

Minneapolis experiences crime wave amid funding debate

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing December 10, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder*



Gadfly keeping an eye on what's happening in Minneapolis. The George Floyd ground zero. Very complicated.

Selections from Liz Navratil, "Divided Minneapolis City Council votes to cut \$8 million from police budget." Star Tribune, December 10, 2020.

The Minneapolis council preserved a plan to hire more officers in future years, avoiding a political showdown with Mayor Jacob Frey.

The late change to the department's staffing projections, passed along a narrow 7-6 vote, does not change the number of officers who will work in 2021. The move, instead, avoided a political showdown with Mayor Jacob Frey.

The city expects a monthly average of 770 police officers will work in 2021, if council agrees to release funding for some recruit classes.

The City Council had initially planned to drop the force's authorized size to 750 officers starting in 2022, but reversed course late Wednesday. Frey, who sought to keep the current target level of 888, had said he was considering vetoing the budget because he was concerned about "the massive permanent cut to officer capacity" in future years.

In a statement early Thursday, Frey lauded the council's vote on the budget.

“My colleagues were right to leave the targeted staffing level unchanged from 888 and continue moving forward with our shared priorities,” Frey said. “The additional funding for new public safety solutions will also allow the City to continue upscaling important mental health, non-police response, and social service components in our emergency response system.”

The 2021 budget served as the latest venue for debates on changing the police department after George Floyd's death and a subsequent pledge by a majority of council members to end the department. As the talks unfolded, city leaders deliberated whether they should leave the department mostly intact while building out new services, or cut the department to fund them.

While the city is seeking to change its public safety system, it is also experiencing a crime wave that includes more than 500 shootings.

Frey pitched a \$1.5 billion spending plan that included about \$179 million for the police department, down from about \$193 million initially approved for it in 2020.

The council cut an additional \$7.7 million from the police department. That money will fund mental health crisis teams, train dispatchers to assess mental health calls and have other employees handle theft and property damage reports.

The council also placed \$11.4 million in a reserve fund they created. That fund will include about \$6.4 million that was included in Frey's plan to hire two police recruit classes, and about \$5 million that could be used to offset cuts council members made to police overtime. To access that

money, the police department will need additional approval from City Council in votes next year.

Arradondo said the department — which had 874 officers at the beginning of the year — is effectively down 166 officers, between officers who have resigned and officers who are on leave. The department's leave figures are far higher than average this year, in part because a large number of officers filed PTSD claims after the summer rioting.

In recent days, the negotiations focused on a different budget provision. The City Council, in a meeting Monday, voted to reduce the authorized force size to about 750 officers in 2022 and future years. The mayor, though, hoped to keep the target level at 888, its authorized size, which he said would make it easier for them to hire back amid the shortage.

The council voted 7-6 Wednesday night to restore that level to 888, with Vice President Andrea Jenkins as the swing vote.

Jenkins said it was a difficult decision. She had voted the opposite way earlier in the week.

“The reality right now is that Chief Arradondo is woefully understaffed for a variety of reasons,” Jenkins said. “Do I believe that this effort will resolve all of our problems, all of our crime issues overnight? Absolutely not. Neither will all of the social service programs and initiatives. It's going to take all of these things together to lower the crime rate.”

If Frey approves the budget, the discussion next year will be about whether to cut or add to a department authorized to employ 888 officers. Had the council's earlier plan remained in place, the discussion would have been about whether to cut or add to a department designed for 750 officers.

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