could be resolved by CPD's service provider partners. In other words, the Ceasefire Coordinator is a first point of contact and is able to assess what kind of external assistance is needed. The Ceasefire Coordinator also remains in regular contact with the service providers to better facilitate the flow of services to the selected offenders when possible.

As such, Ceasefire Columbia is a highly focused deterrent. It aims to dissuade high risk offenders from committing future acts of gun violence by raising their awareness of the consequences of such actions, while simultaneously attempting to address the problems these individuals may well be facing, and which may well be causal in future gun violence. A great deal of criminological research has been undertaken on focused deterrence strategies and the consensus is that they have among “the strongest and most consistent anti-violence effects” of any strategy used to reduce criminal violence.<sup>14</sup>

## Place-Based Strategies: Going Where the Guns Are

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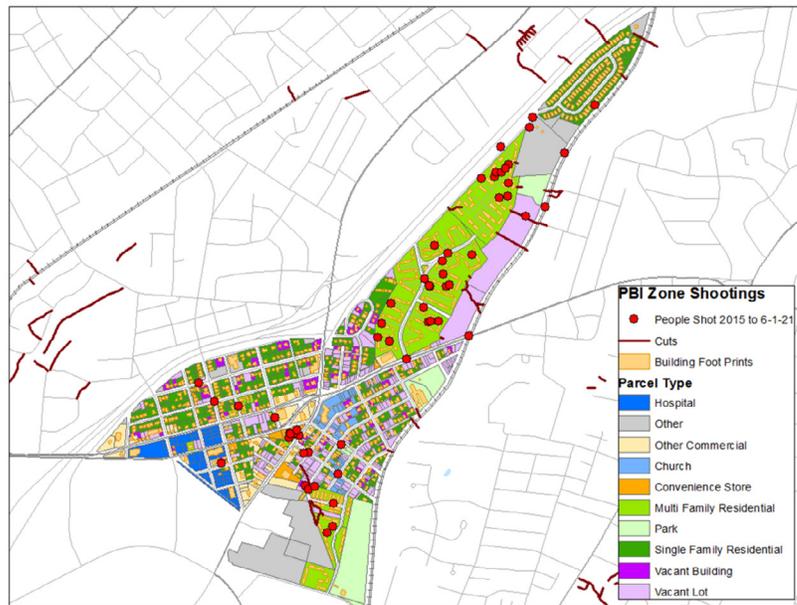
An analysis of the places associated with gun violence in Columbia has shown that a small number of places have a chronic and concentrated problem with repeated acts of gun violence. One of these places has been singled out for the implementation of a pilot place-based gun violence reduction program. This place-based intervention (PBI) zone includes the Booker Washington Heights neighborhood, part of the Colonial Heights neighborhood, and the Colony Forest and North Pointe Estates apartment complexes, along with the Bay Berry Mews community. The PBI zone has experienced more than 10% of the person-hit shootings that have occurred in Columbia since 2015; however, it is only about 0.5 square miles in total area.

Moving forward, we will disseminate ongoing analyses to officers who regularly work in the PBI zone in order to enhance enforcement efforts in this area. We know that violence within the PBI zone is itself very concentrated, both regarding its timing and its location. For the most part, it is restricted to certain blocks within the zone and mostly occurs at certain times during the week.

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<sup>14</sup> Abt, Thomas, *Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence – and a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets*, 2019, Basic Books, p.87 & 88.

This key information ensures that commanders and officers know exactly when and where to be in order to be able to disrupt or prevent gun violence. We have also disseminated information on the affected blocks to other units, such as Organized Crime and Narcotics, who may also be in a position to disrupt specific criminal activity, such as open-air drug markets, which our analysis indicates may well precipitate gun violence. The focused nature of this police intervention is also significant: It is data-driven and is a conscious reversal of the counterproductive blanket-policing formerly undertaken by law enforcement in areas with high rates of gun violence.



A look at the distribution of person-hit shootings in the PBI zone, in comparison to land use, indicates that features of the environment and social dynamics related to land use may also play an important role in the likelihood of person-hit shootings occurring in this area. For instance, shootings often occur near vacant lots or buildings, near desire paths or “cuts,” and at or near convenience stores. Additionally, these shootings tend not to happen on blocks with a high number of occupied single-family residences.

In order to address these issues, we intend to work with Columbia Code Enforcement and others to address the features of the environment that appear to make an area particularly conducive to the occurrence of person-hit shootings. On a related note, a non-profit organization, Serve & Connect, which operates in the PBI zone, is currently pursuing a Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program grant for the purpose of empowering the organization to reduce violent crime at specific locations. This initiative should include the PBI zone. The PBI project is in its early stages and we intend to increase our efforts related to this project over the coming months. If it is successful, these efforts could be extended to other areas which have already been identified as problematic with regard to person-hit shootings.

