

What Allentown did with police budgeting

The Bethlehem Gadfly Budget, Police December 3, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the City Budget* 

Gadfly always keeping an eye open to what's going on around us.

Looks like Allentown backed off on “large-scale reallocation” of the police budget but approved a policing program with Cedar Crest including research into “alternative policing programs launched in other cities across the nation”; provided the financial flex to look into “developing a crisis assistance program that tasks mental health providers with responding first to certain emergency calls”; joined in Georgetown University’s new “active bystandership” training.

Selections from Andrew Wagaman, “As Allentown City Council squeezes more spending initiatives into budget, controller says revenue estimates are too optimistic.” Morning Call, November 30, 2020.

City Council on Monday night considered about a dozen proposed amendments to the 2021 budget — and approved most of them. The initiatives ranged from a new \$100,000 line item to address homelessness issues to a \$40,000 proposal that would jump-start a community policing program with Cedar Crest College.

Rather than proposing a large-scale reallocation of the police budget to various social services, progressive council members Ce-Ce Gerlach and Joshua Siegel worked to build coalitions supporting more targeted reforms.

Gerlach, Siegel and Mota backed Vice President Julio Guridy's proposal to earmark \$100,000 to address issues facing the homeless population. The funding matches a similar \$100,000 earmark in Lehigh County's budget.

Gerlach hopes the city money can support projects recommended by the Commission on Homelessness she spearheaded this year, in conjunction with the Regional Homeless Advisory Board. A number of council members expressed hope that the funding represents real momentum after years of talk.

Council passed the spending proposal by a 7-0 vote.

Mota, Siegel and Gerlach also proposed setting aside another \$100,000 to help arts and culture organizations financially battered by the pandemic.

In a joint letter, nine organizations including the Allentown Art Museum, the Allentown Symphony Association and Discover Lehigh Valley said they need help remaining afloat until programs can resume at pre-pandemic levels.

The financial commitment, the letter said, will also "send a message to private funders" that the organizations need all the help they can get.

"Arts and culture organizations enhance and enrich the lives of so many in our city," the letter said. "The City budget should ensure that we have the resources to make it through the COVID-19 pandemic so we can continue our important cultural work for years to come."

Added Mota, whose husband is an artist: "Beauty creates hope. ... This is a commitment by our city to create a sense of hope in the community."

After much discussion, council voted unanimously to provide \$75,000.

Council's various factions also came together to support a \$100,000 increase to its own budget. The additional money gives council flexibility to tap consultants for help implementing priority-based budgeting and other recommendations of a 2019 independent financial audit. It could also look into developing a crisis assistance program that tasks mental health providers with responding first to certain emergency calls — a proposal of Siegel's.

In yet another unanimous vote, Council added \$40,000 to the police department's budget to kick off its Community Engagement Center collaboration with Cedar Crest College.

The police department and Cedar Crest will use the funds to help establish a community policing program. In addition to talking to residents about what they want out of such a program, they will also research the feasibility of implementing various types of community policing or alternative policing programs launched in other cities across the nation.

"This is a giant step forward," Councilwoman Candida Affa said.

Siegel, who has expressed skepticism about community policing's benefits, said he was confident the research conducted over the next few years will "reflect there are better ways to address certain societal issues that have little to no police dynamic" and "yield an environment I've been advocating for."

Selections from Andrew Wagaman, "What you need to know about Allentown's final 2021 budget and its long-term financial outlook." Morning Call, December 2, 2020.

The Allentown Police Department's \$41 million budget includes enhanced crisis intervention training and resources. The force will also be one of the first in the nation to participate in Georgetown University's new "active bystandership" training," which provides officers with tactics to intervene and prevent misconduct by their peers.

The police department will also replace outdated street surveillance cameras, finish a renovation of its headquarters, and implement a new record management system to better track, analyze and share crime data. And on Monday, city council gave the police department another \$40,000 to begin working with Cedar Crest College experts on establishing a community policing program.

Council earmarked another \$100,000 to address issues related to homelessness. The city's new Commission on Homelessness is slated to deliver a strategic plan in the spring.

Among other initiatives, council also appropriated \$75,000 to support various arts and culture organizations struggling financially because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

APD Joins National ABLE Project

The Allentown Police Department has been accepted into the Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE) Project, Georgetown University Law Center's national training and support initiative for U.S. law enforcement agencies committed to building a culture of peer intervention that prevents harm.

By demonstrating agency commitment to transformational reform with support from local community groups and elected leaders, the Allentown Police Department joins a select group of 30 other law enforcement agencies and statewide and regional training academies chosen to

participate in the ABLE Project's national rollout. To date, hundreds of agencies across the country have expressed interest in participating.

Backed by prominent civil rights and law enforcement leaders, the evidence-based, field-tested ABLE Project was developed by Georgetown Law's Innovative Policing Program in collaboration with global law firm Sheppard Mullin LLP to provide practical active bystandership strategies and tactics to law enforcement officers to prevent misconduct, reduce officer mistakes, and promote health and wellness.

ABLE gives officers the tools they need to overcome the innate and powerful inhibitors individuals face when called upon to intervene in actions taken by their peers.

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