

Allentown Chief asks city to “further invest in the police department”

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [George Floyd killing](#) October 30, 2020

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

As usual, Gadfly is keeping his eye on what is happening around us. Note new programs cooking in Allentown relevant to the issues that we have been talking about. Our new budget is due out c. November 13 or 16. No dates for budget meetings have been announced to the public yet. There was talk early on of having discussions of possible changes in public safety before budget season. Those discussions have not really occurred, so Gadfly assumes the police budget here in Bethlehem, for example, will be simply more of the same.

Selections from Andrew Wagaman, “Allentown chief asks for \$40.8 million police budget, with additional officer training and community programs.” Morning Call, October 29, 2020.

Allentown’s top cop on Wednesday made a case that the best way to reduce crime and improve community relations is to further invest in the police department.

During an hour long budget presentation to City Council, police Chief Glenn Granitz Jr. detailed a number of initiatives the department plans to tackle in 2021 related to community engagement, enhanced training and crisis intervention. He also shared statistics indicating violent crime has fallen for the ninth time in 10 years, and argued that the police force has played an active role in the overall crime drop.

A majority of council members heaped praise on the department in an hours’ worth of follow-up questions, while council members Ce-Ce Gerlach and Joshua Siegel urged Granitz to more ambitiously pursue equitable policies and combat institutional racism. Councilman Ed Zucal, who ran the meeting, suggested their comments weren’t relevant to the budget hearing.

There has been much discussion in Allentown and beyond on how law enforcement agencies can more effectively address the growing number of people struggling with addiction or mental health issues. Granitz and Assistant Chief Charlie Roca provided details on the department's partnership with Treatment Trends Inc., certified recovery specialists connecting those struggling with addiction with helpful resources. The chief touted the success of Lehigh County's Blue Guardian program, launched in 2018, in which officers and recovery specialists make follow-up visits with individuals who suffered a drug overdose and encourage them to seek treatment.

Allentown police also work with a Pinebrook Family Answers' community intervention specialist to connect people to mental health resources. Granitz hopes to fund at least one additional "mental health liaison" in the coming year.

About 40% of city police officers have undergone crisis intervention training led by mental health providers and family advocates, and Granitz said he's committed to having the entire force complete the training in 2021. The department is also improving its field training program to more accurately measure officers' performance and progress, and to introduce a leadership component preparing officers for future supervisory roles.

In addition, officers will undergo "active bystandership" training provided by the Georgetown University Law Center. Allentown was one of the first 30 police departments in the nation selected for the program, which provides officers with tactics to intervene and prevent misconduct by their peers.

The police department will also partner with Cedar Crest College to measure whether its crisis intervention training and partnerships with community intervention specialists are curbing repeat behavioral health emergency calls and police use-of-force incidents.

Granitz said, "If we are going to do something, I want to do it well. ... Does it have an appreciative effect on our officers' use of force? Are they better able to de-escalate using this model? Or after a few years of study, do we need to make a change?"

The proposed 2021 budget does not include a formal community policing program, but department leaders are working toward it. Granitz is eliminating a captain position and creating an additional sergeant position focused on community policing. He has also met with former department leaders involved in the neighborhood police program that was phased out in the early 2000s, and wants to establish a “center for police innovation and community engagement” to figure out the best approach.

Gerlach said she was looking forward to examining more crime data trends related to race, ethnicity and gender. She also asked Granitz what the department was doing, amid ongoing civil unrest over police misconduct, to root out policies that have a disparate impact on minorities.

Despite Zucal, a retired police sergeant, arguing that it wasn't a “budget-related question,” Granitz answered, saying he has fired a number of subpar officers over the past year, increased mandatory training and invited the city's human resources and legal teams to scrutinize hiring practices, department policies and operational procedures.

Siegel urged the department to reconsider its membership with the National Rifle Association, which Granitz said provides training to city firearms instructors.

“I always like to consider what the underlying ideology and intention is, and [the NRA] are a little bit more ‘defend yourself at all costs’ than I'm comfortable with,” Siegel said.

“With all due respect, let's stick to the budget,” Zucal said.

Siegel also pressed the department to consider handing off the first response to behavioral health and substance abuse calls as it continues to build partnerships with intervention and recovery specialists. He also requested the department to pursue the community service officer program developed in San Jose that has civilian employees, who are armed only with pepper spray, handle traffic issues and other lower-priority calls.

Siegel and Gerlach, elected to council last year, have said the city should reallocate some police funding toward addressing social inequities that they believe drive crime — like a lack of affordable housing, treatment services and recreational opportunities for youth.

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