

Seattle re-imagines policing

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing September 24, 2020

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

Still keeping an eye on what's happening elsewhere. The Breonna Taylor ruling yesterday precipitated not only protests but violence, as well as renewed calls to “defund” the police, to “divest and re-invest,” to “reimagine” how public safety is done.

Now that it looks like leadership of the police department is being re-established, perhaps we will have discussion of such matters that is visible to the public.

The Seattle Council proposed changes in August, the Mayor vetoed the legislation, now Council has overridden the veto.

We are not Seattle, of course, but Gadfly believes we are not without suitable imagination.

selections from Hanna Scott, “Seattle City Council approves historic cuts to police department budget.” MyNorthwest, August 10, 2020.

Seattle City Councilmembers have officially [approved legislation](#) enacting sizable cuts to the police department's budget.

Pushback against the proposal from the other side of the aisle has come from [Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan](#), Police Chief Carmen Best, [police unions](#) and pro-police [community members](#), who have all cited concerns over public safety should the department be forced to reduce its number of sworn officers.

Last month, seven of nine councilmembers pledged support for defunding SPD by 50% in 2020 and reinvesting that money into communities of color as demanded by [King County Equity](#)

[Now](#) and [Decriminalize Seattle](#), which encompass dozens of community groups, non-profits, and other BIPOC-focused organizations.

The highlights of the 2020 package approved by councilmembers Monday include:

-
- Eliminating up to 100 sworn officer positions across various teams via layoffs and attrition (including 32 patrol officers), beginning in November 2020
- Capping command staff pay at \$150,000 (not including Chief Best's salary, which was reduced to \$275,000).
- Ending the Navigation Team (14 of the 100 officers mentioned above)

The package also cuts or reduces a variety of SPD's specialized units, including the Harbor Patrol Unit, SWAT team, Public Affairs unit, and school resource officers, and cuts \$800,000 of SPD's retention and recruitment budget.

The goal from councilmembers is a re-imagining of policing, right-sizing what the council feels is an inflated police department and budget that is not necessary and instead finding alternatives to sending armed officers to respond to calls that someone else, such as a social worker, might be better equipped to handle and avoid an unnecessary risk of escalation.

Exactly what this re-tooled version of policing and public safety will look like in practice remains to be seen, and likely won't come into full view until next year, but the council says it will be a community led effort as has been demanded by Decriminalize Seattle and King County Equity Now, the groups that will taking part in the participatory budget process with the council on the 2021 public safety budget.

The blueprint Decriminalize Seattle has [provided as a path forward](#) includes city-funded research done by BIPOC communities to provide, and among other things, “a plan on what health and safety actually means, including (but not limited to) alternatives to policing.”

“Instead of buying bullets, violence and intimidation, we are choosing — the city council is choosing — to invest in peace and restoration in a community that has been ravaged by generations of racism,” Council President Lorena Gonzales said as she explained the vision for future policing in Seattle.

Chief Best has repeatedly urged caution, explaining that she and Durkan support a re-envisioned SPD, but that these changes cannot happen overnight without risking public safety. Last week, Best also released her [own vision](#) and [accountability website](#) for making such changes.

selections from MyNorthwest staff, “Seattle City Council votes to override mayor’s veto of cuts to police budget.” MyNorthwest, September 23, 2020.

City council voted to override Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan’s recent veto of cuts to the police department’s remaining 2020 budget by a 7-2 vote, with the mayor issuing a statement after the fact indicating she might not adhere to all of the provisos laid out in the council’s proposal.

“We cannot look away from this and we can no longer accept the status quo if we truly believe that Black lives matter,” said Council President Lorena Gonzalez after expressing that she would be voting to override the mayor’s veto.