

Improving Night-time Safety and Vibrancy in Norfolk, Virginia

A Case Study of the Gold Bar Norfolk Initiative

April 2024



SafeNight

Downtown
Norfolk 
IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

THE CITY OF
NORFOLK

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GOLD BAR NORFOLK

RAISING THE BAR FOR NORFOLK NIGHTLIFE

Acknowledgments

Safe Night and the Downtown Norfolk Council (DNC) sincerely thank Norfolk City Manager Pat Roberts and Retired Chief Mike Goldsmith for their early support of Gold Bar Norfolk. The City of Norfolk and its businesses are benefactors of strong social commitments by the DNC to introduce and implement Safe Night's innovative and proven nightlife model.



Introduction

In May 2022, the Downtown Norfolk Council (DNC) and the City of Norfolk recruited Safe Night to assess their Downtown area, provide recommendations, and implement a multi-component model to improve nightlife safety, *A Safe Night Out*. DNC selected the Safe Night firm based on their years of experience and innovation in managing nightlife and implementing the first voluntary bar accreditation models with the Arlington Restaurant Initiative (ARI) in Arlington, Virginia, and the Good Neighbor Initiative in Dallas, Texas.

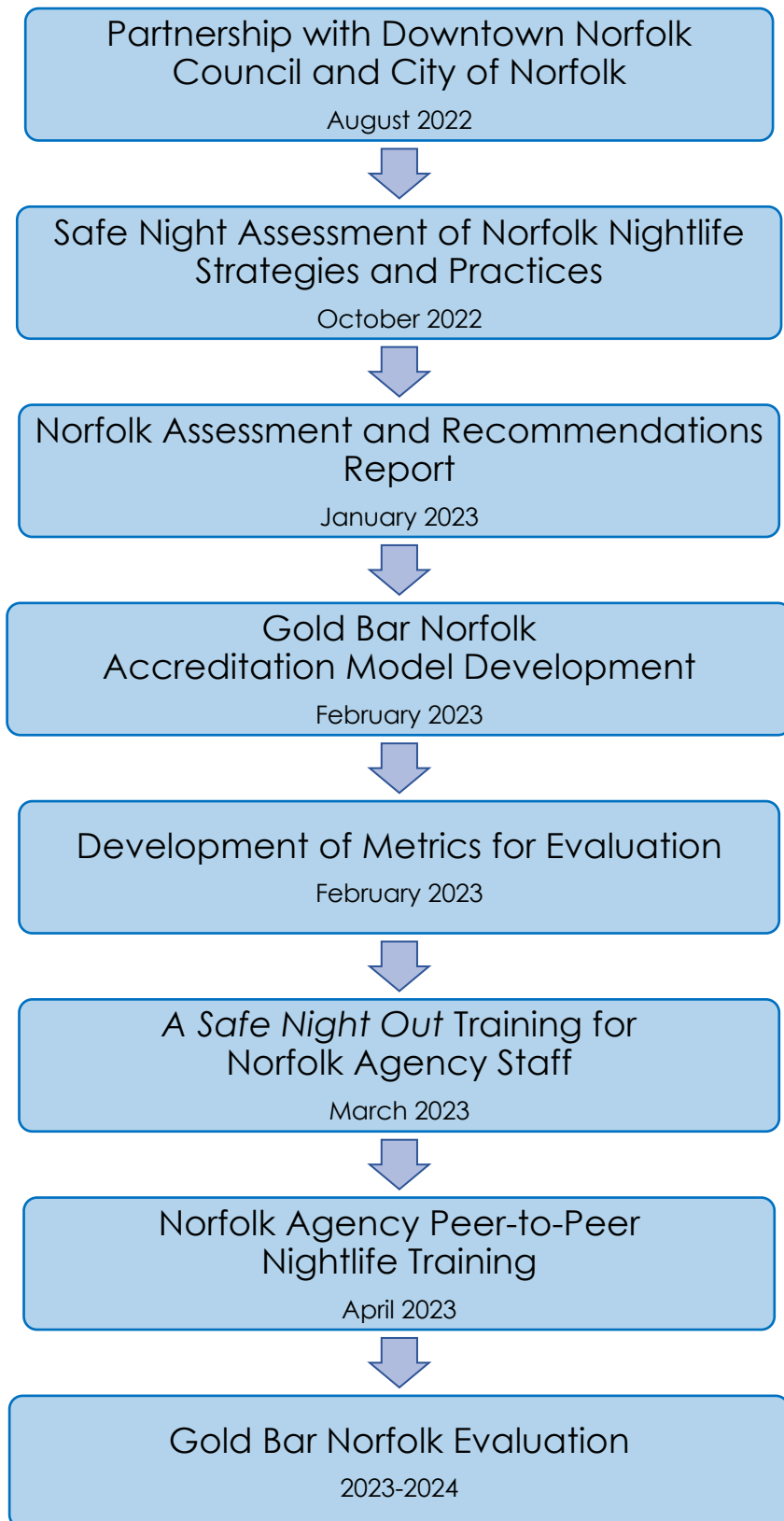
The DNC's mission is to “[serve] as the leading advocate for Downtown Norfolk and [ensure] Downtown's position as the thriving and essential cultural, commercial, and residential hub of Hampton Roads” (DNC, 2022).

