

Justice Department grant to fund community-based crime reduction efforts in Highland neighborhood

THURSDAY, APRIL 29

\$1 million grant awarded to build capacity for Bethlehem Center, create better information sharing between community and police



A \$1 million grant awarded by the Department of Justice late last year will soon begin funding new efforts aimed at reducing crime in Spartanburg's Highland neighborhood.

Awarded as part of the Justice Department's Community-Based Crime Reduction Program, the Highland Byrnes Criminal Justice Institute Grant will be used to build capacity for longtime Highland community organization, The Bethlehem Center, enabling them to coordinate development and community-based crime reduction activities in the neighborhood. Using the funding, the City and its partners will also create a transparent process to streamline information sharing with the city police, residents, and stakeholders with an aim of reducing violent crime in the Highland Neighborhood, specifically gang and gun offenses.

Strategies to reduce crime in the neighborhood will focus around identifying the specific places and mechanisms that continue to encourage violent crime and gun-related activity, as well as the barriers that need to be overcome to begin to address these issues. Officials believe that utilizing a collaborative approach to crime reduction will strengthen mutual trust between community members, police officers, and City officials.

City Police Chief Alonzo Thompson said he's confident that the approach funded by the Justice Department grant will be successful in reducing both crime and the fear of crime in Highland, adding "but more importantly, it will enhance quality-of-life for the residents of and visitors to this proud, historic neighborhood. The collaborative effort of our community partners which led to obtaining the award will also lead to successful outcomes."

The grant funding comes at a time when energy and momentum around Highland's revitalization are at an all-time high, with City Council having [approved the Highland Transformation Plan late last year](#) and with a [replacement for Norris Ridge Apartments](#) — one of the city's highest concentrations of substandard housing and crime — currently under construction. City and community leaders believe that this new violent crime reduction effort will assist in the longterm goals laid out in that transformation plan of creating more safe and affordable housing and developing new economic opportunities for Highland residents.