



**Full City Council Budget Work Session, Monday, June 22, 2020,
6:00 pm, Please click the link below to join the webinar:
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BURLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

FULL CITY COUNCIL BUDGET WORKING SESSION

CITY HALL

BURLINGTON, VERMONT

MINUTES OF MEETING

June 22, 2020

MEMBERS PRESENT: Karen Paul

Max Tracy

Chip Mason

Joan Shannon

Ali Dieng

Brian Pine

Jack Hanson

Franklin Paulino

Perri Freeman

Jane Stromberg

Sarah E Carpenter

Zoraya Hightower

OTHERS PRESENT: Miro Weinberger

Katherine Schad

Eileen Blackwood

Olivia LaVecchia

Jon Murad

Jordan Redell



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Chapin Spencer

Lori Olberg

Amy Bovee

1. CALL TO ORDER and AGENDA

The meeting was called to order by Council President Tracy at 6:05 PM.

MOTION by Councilor Paul, SECOND by Councilor Pine, to adopt the agenda as written.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

2. PUBLIC FORUM (LIMITED TO ONE HOUR)

2.01 Verbal Comments

Forum opened at 6:07 PM.

COMMENTS:

- Sheller voiced concern that proposed budget with minimal cuts to police department is insufficient, stating that the change in Burlington's use of force policy will not protect its community members, and that funds need to be reallocated to community service..
- Martha Friedman noted that the American Public Health Association has issued a statement that categorizes racism as a public health issue and that she thusly supported the demands of the Racial Justice Alliance.

Public forum closed at 6:12 PM.

3. WORK SESSION REGARDING BUDGET

3.01 Work Session

Police Chief Murad noted that the Council had asked for head count statistics, and he presented them. There are currently 91 sworn officers (90 effective). He outlined the current Burlington Police Department staffing structure and how each shift is staffed. He also noted staffing requirements for the Detective Services Bureau and Burlington International Airport. He noted that Burlington's policing requirements are not comparable to that of similarly sized cities, due to Burlington's



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unique position as a small city that is also Vermont's largest city and a cultural and commercial hub for the state. He reviewed call and arrest volume as well as call volume by call type (severity) from 2015-2019. He noted that while less severe call types experienced a drop-off in volume, more serious call types have seen either a stable volume or an uptick in volume over those years. He then summarized the impacts to staffing levels of the proposed 30% cut to the police department's budget, which would result in a decrease to the police force of approximately 15 sworn officers.

Councilor Pine asked if the 8 officers at the airport could be handled by some other department, such as South Burlington or the Sheriff's Department, and if it is an obligation that could be renegotiated and transferred. Chief Murad noted that the airport is Burlington's responsibility and as such it polices its own territory. Mayor Weinberger added that Burlington is required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to have sworn police officers stationed at the airport, and that it is the City's strong preference to utilize its own officers than contract that work out. City Attorney Blackwood cautioned that any discussion of subcontracting City services that are performed by union employees will potentially need resolution and renegotiation with the union.

Councilor Pine noted that the decreases in call volume, arrests, and traffic enforcements and the corresponding decrease in police officer head count indicate that perhaps reallocating resources to the community is a further step along this path. Chief Murad replied that the decrease in those areas has been the result of persistence and engagement with the community by the police force, and that it is a result of their proactive work.

Councilor Carpenter asked if Burlington's airport police staffing levels could be compared to those of cities with similarly-sized airports. She also asked how much of the police force is devoted to covering the University of Vermont (UVM) and associated responsibilities. Chief Murad replied that the police department does not currently patrol the UVM campus, but that they are, however, responsible for covering the UVM Medical Center.

Councilor Hanson asked why the airport does not pay for police services through its revenue, since it requires a certain level of police coverage. Chief Murad replied that Burlington does see some reimbursement from the federal government for the airport presence. Mayor Weinberger added that 100% of the costs associated with policing the airport are paid from airport revenues.

Councilor Hanson asked about reducing the number of School Resource Officers (SROs) in schools and whether that could be achieved through resolution or the budget process, and also asked about the implications of that reduction for the Burlington Police Department in terms of freeing up resources. Chief Murad replied that the SROs are in place through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the School District, and that if the Council chose a diminished service route, the SROs would be folded back into regular patrol. City Attorney Blackwood added that the City would need to further review how changes like that could be made to SRO staffing.

Councilor Paul noted a drop in the number of noise complaints in the Hill Section of Burlington, but that it coincides with UVM taking a very active role in addressing that issue. She also noted that in terms of attrition, there are a number of officers who will be eligible for full retirement in the next year, and asked Chief Murad how many officers tend to take full



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retirement when they are eligible. He replied that it is up to the discretion of each officer and that he was not sure about individual officers' retirement intentions at the moment. Councilor Paul asked if any of the SROs have social work degrees, adding that they could be re-envisioned as community outreach officers. Chief Murad replied that no, the SROs did not currently hold degrees in social work.

