

Allentown protestors take a knee for the knee'd

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police July 16, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing* 

Last night Allentown City Council spent 3 hours reading the many citizen comments on this incident into the record. Interesting. Worthwhile. See video [here](#), begin min. 3:10.

from Jacqueline Palochko, “For three hours, Allentown City Council read comments from the public about police video as protesters demanded reform outside City Hall.” July 25, 2020.

It took three hours for Allentown City Council to get through comments from the public that mostly called for defunding the police department while protesters gathered outside City Hall to also demand reforms, including that all the officers involved in a video that showed an Allentown officer kneeling on a man be fired.

Also at the meeting Wednesday night, councilwoman Ce-Ce Gerlach and councilman Joshua Siegel proposed a police oversight resolution that calls for a number of reforms, including requiring officer intervention to stop any excessive use of force, making body camera footage available to the public and removing any exceptions for chokeholds and neck restraints from the use of force policy. The resolution has been referred to the July 29 meeting. It's not the first police reform proposal that Siegel has proposed.

Wednesday's meeting came just days after the video, which went viral and [sparked a few local protests](#). The majority of the comments read during three hours were from people who said they were “infuriated,” “saddened,” and “outraged” about the video. Many suggested police funding be reallocated elsewhere, such as to mental health services, education and affordable housing.

“I demand that you immediately begin removing funds from the Allentown Police Department,” Muhlenberg College student Sydney Baron said in a comment.

“In the video widely circulating around social media, it is painfully obvious that the APD’s use of force in this scenario was excessive and dangerous,” Anna Tjeltveit wrote.

As council members took turns reading the comments, a group of at least 100 outside City Hall chanted “defund the police,” “if we don’t get no justice, they don’t get no peace,” and “no power like the power of the people” during the meeting that lasted more than four hours. At times early on in the meeting, the protesters could be heard banging on the doors on the city’s live stream.

The protesters held signs that said, “make an apology” and “defund now.” A large black banner that read “Black lives matter” in gold was also set up.

Because meetings are held virtually since the coronavirus pandemic, public comments are emailed in and then read at the meeting. When the meeting first started, council debated whether it was going to read all the comments at the beginning or end of the meeting. Councilwoman Cynthia Mota said all the comments should be read in the beginning, following the normal rules of a council meeting.

“Just listen to the people out there,” Mota said, as protesters watching the livestream outside applauded. “I’m willing to stay as long as I need to stay to hear what people have to say.”

A few comments were in support of the police department and encouraged the city to invest in more money for officers.

“The Allentown Police Department is essential to the safety and security of the citizens of Allentown,” Donald L. Cease wrote. “What we should do is increase funding to help make the department better by increasing the

number of officers on the streets, increase training, expand mental health counseling and social workers that work in the field.”

Among the list of demands by POWER Lehigh Valley and six other Lehigh Valley activist groups are:

- Release all body camera and surveillance footage from the incident Saturday
- Fire all officers involved in the video, release their names and make their career history public and under review
- Have Mayor Ray O’Connell, police Chief Glen Granitz Jr. and City Council President Daryl Hendricks make a statement of wrongdoing of the police department and commit to holding the department accountable
- Defund the police department by \$25 million and reallocate those funds into the community
- Reallocate the \$50,000 being considered for equipment to community-based violence prevention.

Borrero was intoxicated and screaming obscenities and posed a danger to himself and others, according to an affidavit.

Comments on Wednesday night suggested officers could have done something instead of cuffing him. Danica Schofer, a Muhlenberg College student who grew up in the city, said Allentown officers often came to her house growing up because her grandmother had a violent form of dementia. “She yelled and spit and hit and was called “non compliant” many times,” Schofer wrote. “But she never had a knee on her neck. She was a white woman.”

When the meeting ended, the protesters again started to bang on the doors of City Hall and chant “Black lives matter” and “defund the police.”

Gerlach and Siegel joined the protesters, who applauded for them, after the meeting.

Speaking to the crowd, Siegel said Borrero needed help rather than to be cuffed last Saturday. A protester then told Siegel that Borrero was in attendance, according to Facebook Live videos posted by the group Lehigh Valley Stands Up.

Siegel turned to address Borrero and apologized for what happened to him.

Standing in front of Borrero, everyone in attendance then took a knee in solidarity with him.