

# The budget dance (2): the police department

The Bethlehem Gadfly Budget, Police November 24, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police 

## Budget Hearing November 9 video

public comment, begin min. 3:53:49

*“When I was in [a depressed state], the presence of law enforcement . . . made my anxiety spiral out of control.”*

*“You must make meaningful cuts to the police budget.”*

*“Implicit bias training and one part-time social worker — it’s insulting, seriously.”*

*“My ask tonight would be to make a cut to the police department personnel and to put that money to the Health Bureau for mental health services and crisis response and community health services.”*

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ref: **“Defunders” criticize the proposed police budget**

Gadfly finishing off what he started a week ago.

Capturing the voices of those who called in at the tail end of the 4+ hour first budget hearing on November 9 to comment on the police budget.

In all, there were 8 comments, all asking for cuts in the police budget and reallocation of those funds elsewhere in the mental health area.

Gadfly captured 4 of those “defunder” voices in the previous post, now the final 4.

There were no “defender” voices at that meeting.

Once you use a metaphor, it’s hard to shake.

So Gadfly continues describing to you what he calls the “budget dance.”

These dancers are not responding so much to the economic issues triggered by the pandemic but to the moral issues set on fire by the murder of George Floyd.

And it’s not clear yet whether these dancers have any partners on Council.

They may be dancing alone.

At least two Council members have said that they would not “defund” the police, but several have spoken as if they would.

No specific plans to do so have been floated by Council members.

And, as a wise Gadfly follower has noted, that’s a problem.

It is one thing to say “defund,” but it does not seem at all likely to even get a hearing unless someone has a very detailed plan of where diverted funds would go and for what purpose.

And, in addition, that it was made very clear and that there was consensus about how fears of diminished community safety because of reduction of police funding were addressed.

It is hard for Gadfly to see that such a complex idea can be presented at this late date with any chance of approval.

In addition, the City/Police Department has advanced a pilot program involving a social worker without “defunding” and at no additional cost, though callers are not satisfied with that program.

Early on Councilman Reynolds foresaw that discussions about any change in public safety would need to start early on if any major changes in the police budget for 2021 would have a chance.

That’s one reason why Gadfly has been so impatient over the past weeks.

But maybe some ideas by Councilfolk are percolating but not yet visible to Gadfly.

In any event, Gadfly encourages you to listen to the voices of your fellows in order to understand the “defunding” impulse. The text here is just quick and dirty highlights.

If you find Gadfly’s audio muffled, follow the link to the meeting video.

### **Glenn Nelson (3 mins.) (4:13:59)**

In Philadelphia Walter Wallace was shot within one minute of police arrival, and he was shot in front of his mother, leaving a wife and unborn child. That is what we want to stop happening here, and mental stress is in no short supply. There seems to be a willingness to allow mental

health to languish. As a depressed person, I make up one of five in the population. I have been lucky enough to find voluntary treatment. When I was in that state the presence of law enforcement was not helpful to me. It made my anxiety spiral out of control. The answer to mental health, you can't have that being a cop. We don't need a mental health cop that is on the police force. We need other services that already exist. The police aren't trained for that job, and they shouldn't be. It is not fiscally responsible to have other departments on skeleton crews. A budget shows what a city values.

**Jackie (2 mins.) (4:17:18)**

Residents are facing simultaneous public health and economic crises. Police budget could be better directed to help. Lack of comparable cuts to other departments is frankly unacceptable. Council members previously promised LV Stands Up members cuts to the police. If we have 154 members of the police department next year, we have failed. I will not mince my words, your police budget by your own words is a failure. You must make meaningful cuts to the police budget. Free up funds to put back in the community to help manage the crises. It is the city's responsibility to be proactive to protect citizens in the months ahead. Cops won't protect us against the virus, joblessness, etc. Investment in other things will. Make the difficult but necessary cuts to the police budget in order to give the residents a fighting chance in the year ahead.

**Cherokee St. resident (5 mins.) (4:19:35)**

I live in the low to moderate income area. We don't want more police here, whether they are on horseback, bicycles, etc. Policing does not make our community safer. Our demands have been to defund . . . abolish. Chief, you're giving us inches when we are asking for miles. Clearly you are listening, you know we want social workers to respond. You clearly recognize that there's a problem with racism. But you need to

take it 500 steps further. There's no amount of training, or reform, or money that you can throw at the problem of police brutality. Murder of black and brown. Don't act as if that is not a problem here. Police brutality is a serious issue here. Can't be glossed over. Won't just go away. Wallace was murdered by police. We need to be accurate. It is a living, breathing problem in the corrupt institution of policing in our country. Everywhere in America. Budgets are moral documents. We saw Chief DiLuzio spew his morals on Facebook. The residents have clearly spoken. I implore you to listen and do better. Implicit bias training and one part-time social worker — it's insulting, seriously. Police departments are not equipped to handle the problem of police brutality. Need 3rd party. You need someone else's viewpoint. The community that I live in do not want you. Safety is not police— we've told you over and over again.

### **Southside resident (3 mins.) (4:24:30)**

Very concerned about the budget proposed tonight. We've already expressed what we want very clearly. We want fewer police officers. We don't want or need community engagement. We don't want community policing. We have asked to divest money from the police into the community, and what we are offered instead is cuts to other departments. Once again, we're not being listened to. My ask tonight would be to make a cut to the police department personnel. We don't want armed police officers responding to a mental health crisis. We've seen people like Walter Wallace being murdered. More community engagement will not solve this. Social workers not going out on calls won't solve this. Training won't solve this. Only divesting funds into mental health services will solve this. This isn't meant to be a punishment. This is meant to be a helping hand to the community.

