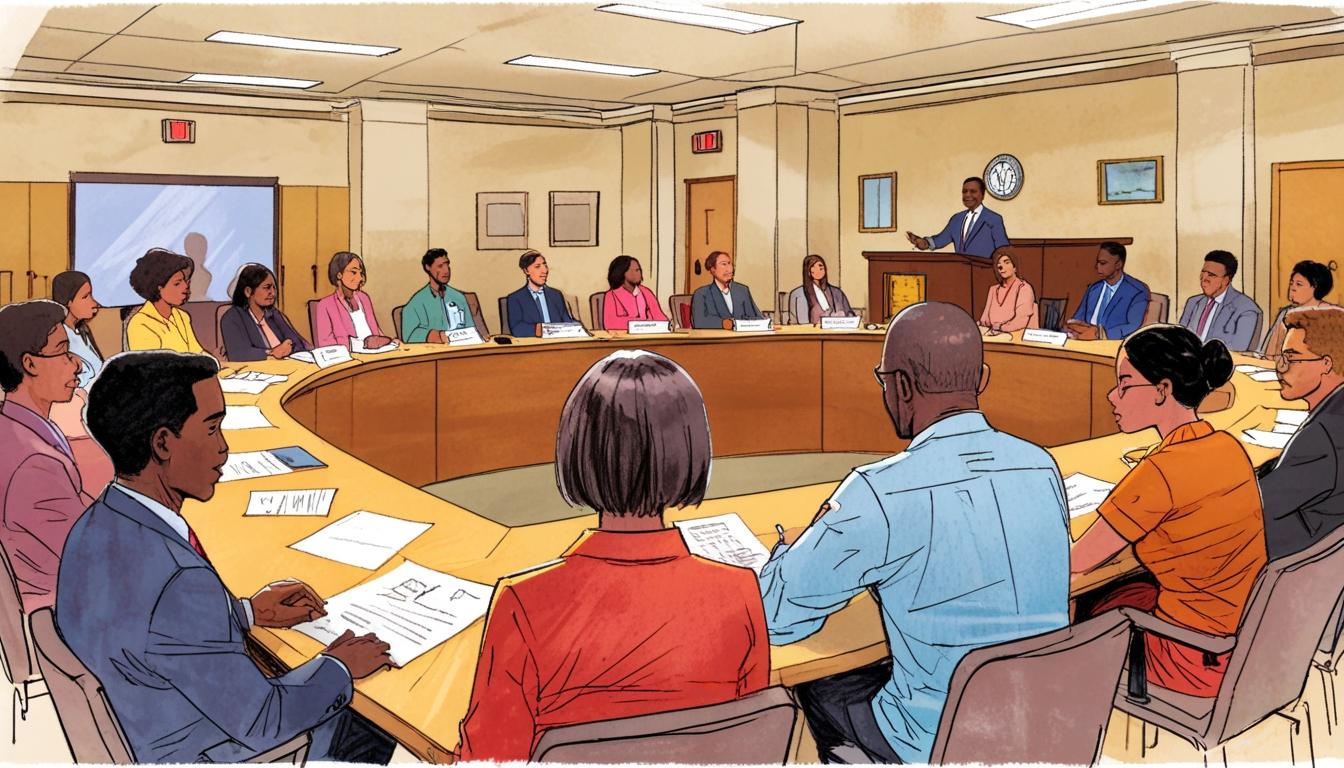
# Chicago debates curfew proposal and community strategies to manage Memorial Day teen gatherings



As Memorial Day weekend approaches in Chicago, the city faces a challenge posed by anticipated large gatherings of teenagers at locations like 31st Street Beach, part of a phenomenon known locally as “teen trends.” These events, often organised and promoted via social media, have in some cases escalated into disorderly or violent situations. In response, the city held a pioneering meeting last week aimed at addressing these gatherings with perspectives from diverse stakeholders, including city officials, law enforcement, community organisations, and elected representatives.

The event, convened by the mayor’s office and involving Chicago’s Police, Fire and Health departments along with City Council members such as Alderman Brian Hopkins of the 2nd Ward, engaged participants in strategic discussions about how best to manage the expected influx of teens. Community representative Kofi Ademola of GoodKids MadCity described the range of tactics debated, saying, “On one extreme, you had people talking about cutting off the parking lots, shutting down buses... Completely trying to prevent young people from even getting access to the beach. And then on the other side, the city could prepare the beach for an impromptu block party, carnival or mini-concert, even handing out gift bags and assigning youth peacekeepers to watch over their peers in case there’s a need to de-escalate a fight.” This marks the first occasion Ademola has participated in such a broad, city-led conversation on the issue.

Meanwhile, a contentious policy proposal has emerged from Alderman Hopkins, backed by more than 30 City Council members, which seeks to grant the Chicago Police Department (CPD) the authority to impose an immediate curfew at mass gatherings predicted to potentially become disorderly. The ordinance would define a “teen takeover” as “a gathering of 20 or more people in a public place” where criminal conduct or risks to public safety are anticipated. Under this proposal, police commanders could swiftly enact a curfew covering the area where the gathering occurs. However, the geographical scope of such curfews remains undefined.

Despite significant support, the proposal is under negotiation with the mayor’s office, reflecting concerns about its scope and possible infringement on civil liberties. Deputy Mayor for Public Safety Garien Gatewood emphasised the city’s preference for preventative, non-police interventions, citing ongoing efforts such as the deployment of crisis response teams to mediate conflicts, communications with event organisers, and outreach through Chicago Public Schools aimed at discouraging large teen gatherings.

“This is not about changing curfew laws; it’s about keeping people safe and stopping trends from turning violent or from happening,” Gatewood told WBEZ.

Legal experts have voiced strong opposition to the proposed ordinance on constitutional grounds. Sheila Bedi, a clinical law professor at Northwestern University, described the proposal as “shockingly unconstitutional and so divorced from what we know actually helps reduce incidents of young people engaging in any kind of unlawful conduct.” The criticisms focus on the vague criteria used for predicting potential criminal activity at gatherings, which some argue could lead to racial profiling and arbitrary enforcement.

Amanda Yarusso from the National Lawyers Guild highlighted concerns for teenagers subjected to police encounters, saying, “It’s hard enough to know what to do and to stand up for your rights in that kind of an encounter as an adult but let alone as a teenager.”

Opponents also argue that CPD already holds numerous legal tools such as dispersal orders and laws against disorderly conduct, rendering a new curfew power redundant. Sharlyn Grace, senior policy adviser for the Cook County public defender, remarked, “There’s already 15 nails lined up on the board, and we’re saying we need to add a 16th one. That doesn’t really seem like an honest assessment of either the causes or the solutions.”

Alderman Hopkins has not publicly addressed the constitutional concerns surrounding his proposal. Meanwhile, Alderman Jason Ervin, a co-sponsor of the ordinance, acknowledged the difficulties in balancing public order with the risk of criminalising youth, stating, “No one wants to criminalize young people, while at the same time, we want to try to maintain order. We ultimately will strike a balance between the two.”

The city continues to explore multiple approaches to manage teen gatherings during high-profile weekends. The discussions highlight the tensions between law enforcement tools and community-based preventive strategies, as Chicago seeks pathways to address public safety concerns without escalating conflict or infringing on civil rights. The evolving debate involves continued dialogue among city officials, police, legal experts, and community members as Memorial Day activities draw near.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)