It is important to note that these strategies have been tried and tested elsewhere. Place-based violence reduction strategies, which blend targeted enforcement action with attention to the built environment and a commitment to mitigating crime generating features of the environment, have been successfully implemented in other jurisdictions. Cincinnati PD’s PIVOT project resulted in an 80% decrease in shootings in the treatment area and New Haven PD’s intervention led to a 41% reduction in violent crime, an outcome which continued 13 weeks after the intervention ended. Similar programs are now being launched in various other cities across the country, such as Tucson, AZ. <sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Information on New Haven PD’s place-focused violent crime reduction SPI project can be found at [www.strategiesforpolicinginnovation.com/sites/default/files/spotlights/New%20Haven%20SPI%20Spotlight%20Final%202016.pdf](http://www.strategiesforpolicinginnovation.com/sites/default/files/spotlights/New%20Haven%20SPI%20Spotlight%20Final%202016.pdf). Information on Cincinnati PD’s PIVOT project can be found here: <https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/police/community-involvement/pivot/>; For info on Tucson see: [https://tucson.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/tucson-police-use-new-evidence-based-methods-to-tackle-rising-homicide-rate/article\\_32be9e6a-b162-5bc4-8b83-2b6e5268173b.html](https://tucson.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/tucson-police-use-new-evidence-based-methods-to-tackle-rising-homicide-rate/article_32be9e6a-b162-5bc4-8b83-2b6e5268173b.html).

It is also helpful to be able to identify when and where shootings occur. In this regard, Columbia PD has been using ShotSpotter Technology (SST) since April 2019. SST has been deployed in areas where Columbia has experienced the most gun violence over the past few years. SST deploys a series of acoustic sensors that detect gunshots. This information is analyzed and sent out immediately to CPD officers via a smartphone app. This allows officers to respond to gunshots more quickly. Whereas the traditional method of relying on citizen reports via telephone was slow and may have missed as many as 75% of gunshots, SST detects nearly all gunshots in the deployment zone in an instant. Moreover, SST is able to relay much more precise information on the exact location of the gunshot, which is again an improvement on the traditional method of relying on citizen reports. This more complete, accurate, and timely information on gunshots allows for immediate deployment to the scene, faster medical attention to potential victims, increased probability of identifying suspects and witnesses, greatly enhanced ballistics evidence collection. Officers are now able to more frequently locate shell casings or firearms at crime scenes. To further bolster CPD's ballistics evidence collection efforts CPD has also recently deployed a ballistics detection K-9 unit, and thermal imaging devices.

This evidence is important on a local and national level, both for detention and eventual prosecution. The large amount of ballistics evidence collected by CPD is then entered into the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). This system logs microscopic images of ballistics evidence (i.e. discharged shell casings) and can compare all pieces of ballistics evidence against one another, identifying any items that were discharged from the same firearm. This allows CPD and its local, state, and federal law enforcement partners to identify guns used in multiple crimes. SST has also recently begun deploying ShotSpotter Connect in Columbia. This software system identifies areas where gunshots are likely to occur during a given 8-hour window based on SST analysis of several years of gunshot detection data in Columbia. By identifying areas at highest risk of gunfire, the system is able to direct officers (via PC or cellphone) to patrol specific areas for limited periods of time, thereby maximizing the crime-reduction benefits of an officer's presence. SST Connect also logs officer activity in these areas, maintaining a record of officer movement and action.

SST has also recently begun deploying ShotSpotter Connect in Columbia. This software system identifies areas where gunshots, as well as other violent and property crimes, are likely to occur during a given 8-hour window based on SST analysis of several years of gunshot detection data and crime reports in Columbia. By identifying areas at highest risk of gunfire, the system is able to direct officers (via PC or cellphone) to patrol specific areas for limited periods of time, thereby maximizing the crime-reduction benefits of an officer's presence. SST Connect also logs officer activity in these areas, maintaining a record of officer movement and action.

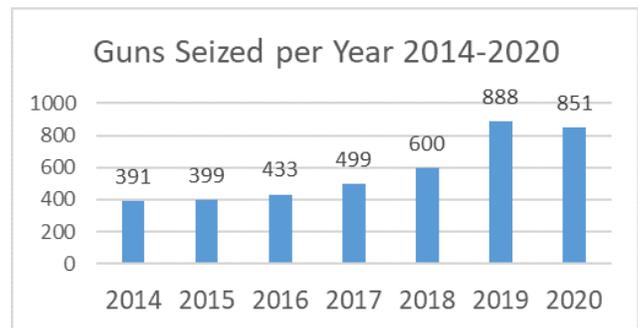
CPD will also be deploying 20 automated license plate readers (LPRs) at various locations as a part of a multi-agency initiative. These LPRs may be used in previously identified areas of chronic and concentrated gun violence to enhance enforcement activity in these areas. The deployment of these LPRs will be complemented by a series of 600 cameras positioned across the city that make use of the latest in surveillance camera technology. Lastly, Columbia PD will soon begin implementing efforts to further centralize intelligence gathering and dissemination. One facet of this effort will be the creation of a Real Time Crime Center (RTCC). The purpose of the RTCC, vis-à-vis gun violence, is to leverage technology to allow officers to more quickly respond to crimes and with better operational intelligence.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For more on the CIU and RTCC concept as suggested for CPD, see Insp. Sellers' briefing note on the topic dated March 4, 2021. The information in this paragraph was drawn entirely from the briefing note.