Safe Night began providing official technical assistance and consultation to the Downtown Norfolk Council and the City of Norfolk in the fall of 2022. Safe Night's first recommendation was to create a working group of Norfolk City department leaders who would commit to the project and collaborate with the Downtown Norfolk Council. Safe Night staff traveled to Norfolk to conduct a multi-day assessment of nightlife operations in several areas of the city and in January 2023, released the [City of Norfolk Nightlife Assessment and Recommendations Report](#) to the DNC and the City of Norfolk.

During the spring of 2023, Safe Night collaborated with the DNC to develop Gold Bar Norfolk, a voluntary bar and restaurant accreditation program. In March 2023, Safe Night delivered a three-day nightlife management training to Norfolk municipal stakeholders, including the Proactive Alliance relationship-based approach and guidance on building a multidisciplinary nightlife team. Municipal agency training focused on prioritizing prevention over enforcement, collaborative problem-solving, and building individual relationships with the stakeholders. On the third day of training, Safe Night invited all stakeholders, including bar and restaurant owners and community-based organizations, to introduce the Gold Bar Norfolk accreditation.

This case study will discuss DNC's Gold Bar Norfolk voluntary accreditation program and highlight the work still needed to successfully implement this innovative and novel nightlife management model.

A Safe Night Out - Norfolk Nightlife Management Model Timeline 2022 – 2023



Norfolk Nightlife Assessment & Recommendations

The following is a condensed summary of the findings of Safe Night's City of Norfolk Nightlife Assessment and Recommendations Report, which was released in January 2023.

Downtown Norfolk is a bustling nightlife area, specifically in the Granby Street corridor, with restaurants, clubs, and entertainment venues that draw thousands to the downtown area annually. The most prominent concerns stakeholders reported were:

- **Crime, Disorder, & Safety**

Business owners are concerned about alcohol-related violence and shootings.

- **Public Safety Operations**

The Norfolk Police Department and Norfolk Fire Marshal's Office do not have defined engagement and responsibilities specifically to manage nightlife beyond traditional police and enforcement duties.

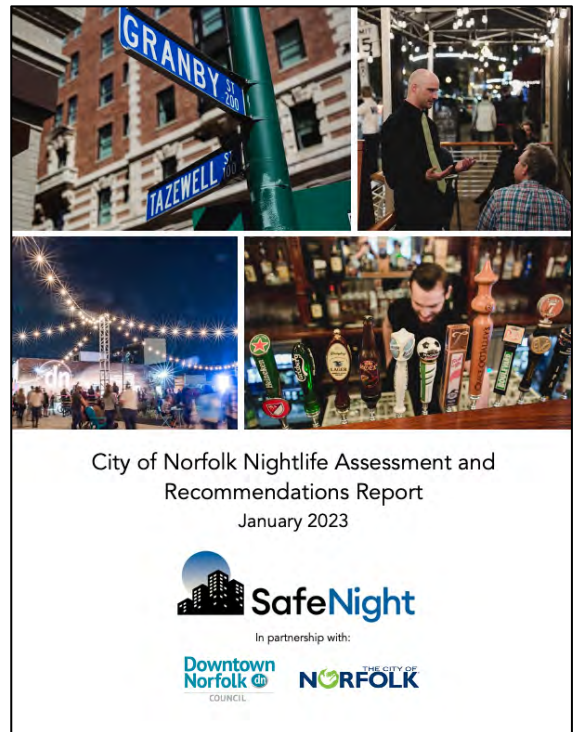
- **Communication**

Outside of enforcement action, communication between city agencies and businesses was reported to be largely absent.

