

Lehigh Valley Stands Up applies full-court press as budget vote nears

The Bethlehem Gadfly Budget, Police November 27, 2020

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

City Council, November 17, 2020 video

begin min. 14:40

Lehigh Valley Stands Up members or residents supporting them dominated the public comment period at the November 17 City Council meeting, criticizing the budget plan to insulate the police department from cuts and calling for reallocation of resources to Health areas.

Such arguments were generally based on needs generated by the pandemic, and, for the first time, we see such specific proposals as a hiring freeze in the police department, elimination of school resource officers, and cutting — 16% — a specific amount that would double the Health Department budget.

Interesting.

One caller — the final caller — Bruce Haines provided the “other side,” indicating that the police department has been understaffed, that social trip media indicates Bethlehem is not a safe city, and that therefore the police are very important to the business community and others. He also suggested that he has no argument with mental health as a need but that the defunders should explore other options rather than the police department for the necessary funds.

As always, Gadfly points out that his text is paraphrase and incomplete and that he hopes you will take a little time to listen to the voices of your fellow residents as they make their cases.

Public participation. Democracy in action.

Always good.

There are two more meetings where the budget will be discussed, amended, and voted on.

What are you thinking about the issues raised here by community members?

Jon Irons (4 mins.) (min. 14:40)

Lot of needs in the City: pandemic, economic crisis. The Mayor's budget is planning for this but leave the police department budget untouched. If there are cuts in personnel anywhere, there should be cuts in police. It's the biggest slice of the budget and the primary driver of the pension costs. How to cut? School resources officers might be cut. Also a hiring freeze. Hopes in future years for serious divestment in the police department. Health Bureau, for instance, has a lot of needs. Could expand the new social worker program immediately. More public accountability in regard to discipline hearings and firings. Any new training should be within existing budget not new funds or new grants.

W. Market St. lady (2 mins.) (min. 18:35)

Increasing evidence that policing is not working in the way we expect it to. Think strategically and creatively about ways in which we can keep our community safe and healthy.

Michele Downing (3 mins.) (min. 20:20)

Short time to address the impending catastrophes. Mortgages, evictions, housing crisis, student loans, covid, food insecurity, child care, online learning = our social worker program is inadequate. We are not looking at all at what the needs of the City are going to be. We all need to tighten our belts and redistribute as necessary. Videos of cars in line at food banks, and we're not removed from that. Need discussions of where resources actually belong.

Glenn Nelson (3 mins.) (min. 23:38)

Immediate hiring freeze, and future defunding of police. Reallocation of 16% of police budget would double the Health Department budget, which seems reasonable in the middle of a pandemic. A common sense move when you realize how underfunded the Health bureau has been. It makes sense in a pandemic and financial crisis to see where money is really critically needed. Police department budget has gone up every year a bit, leading to large amount over decades. Unjustifiable in financial crisis not to look at the Police budget, plus we know it's not working. Putting issues with people of color and with mental issues at higher risk. Hoping for cuts in police officers and addition of mental health personnel.

Cherokee St. lady (3 mins.) (min. 26:25)

Mental health crisis long before covid, now made worse. Worrying about your talk of increased police presence on Southside because knows from personal experience because police re not going to help here, and she is not alone in this belief. These crises in mental health, substance abuse, and covid have shown how deep inequalities are. We need sacrifices everywhere, and the police department is the obvious place to look. Police are not what we need. Part-time social worker and bias training will not help.

Patricia (3 mins.) (min. 28:53)

Supports calls for increased health services in the midst of a pandemic. Affordable public health services have been incredibly helpful to her. Calling 911 for mental health issues — cf. Walter Wallace — is not the answer. Police not trained to deal with such things. I can sleep easier because of the Bethlehem Health Department but not because of the police. Need to put funds where they help people. People are really concerned as second wave of covid comes in, evictions, student loan payments. Not easy working with budget but keeping things as is will not be a benefit.

Anthony Downing (4 mins.) (min. 32:01)

Concerns of the disabled. Wants to remind people of a time when they were united in regard to caring about health because now cutting fire and other place as well as putting a 5% tax on is going in opposite direction. We should be spending this money in the midst of a global pandemic to bolster our public health, and more police or not cutting police but cutting elsewhere is going in opposite direction. You've done the right things before and hope you will be cutting money from police in favor of mental health services now.

Alexander Fisher (3 mins.) (min. 35:52)

Supports cutting police budget and reallocating to mental health services. Not safe calling police for mental health issues. Police department very overfunded. No empirical evidence that shows more policing leads to less crime. Myth that without big police force we would have an unfit society. Not hatred for police but growing move to reimagine the police and their function. Reallocation would make people of color and women feel a lot safer.

Bruce Haines (3 mins.) (min. 39:26)

LV Stands Up has one agenda, to cut the police budget, and using the idea of a national agenda to do that. But that is not a majority position, rather a minority position. Agrees that the police are not meeting needs of the community but reason is that they are understaffed. Department only now fully staffed which gives business community a sense of safety about bringing tourists to Bethlehem. See Trip Advisor — we are considered an unsafe community. Police are critical in Bethlehem putting its best foot forward. No issue with concern for mental health but need to refocus on other options to funding mental health instead of taking money from police. Our police problem is not excessive. We don't have a major police problem. LV Stands Up tries to make it a problem. I'm here to defend the police and funding for the police and speak for a whole lot of people who haven't called in because the Mayor's budget did not cut the police. Speaking for the other side and the safety of our community.

The Bethlehem Gadfly