## Behavior Disrupting Strategies: Getting Guns Off the Streets

Put plainly, you need a gun to shoot someone. It follows, then, that the CPD's ongoing focus on preventing individuals from illegally carrying guns can have a significant impact on gun violence. Annual gun seizures by the CPD have greatly increased over the past few years: Over 800 guns were seized both in 2019 and 2020, which is more than double the number of guns seized in 2014 or 2015, and significantly more than were seized between 2016 and 2018.



The prosecution of these crimes is an important element when considering how to affect the behavior of bad actors. The Crime Gun Intelligence Unit (CGIU) review all arrests for illegal gun possession in the city of Columbia and identify cases that are eligible for federal prosecution. CGIU personnel then work with the CPD's federal partners at the ATF and the US Attorney's Office to bring charges when appropriate. To this end, the CPD has recently hired a Special Assistant United States Attorney (SAUSA) to support this effort. The SAUSA, a city attorney, works with the United States Attorney's Office and aids in the prosecution of cases related to gun violence. CGIU personnel also work with the State Solicitors' Offices to ensure that prosecutors at the state level are aware of important cases and have the tools they need to appropriately prosecute gun possession cases.

Identifying and pursuing bad actors is also part of the strategy of disruption. Accordingly, the CGIU also collates intelligence to produce the Violent Offenders List (VOL), which draws on Tampa PD's Violent Impact Player (VIP) program, which reduced violent crime in Tampa by 7.9% according to a study conducted in 2017.<sup>17</sup> The CPD's VOL includes people who have been identified as involved in violent crime or gun crime in Columbia. Individuals are assigned a numerical score based on several factors, including previous firearm arrests, previous violent crime arrests, gang affiliation, past gun crime victimization, involvement in NIBIN linked incidents, and probation status. The highest scoring offenders are placed on the VOL. The VOL is then disseminated throughout CPD and shared with local, state, and federal law enforcement partners. The CGIU works with other law enforcement agencies as well as federal and state prosecutors to support cases involving offenders identified on the VOL.

In view of the fact that a certain percentage of person-hit shooting cases are gang related, CGIU personnel also support the Midland's Gang Fugitive Taskforce (MGFTF) as needed. Comprised of officers from several local law enforcement agencies, the MGFTF addresses gang-related crime in the Midlands of South Carolina.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/acting-attorney-general-matthew-g-whitaker-recognizes-outstanding-contributions-project-safe>

While illegal gun carrying is intrinsic to gun violence, there are other closely-related behaviors that precipitate gun violence, which have been mentioned above. These include armed robberies, domestic disputes, and illegal drug sales, among others. Additional data collection and analysis is needed to better understand the ways in which these behaviors precipitate gun violence in Columbia. This will allow the CPD to formulate additional strategies to further disrupt the problematic behaviors that lead to gun violence.<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusion

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Clearly, gun violence in Columbia is a serious problem, and it is not one that will improve without an effective response by the City of Columbia and its partners. Drawing on data-driven analyses and examples of successful departments around the nation, the Columbia Police Department has implemented a variety of evidence-based strategies designed to reduce gun violence; perhaps more significantly, the CPD continues to refine and expand upon those strategies in response to what is an ever-growing problem. By focusing narrowly on the people, places, and behaviors most closely associated with or affected by gun violence, the CPD is combining enforcement and intervention to proactively reduce gun violence. This focused, balanced approach to the people places and behaviors associated with gun violence has been shown to be the most effective way to reduce the problem.<sup>19</sup> Importantly, it also means the CPD is able to operate in manner that does not make our most vulnerable communities feel simultaneously over-policed and under-protected, as could well be the case with less focused, responses to gun violence. Manifestly, our policing must be both fair and effective to maintain the trust of the communities we serve and to achieve this, we intend to pursue a series of public-private partnerships that will underscore our ongoing commitment to fair, impartial, and constitutionally sound policing as we work to take guns off the streets for the benefit of all.

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<sup>18</sup> On a related note, we do not understand the precise relationship between illegal gun carrying and gun violence in Columbia. For example, we do not know what percentage of identified shooters were unlawfully possessing or carrying their firearm at the time that they committed a shooting. It seems reasonable to assume that most were unlawfully carrying, but at this time we have not had the chance to verify this assumption.

<sup>19</sup> For a great explanation of the evidence for this see Thomas Abt's book *Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence – and a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets*



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