When asked what could improve their experience, business owners and staff identified several suggestions, including:

- A dedicated restaurant liaison
- In-depth training, resources, and tools
- Support from the Department of Economic Development
- A dedicated nightlife team
- Improved relationship with City of Norfolk agencies

Many owners also reported a desire to have a voice with the Norfolk City Council and the Norfolk City Manager's Office. Restaurant owners expressed concern that their interests are not valued or equal to those of residents and the Downtown Civic League.



Conditional Use Permit (CUP)

The CUP is an important tool in Norfolk's nightlife management. It is a necessary set of regulations and an instrument of enforcement. Businesses universally indicated a desire to better understand and navigate the CUP standards and processes, specifically asking for more education, support, and guidance from the City of Norfolk. They also expressed a desire for a voice in the CUP process and confirmation that procedures related to the CUP are transparent and fair.

Restaurant and Club Owners

The following compilation directly represents the themes and concerns of restaurant and club owners. The businesses expressed several concerns and perceptions that fall into three main areas.

1. "The CUP process is hard to understand."
2. "Establishments do not receive enough support from municipal agencies."
3. "The CUP process is unfair."



Municipal and Community Agencies

Members of municipal and community agencies who work directly with downtown businesses also gave helpful feedback, lending a more well-rounded perspective of the CUP process. Summary of city staff impressions:

- The CUP is cumbersome and hard to figure out.
- Calls for service are used against establishments regarding the CUP.
- There is no liaison working with stakeholders and no system for the restaurants and community to collaborate.
- Businesses push back on the city because of the high level of enforcement.

Additional Downtown Observations

Many restaurant owners, managers, and staff expressed concern for their personal safety and their property. Safe Night also assessed the following issues occurring in the downtown area:

- Crime occurring in parking garages, parking lots, and alleys
- Increase in people experiencing homelessness
- Lack of transportation options



Safe Night Recommendations

City of Norfolk

1. Enhance the Business Compliance Unit

The City of Norfolk should create a full-time nightlife and entertainment team consisting of agency liaisons from Norfolk Police, Norfolk Fire-Rescue, Norfolk Code Enforcement, Virginia Department of Health, and the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority.

During Safe Night's site visits and interviews in September 2022, the following stakeholders expressed support for a relationship-based approach:

- City Manager's Office
- Norfolk Police Department
- Norfolk Sheriff's Office
- Norfolk Fire and Rescue Department
- Norfolk Code Enforcement
- Virginia Department of Health
- Businesses owners

2. Adopt a Relationship-Based Approach

The City of Norfolk staff would benefit from the Proactive Alliance relationship-based approach training to establish trust with business owners and collaboratively reach mutually beneficial outcomes.

3. Establish a Unified Nightlife Strategy

A unified nightlife strategy will create accountability for City agencies and businesses. In addition, clearly defined roles and inter-agency collaboration for City staff will help guide businesses toward prevention and collaborative problem solving. A successful unified strategy is prevention-based with a problem-orientated approach, inter-agency collaboration, agency deployment coordination, and nightlife training for Norfolk police officers.

4. Standardize the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) Process

Safe Night strongly recommended that the nightlife team create an explicit, standardized process to implement and enforce the CUP based on the tenets of procedural justice.

5. Adopt Risk Terrain Modeling (RTM)

RTM is a place-based analysis model that can provide accurate forecasts of the highest-risk locations and enables city agencies to deploy resources efficiently to disrupt the factors contributing to complex problems.

6. Broaden Public-Private Partnerships

Establish a public-private partnership that allows municipal agencies and establishments to work together to identify and exclude the most harmful offenders from businesses.

Downtown Norfolk Council

1. **Collaborate with City and State Agencies**

Initiate collaboration with City and state agencies to evaluate and continue to develop accreditation standards and effective practices to meet Norfolk's specific needs.

