

What's happening in Minneapolis? A plan to disband the police in favor of a Department of Safety and Violence Prevention

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police August 6, 2020

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

As our August 11 Public Safety Committee meeting approaches, Gadfly's going to look around at what's going on in other cities. Join him.

Minneapolis, site of the George Floyd killing, is ground zero in the debate about police reform.

What's happening in Minneapolis?



Mpls. City Council To Take 1st Step In Ending MPD

The Minneapolis City Council is pursuing a city charter change to disband the Police Department as it is now constituted and establish a Department of Safety and Violence Prevention that will take “a holistic

public-health-oriented approach” and, apparently, be largely controlled by Council. This new department has not been described in detail, but the director would have “non-law-enforcement experience in community safety services, including but not limited to public health and/or restorative justice approaches.”

The measure would:

1. Eliminate charter provisions concerning the city’s police department.
2. Establish the Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention and the director of the new department.
3. The director of the department would be nominated by the mayor and confirmed by the city council.
4. Allow a Division of Law Enforcement Services within the new department;
5. The division would be made up of licensed peace officers.
6. Its director would be appointed by the director of the Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention.
7. Give the city council authority to establish the Division of Law Enforcement Services.

The Minneapolis Mayor is opposed to eliminating the Police Department and has instituted an interesting policy forcing officers to document their efforts at mitigation.

from “Minneapolis Mayor announces de-escalation standards, police use of force reporting requirements.” KSTP Eyewitness News, July 14, 2020.

The new policies places a stronger emphasis on de-escalation and expands the range of force reporting, which means police must describe in print what kind of mitigation they tried, plus a supervisor must be told. The policy also requires documentation of attempts to diffuse all

possible situations. Mayor Frey acknowledged these steps have never been must-haves before.

“This change will instill a stronger emphasis on de-escalation and help effectively curb excessive use of force by ensuring our officers center de-escalation in any-and-all interactions between officers and the community,” Frey said. “These comprehensive reporting requirements will help reinforce de-escalation as the first resort, increase accountability where de-escalation is an after-thought, and provide improved data to head off problematic interactions before they happen.”

“As the MPD continues to professionalize our service and make necessary reforms, these new changes in policy, strengthening de-escalation and Use Of Force reporting will play a key role in our efforts in building trust and legitimacy with all those we serve,” [Police Chief] Arradondo added.

The move to establish this new department is now stalled, as you can see from the following article. The article has an excellent video interview with the Mayor who points to problems with the police union in effecting the kind of “culture shift” in the department necessary for beneficent change. The Mayor calls the police union “the elephant in the room” in regard to reform. Please check out the video.

from “Commission stalls on amendment to dismantle Minneapolis Police Department, keeping it off the ballot in November.” CBS News, August 5, 2020.

A Minneapolis commission decided Wednesday to take more time to review a City Council amendment to dismantle the police department in the wake of George Floyd’s death, ending the possibility of voters deciding the issue in November.

The Charter Commission had expressed concern that the process to change the city’s charter was being rushed after Floyd died following an

encounter with a Minneapolis police officer. Some commissioners said they were more concerned with making the right changes rather than making them fast.

The proposed amendment followed widespread criticism of law enforcement over Floyd's death. It would have replaced the police department with a "Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention" that backers said would take a more "holistic" approach. That approach wasn't fully defined.

The proposal would have allowed for some armed police officers. It called for a division of licensed peace officers, who would have answered to the new department's director.

"The council says 'Trust us. We'll figure it out after this is approved. Trust us.' Well I don't, and we shouldn't," said Barry Clegg, chairman of the Charter Commission. "Charter change is too important."

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey told The Associated Press on Tuesday that he remains opposed to eliminating the department.

"We should not go down the route of simply abolishing the police department," Frey said. "What we need to see within this department, and within many departments throughout the country, is a full-on culture shift."

The mayor and Chief Medaria Arradondo have moved ahead with their own changes since Floyd's death, including requiring officers to document attempts to de-escalate situations whether or not force is used. They also have expanded requirements for reporting use-of-force incidents, ordering officers to provide more detail.

Arradondo also pulled the department out of negotiations for a union contract, saying he wanted a review designed to change the grievance and arbitration process, which he said makes it hard to get rid of problematic officers.

According to draft language of the amendment posted online, the new department proposed by the City Council “will have responsibility for public safety services prioritizing a holistic, public health-oriented approach.” The director of the new agency would have “non-law-enforcement experience in community safety services, including but not limited to public health and/or restorative justice approaches.”