State of Gangs

Task force reviews gang- related crimes.

**By Vernon Miles**

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The Gang Prevention Task Force is a who’s who of legal and educational re- sources in Alexandria, several branches coming together to work towards eliminating gangs from the city. At its first meeting of 2018

on Jan. 17, the group reviewed the state of gangs in 2017.

Steve Carr, a detective with the Alexandria Police Department, said the city is still working with a new tracking system and is putting together its 2017 data. There were 10 gang-related crimes, meaning crimes committed by people who are affiliated with gangs, but the data on how many crimes were gang motivated, meaning actions taken for the furtherance of the gang, is still being compiled.

Carr said one of the biggest challenges facing the police department’s anti-gang work is back- lash from the national level rhetoric on immigration. “Whenever we show up in Arlandria, people worry we’re there to enforce immigration law,” said Carr. “Having difficulty building up that trust. We’re a local police department looking for people breaking local law.”

Sean Sherlock, Assistant Common- wealth Attorney, said there was one gang-motivated prosecution ongoing currently. Because those involved are juveniles, the names are withheld. It was a mob assault on another juvenile that emerged out of a conflict in T.C. Williams High School. Sherlock says the issue wasn’t originally gang motivated, but it became gang associated and evolved into an assault. Sherlock said the ring- leader was a person detectives approached about a month before the as- sault happened. He hadn’t committed any crimes, but was a self-avowed MS- 13 gang member that had been sent to Alexandria from El Salvador to work with the gang. Sherlock said getting testimony from victims has been difficult, one is a juvenile and is scared, but doesn’t want to see this happening in his community.

The next meeting will be held on May 17 in the Sister Cities Conference Room in City Hall.

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