2. **Use Data for Evaluation**

Facilitate data-sharing with City and state agencies to identify venues struggling to maintain safety standards and participate in collaborative problem-solving.

3. **Expand Partnerships and Promote Gold Bar Norfolk**

Collaborate closely with the City of Norfolk to promote Gold Bar Norfolk and help businesses meet safety standards.



Gold Bar Norfolk

Gold Bar Norfolk is a multi-faceted voluntary accreditation program that prioritizes safety at establishments that serve alcohol. Voluntary accreditation programs such as Best Bar None in the U.K. and Canada, the Arlington Restaurant Initiative, and the Good Neighbor Initiative are successful because they prioritize staff and patron safety as the first and most crucial step to building safe and vibrant nightlife areas.



“Businesses are all part of our community, and all have to play a role in making the community safe. If everybody is doing what they should be, everybody can get lifted up, and we can have a much better place.”

- **Mary Miller, President & CEO, Downtown Norfolk Council**

Standardized bar and restaurant accreditation models improve employment policies and practices that help keep staff and patrons safe. With its focus on safety and well-being, the GBN voluntary accreditation program addresses the foundational concern of Norfolk’s nightlife area: providing a safer nightlife experience for everyone.

In early April 2023, Gavin Stone of The Virginian-Pilot reported, “The Downtown Norfolk Council on Thursday unveiled Gold Bar, the name for its voluntary accreditation model that will serve as a roadmap for businesses to establish best practices for managing nightlife and remain in compliance with government regulations. The announcement was made at the conclusion of a three-day training for city regulators and law enforcement on Proactive Alliance, a relationship-based approach to policing and code enforcement put together by Safe Night LLC” (Stone, 2023).

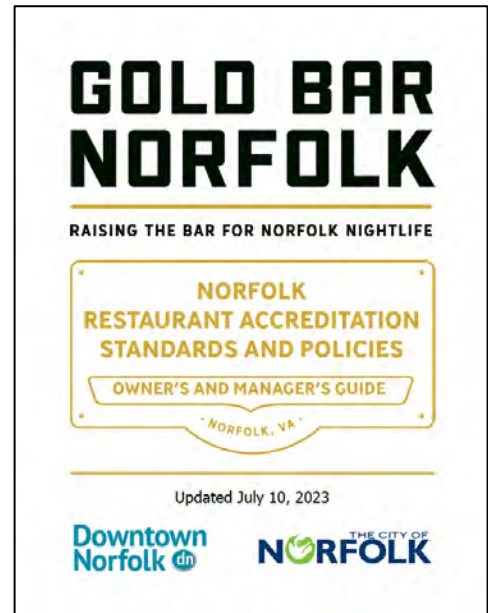
Quotes from The Virginian-Pilot article (4/24/23):

- “Assistant City Manager Pat Roberts said he hopes Safe Night’s model will help businesses be successful, build new relationships with other business owners, and ultimately ‘boost the vibrancy’ of the city.”
- “We’re very excited about the implementation of this program, Roberts said. But we’re more so excited about the interest that we’ve received from business owners and from throughout the city, particularly folks downtown but also from people around the city who’ve said, ‘When can we try this in our neighborhood or our corridor?’”

The voluntary Gold Bar Norfolk program is meant to help businesses, organizations, and establishments in the night-time economy. Participation in the program requires businesses to meet higher operational standards, implement employee policies, and participate in training to improve safety and reduce liability.

Night-time operators in Norfolk achieve the Gold Bar Norfolk accreditation by writing employee policies and procedures that meet the program standards in the following sections:

- **Public Safety** – Reduction of risk related to crime or injury.
- **Fire Codes** – Enhances compliance with fire codes, including occupancy, means of egress, fire protection systems, emergency lighting, and accessibility.
- **Public Health Codes** – Enhances compliance with safe food handling and equipment codes.
- **Zoning and Building Codes** - Compliance with the City of Norfolk ordinances for outdoor seating, noise/music levels, and maintaining clearance for pedestrians.
- **Community Partnerships** - Practices that show businesses are considerate and invested in being good neighbors.



