

Look what Minneapolis is proposing: a Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police June 29, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 

We have a Public Safety Committee meeting coming up to discuss Police department policies and the Reynolds/Crampsie Smith Community Engagement Initiative. 'Tis being planned. No date announced yet. Or format. Councilman Colon chairs the committee, with Councilwomen Negron and Crampsie/Smith as members.

Gadfly's excited.

He loves the idea of a community gathering. It's a chance for us to talk, to exercise our citizenship, to influence local government policy, to have some input on the quality of our lives. "Good conversation builds community."

He also likes planning. "Planning," like "community," is one of Gadfly's aphrodisiac words. Planning is foreplay, a key step in the continuum of creativity, and creativity — bringing something to life that did not exist — is the quintessential human activity.

But at the moment Gadfly doesn't know what to plan for.

Mainly because he doesn't have a good grasp of the problem, if there is one, locally here between the police and our community, or with some segment of our community.

He has **asked for stories**. And he got **one**. And he hopes for more, many more. Please help him with that. For he feels that it is only on the basis of those stories that we will know what to plan for.

There might be problems more or less severe that need to be tended to. Or the murder of George Floyd just might be a ripe moment to reflect on and review what we are doing well under the headlight of the new ideas

that problems elsewhere are shining on how police departments and local criminal justice systems do their work.

So while Gadfly treads water a bit waiting for that meeting to call us to order and to focus our attention, he pays attention to the more radical ideas percolating out there. He has called attention to **Governor Cuomo's plan** for community engagement.

And here below is what is envisioned in Minneapolis — **a Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention** — which, of course, may be no model for us because of the long history there of rupture between police and the community.

Note that the Minneapolis City Council has been hanging together with 12-0 votes and that in the envisioned new system the City Council manages the system. Which would mean the equivalent of 4-5 more sets of twins for our president Waldron.

Food for thought here.

from “City Council OKs charter amendment to remove Minneapolis Police Department.” Minneapolis Fox 9 News, June 27, 2020.

The Minneapolis City Council on Friday unanimously approved a proposed amendment would remove requirements for the city to maintain a police department from the city's charter. The 12-0 vote is step toward putting the issue in front of Minneapolis voters on the November ballot.

Under the current charter language, the city council is required to fund a police force of a size proportionate to the city's population. Changes being considered in the amendment would remove that requirement along with an entire section on the police department.

The proposal replaces that language with a new department: the Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention. It would be managed by the City Council, marking a key power shift for a council frustrated with limited authority.

“Using the bully pulpit, using the budget, using the chief’s appointment to try move things around a little bit, but I don’t think we’ve had the kind of policy-making participation that we should have,” said Council member Cam Gordon.

The changes also remove minimum officer requirements within the new community safety department, instead saying the council is responsible for “adequately funding” the replacement department.

Along with the department of community safety, the amendment would add a Division of Law Enforcement Services, which would be composed of “licensed peace officers” under the purview of the director of the Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention.

While the current charter language gives the mayor complete control over the police department, including hiring the chief, the new proposal would put the mayor in charge of nominating a director for the new department that would be appointed by the city council.

That person would be someone who has “non-law enforcement experience in community safety and violence prevention” which could include “public health and restorative justice approaches”

The appointed director would in turn choose the leader of the Law Enforcement Services Division.

Mayor Frey has previously shared that he does not support disbanding the police department – a stance which led to him being booed at a rally. After the vote Frey stood by his previous remarks saying he supports “deep structural reform” and “complete transformation” of the policing system. He criticized the amendment for lacking clarity moving forward.

“This amendment to our legal city charter does not provide clarity. There are more questions I have regarding this amendment than answers,” said Frey. “If this amendment passes will we still have police? If you vote for this, are you voting to abolish the police department? Or is this merely a cosmetic change where you add a bureaucratic layer, you change the name to peace officers and give them different uniforms?”

he Board of the Police Officers Federation of Minneapolis put out statement in response to the vote and criticized the amendment for lacking clarity.

“Public safety is a primary role of city government and the politicians in charge of the Minneapolis City Council are not putting the safety of residents and visitors to the city at the core of their actions. This charter amendment fails to clarify questions about what replaces the police department, how it will work, and what actual steps will be done to address and prevent crime.”