GBN Spotlight – President & CEO Mary Miller, LPM, Downtown Norfolk Council



Mary is an experienced executive with a long history of working in the urban place management industry. She has served as the president and chief executive officer for almost ten years at the Downtown Norfolk Council (DNC). Her strong business development leadership skills leading the DNC have helped the City of Norfolk thrive economically and culturally.

Mary's leadership and willingness to consider innovative concepts to improve safety downtown led to the City of Norfolk and the DNC's adoption of the Gold Bar Norfolk program.

Gold Bar Norfolk Recognition

The Gold Bar Norfolk voluntary accreditation hospitality program has garnered much attention from the community and the local media. In a media story from 13 News Now, Retired Chief Goldsmith calls *A Safe Night Out* "An innovative solution in the fight against crime."

Retired Chief Goldsmith goes on to say, "Safe Night will teach businesses and city agencies on ways to prevent violence." (13 News Now, 2022)

In an interview with Wavy 10 News, Mary Miller, President & CEO of the Downtown Norfolk Council, said, "We really believe this program can get us back on track to being a very safe downtown."

Safe Night: New program aims to improve safety in Downtown Norfolk



Interim police chief Michael Goldsmith said his department is "investing heavily" with a company called Safe Night.

(13 News Now, 2022)

Miller also said, “While the DNC focuses on enhancing business and culture in the downtown district, the city and Virginia Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) board oversee most of the rules bars and restaurants are held to. Safe Night focuses on



(Wavy 10, 2022)

improving relationships between business owners, state agencies, and the city government. Miller said under an accreditation program, bars, and restaurants will help hold each other to standards that everyone can help come up with.”

“[Businesses] will get a seal,” Miller said. “There will be some sort of branding that

will be on the establishment so if you are going out at night with your friends, you’ll know ‘oh, this is a business that went through this accreditation model. This is a business I can feel safe going into with my friends’.” (Wavy 10, 2022)



A Safe Night Out

Safe Night provides comprehensive strategies to municipal agencies, business owners, trade associations, business improvement districts, and community groups to build mutually beneficial relationships using an evidence-based, multi-component approach called *A Safe Night Out*. This model provides a path to involve all stakeholders when implementing strategies to reduce alcohol-related harm and improve safety and economic viability.

In March 2023, Safe Night staff, including Molly C. Mastoras, MA, LPC, and Master Police Officer Dimitrios Mastoras (Ret.), traveled to Norfolk to teach *A Safe Night Out* to staff from the following agencies and organizations:

- Downtown Norfolk Council
- Norfolk City Attorney's Office
- Norfolk Police Department
- Norfolk Fire and Rescue Department
- Norfolk Code Enforcement
- Norfolk Zoning Office
- Virginia Department of Health
- Norfolk restaurant, bar, and club owners



MPO Dimitrios Mastoras (Ret.) teaching *A Safe Night Out*

Safe Night's nightlife management model incorporates multi-faceted training, which includes evaluating the need for nightlife management, collecting data and analysis, and developing higher standards of operation for businesses that serve alcohol. The foundation of Safe Night's model is the Proactive Alliance (PA) relationship-based approach. PA uses methods adapted from evidence-based counseling psychology concepts, teaching municipal staff how to build relationships with business owners while breaking down barriers to collaborative problem-solving (Gill & Mastoras, M., 2022).

“As City staff takes the time to talk with community stakeholders and business owners, they are building important individual relationships. These relationships are the foundation of collaborative problem-solving, increased safety, and community vibrancy.”

- Molly C. Mastoras, MA, LPC creator of Proactive Alliance

A *Safe Night Out* nightlife management training introduced Norfolk city staff to several concepts that will strengthen their collective problem-solving and help them develop relationships with business owners and staff. Safe Night's blueprint allows City staff to address several other complex issues facing the city, including downtown crime, management of people experiencing homelessness, and traffic safety.



A *Safe Night Out* nightlife management covered the following topics:

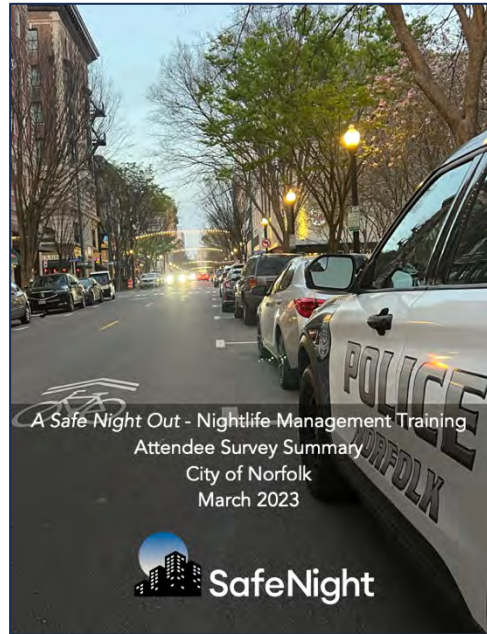
- Using data to increase efficiency
- Establishing and maintaining relationships with stakeholders
- Building a multi-agency nightlife team
- Cultivating a unified nightlife strategy
- Supporting a restaurant/bar accreditation program
- Developing training and policies for restaurant/bar staff
- Enhancing public safety deployment and operations
- Considering nightlife establishment environmental factors using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)



Safe Night's Molly C. Mastoras is interviewed by local media

City staff was asked to evaluate the training they received from Safe Night. The survey results from *A Safe Night Out* training showed that city agency staff strongly connected with Safe Night's concepts for building relationships to improve collaborative problem-solving. Students reported the following in the survey:

- Proactive Alliance's relationship-based approach has changed the way they view themselves and the community
- City staff agrees that empathy helps them connect with the community while learning to become problem-solvers
- City staff feel they will be able to apply the knowledge learned and have more resources to work with when they are in the field
- City staff reported that meeting and training with Norfolk's business owners and managers was very helpful



Quotes from City staff that attended *A Safe Night Out* training:

“The demonstration that it works. The proof is in results.”

“Discussion of the structure of accreditation and team interaction because it directly addresses a need going forward.”

“Learning how to take a different approach to help the restaurants succeed.”

“Understanding the collaboration efforts”

“The application was very well written. Brought more ideas for a safer environment with the business and patrons if they follow the application.”

“Hearing different ideas and how others handled conflict.”

“Hearing perspective from other city agencies”

Gold Bar Norfolk is Released

In the summer and fall of 2023, Safe Night's Samantha McNamara, in partnership with the Downtown Norfolk Council, began meeting with business owners. Regarding this outreach effort, Ms. McNamara said, "We're here to build a relationship, say we're here to help you, let's get your accreditation started."

The Downtown Norfolk Council continues to build the foundation of work with the city even as businesses have been closing in the downtown area due to the revocation of conditional use permits by the Norfolk City Council.



Safe Night's Samantha McNamara is interviewed by local media

Despite the recent downturn, Mary Miller is optimistic and determined to support businesses that want to achieve the Gold Bar Norfolk accreditation. Ms. Miller's goal is to expand the scope of the Gold Bar Norfolk, allowing any business to take advantage of the accreditation program, including art galleries, theaters, special events, sports venues, and the airport.

Business Compliance Team - Downtown Norfolk Council Meeting

In 2024, DNC aims to initiate a monthly meeting with Norfolk Police, Norfolk Fire-Rescue, Code Enforcement, City Attorney's Office, Virginia Department of Health, and Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Commission to discuss how the city agencies can best help businesses succeed while achieving compliance with the law.



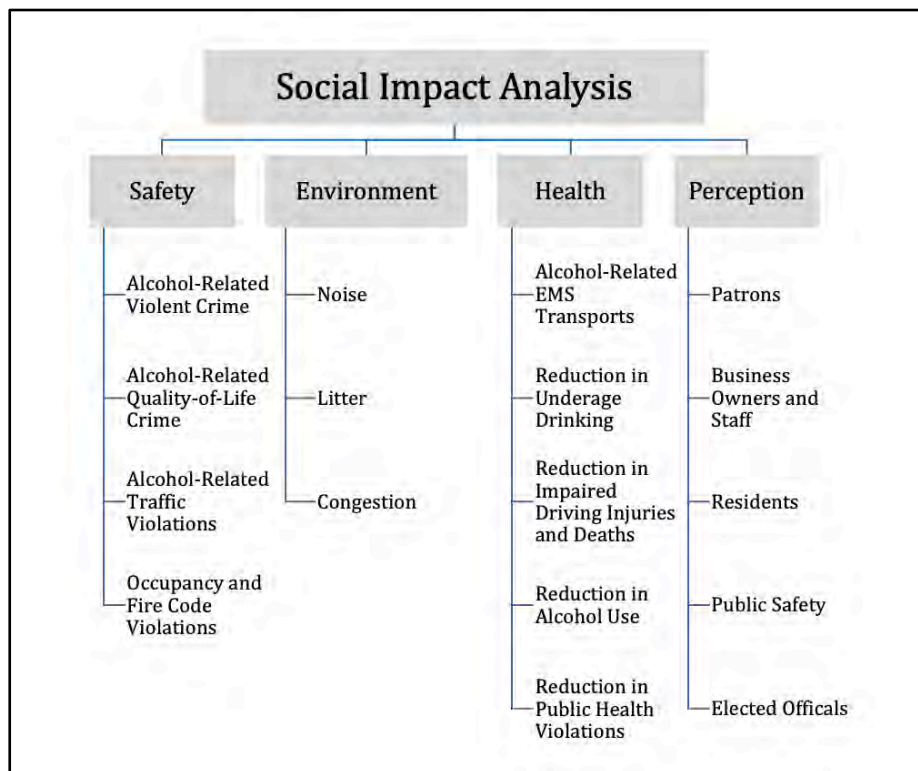
GBN Spotlight – Chief Mike Goldsmith (Ret.), City of Norfolk Police Department



“Norfolk’s relationship with Safe Night has been very beneficial to our community. Their nightlife management model, *A Safe Night Out*, allowed us to approach our nighttime entertainment establishments in a way that relied more on relationship-building than strict enforcement. Using their Proactive Alliance relationship-based approach, the city and the establishments are now seeking solutions that allow the businesses to thrive and keep our guests and residents safe. The result is an enjoyable and safe environment for all, reducing the need for public safety services and allowing the city to use resources more efficiently.”

GBN Program Evaluation

Accurate measurement of the GBN program’s impact on public safety and economic vibrancy requires the City of Norfolk agencies and Downtown Norfolk Council to collect data.



For a more in-depth look at the data, please see Appendix A

Moving Forward

Thanks to the DNC's recruitment of Safe Night, the City of Norfolk now has a blueprint and the tools to manage complex issues related to nightlife. The DNC is excited to share the Gold Bar Norfolk initiative with businesses across the city. The benefits of the Gold Bar Norfolk program can help businesses operate at a higher level of safety and community partnership.

Other communities have used Safe Night's strategies to reduce complex issues such as downtown crime and homelessness. For example, the Proactive Alliance relationship-based approach provided the foundation for the Arlington Homeless Outreach Coalition in Arlington, VA, and in Wichita, KS, Proactive Alliance strengthened the engagement strategies and multidisciplinary collaboration for Project HOPE and the Wichita Police Homeless Outreach Team.

Complex issues require creating a collaborative multidisciplinary team, using data-informed strategies, and cultivating individual relationships with hard-to-reach stakeholders.



Conclusion

Reducing crime in nightlife areas requires investment from all essential stakeholders, including city agencies, businesses, and the community. This is no small task and requires long-term commitments to relationship building, data gathering and analysis, and inter-agency planning. Shifting from piecemeal, enforcement-only reactions to a relationship-based, prevention-focused, collaborative approach takes time and sustained effort from agency leaders.

Gold Bar Norfolk is a new standard for the Hampton Roads region for improving safety, building relationships, and encouraging collaboration among stakeholders in the night-time economy. After providing a solid foundation for change, Safe Night looks forward to supporting Norfolk's continued growth and vibrancy in the night-time economy.

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About the Authors

Molly C. Mastoras, MA, LPC

Co-Founder, President

Molly Mastoras is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in Virginia and Connecticut. She has worked as an assistant program director and probation counselor for the Fairfax County Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court and as a social worker for the Fairfax County Office for Women and Arlington County Child Protective Services (CPS). Molly has worked extensively with survivors of sexual assault throughout her career, leading to the creation of Safe Night Active Bystander, a sexual assault prevention and intervention training program.



She developed the Proactive Alliance relationship-based approach, which teaches police and enforcement agencies to develop relationships to enhance problem-solving with the community using adapted counseling therapy concepts. She co-authored several articles, including *Proactive Alliance* in IACP Police Chief Magazine and *Productive and Proactive* in Sheriff & Deputy Magazine and *Proactive Alliance: Combining Policing and Counseling Psychology* in the Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being with Dr. Charlotte Gill.

Molly has presented the Proactive Alliance concept at the American Society of Evidenced-Based Policing (ASEBP) conference, the Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) Conference, and the International Conference on Law Enforcement & Public Health (LEPH). Molly also serves on the Board of Directors for the Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP).

Master Police Officer Dimitrios Mastoras (Ret.)

Co-Founder, Executive Vice President

Dimitrios (Jim) Mastoras served as a Master Police Officer in Arlington County, Virginia, for almost twenty-four years. As Arlington's first nightlife liaison, he used the relationship-based policing techniques of Proactive Alliance to establish trustful relationships with bar and restaurant owners, providing the foundation to develop and implement strategies aimed at reducing alcohol-related violence. Using this approach, Jim developed the first restaurant accreditation program in the U.S. to focus on best practices and law compliance for bars and restaurants while also increasing safety and economic viability.



Jim authored a toolkit published by the DOJ COPS Office in 2019 titled, *The Arlington Restaurant Initiative - A Nightlife Strategy to Improve Safety and Economic Viability*, and an article titled, *Solving Complex Crime Requires Community Relationships* in Policing Insight. Additionally, he co-authored an article titled, *Traffic Safety Initiatives: SoberRide-Enhancing Enforcement Efforts Since 1982* in IACP Police Chief Magazine. His work for Arlington County has been recognized by the Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP) for saving lives and preventing injuries caused by drunk driving in the Washington, DC, Metro area.

About Safe Night LLC



relationship-based policing approach, visit Safe-Night.com.

Safe Night LLC, established in January 2018, is a consulting firm that combines the expertise of a licensed professional counselor and a career law enforcement officer to provide solutions to increase safety and economic viability for communities. Safe Night trains law enforcement agencies, including local and state enforcement agencies, police, fire marshals, code enforcement, and public health inspectors. Safe Night has years of experience in law enforcement, public policy, and social services. For more information about Safe Night and the Proactive Alliance

About the Downtown Norfolk Council

The Downtown Norfolk Council is an award-winning urban place management organization (UPMO) comprised of more than 300 businesses and individual members dedicated to promoting and enhancing business, cultural, retail, and residential initiatives in Downtown Norfolk.



Appendix A

Social Impact Analysis Data

Norfolk Police

- Violent Crime
 - Rape
 - Sexual assault
 - Aggravated assault and battery
 - Assault and battery on law enforcement
 - Assault and battery
 - Disorderly conduct
- Quality-of-Life Crime
 - Drunk in public
 - Underage possession of alcohol
 - Urinating in public
 - Possession of a fake ID
 - Destruction of property
 - Noise complaints
 - Trash/Litter
 - Pedestrian violations
- Traffic Violations
 - Driving under the influence
 - Reckless Driving
 - Hit and Run

Norfolk Fire-Rescue

- Emergency medical services calls
- Fire marshal inspections for occupancy and public safety issues
- Over-occupancy and fire code violations
- Required time needed to re-inspect violations

Public Health

- SBIRT: Screening, Brief Intervention & Referral to Treatment
- Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT-C) screening
- Binge-drinking
- Number of injuries and fatalities related to crashes involving drinking and substance abuse

Code Enforcement

- Hours spent per business to investigate violations
- Hours per violation
- Hours per inspection
- Hours per re-inspection

City Attorney's Office

- Case hours
- Case hours for court
- Data collection

Planning and Zoning

- Hours spent per business to prepare permits
- Hours per violation
- Hours per inspection
- Hours per re-inspection

Virginia ABC

- Hours per officer or per shift
- Overtime hours for administrative hearings
- Hours per arrest or out of service
- Hours per violation
- Hours per inspection
- Required time needed to re-inspect violations

Businesses

- Number of businesses that earn Gold Bar Norfolk accreditation
- Number of employees trained
- Number of employees issued policies
- Perception of safety



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NORFOLK NIGHTLIFE