Councilor Freeman noted that Burlington is still 31% above the median in terms of the size of its police force per capita, even with factoring in the medical center and airport. She said that she still supports the proposal to reduce the police force by 30% and removing officers from schools. She also added that reinvesting the funds from a police reduction into community and prevention services is crucial to this conversation and needs to be part of this discussion.

Councilor Paulino noted that the City Council needs to remain focused on the issue, which is that the community feels that issues and problems in the community are responded to with a higher level of violence than they should be, and that the goal is to make budget cuts to reinvest in the community in a different way going forward. He asked what the average cost is to the City per officer, and Chief Murad replied that officer salaries change with the length of tenure. Councilor Paulino asked SROs could stop responding to truancy calls, or respond in a more limited way. Chief Murad replied that the SROs do not conduct truancy calls.

Councilor Dieng asked if the administration could explore a task force around SROs and adjustments that could be made in the short term.

Councilor Hightower emphasized that this discussion wouldn't just take away resources, but reallocate them within the community. She asked about the feasibility of substituting officers with more balanced fully-uniformed officers and personnel that are trained in preventive measures. Chief Murad replied that there are many approaches to these problems, and that there are opportunities for collaborative teams with the Police Department. He added that many of the school arrests last year were weapons arrests, which is difficult to de-escalate without the right tools.

Councilor Shannon noted her appreciation for the Police Department's ability to solve complex crimes. She asked if detective staffing would need to be reduced if the overall police force were reduced. She also asked if the Chief could explain the role of SROs in schools. Chief Murad replied that contract requirements stipulate the need for 10 officers in the detective bureau, and that the MOU set forth for the SROs outlines their role, and is explicit that they are not placed in school for disciplinary action.

Councilor Shannon asked the Mayor if he could review the shift proposed between original budget and budget proposed to City Council. Mayor Weinberger replied that the original proposal was for a \$1.1 million cut for Fiscal Year 2021, but that it had since been adjusted based on the current climate, and would devote \$300,000 to a racial equity and police transformation fund, with the potential for that fund to rise to \$1 million. He added that some of that would be used for funding at the Howard Center.



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Councilor Mason asked if the Chief could clarify about the statements that are calling for a stop to truancy calls, because it sounds like Burlington doesn't conduct them. Chief Murad replied that Burlington conducts wellness checks where trauma may be involved, and that they are conducted by school staff with an SRO present, are rare, and have nothing to do with school attendance.

Councilor Carpenter asked whether funding for these activities could take on a more regional focus, since there are some examples in the City budget of shouldering costs for neighboring towns. Mayor Weinberger noted that the City had contemplated a regional dispatch center through a public safety municipal union that would share costs regionally, and Councilor Carpenter said that the City should contemplate pursuing more arrangements along those lines.

Councilor Pine noted that the Police Department's presentation said that head count could be decreased if done intentionally and fairly, stating that this is what the Council and community are looking to do, and to then reinvest in crime prevention.

Councilor Dieng asked what percentage of the general fund is paying for the current 93 sworn officers. Mayor Weinberger replied that he will research the figure and reach back out to the Council, and also noted that not 100% of the Police Department's \$17 million is funded through the general fund.

Councilor Hightower added that SROs in schools is a big issue, that officers should not be in schools at all, and that school-related arrests have marked racial disparities.

Councilor Freeman asked what amount would be available in the general fund for reallocation if a 30% reduction were pursued. Chief Administrative Officer Schad replied that there are nuances to that question that would need to be parsed out in order to give accurate numbers. Councilor Freeman said that the entirety of cuts should be reallocated to communities rather than going to balance the budget, and that austerity measures are the exact opposite of what is currently needed. She noted that she is interested in putting funds toward housing first models, which can be used to solve the homelessness crisis. She finally noted the importance of stakeholder engagement at this juncture of the budget discussion.

Councilor Hanson noted that one key point is reallocation of resources from policing to community support, another is how to address the crime that remains through a different style of policing or responding to challenges, and that the third is the deeply entrenched racism in this country and in the systems of policing, criminal justice, housing, and healthcare. He emphasized that the Council should not lose sight of those goals while working through this budget.

Councilor Dieng asked who would determine how funding is reallocated if budget cuts to the Police Department were to occur. Mayor Weinberger replied that the funds would be set aside in the budget and that spending would require additional Council approval.



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MOTION by Councilor Dieng, SECOND by Councilor Shannon, that the City Council find the necessity to enter into executive session to discuss pending litigation because premature disclosure would place the City at a substantial disadvantage.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.

MOTION by Councilor Dieng, SECOND by Councilor Shannon, to enter into executive session after other budgetary matters are discussed.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.

Councilor Dieng said he wants to see budget line item in general fund for the fight against homelessness. Mayor Weinberger replied that social services for assisting the homeless are paid for almost entirely by other agencies, further noting that CBDG allocations sometimes supplement homelessness spending.

Councilor Pine said that the City's primary way to address homelessness is to try and obtain federal continuum of care program funding, adding that Burlington will see significant federal resources come to the state for homelessness due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Councilor Freeman asked why the CEDO budget is being cut by 44% and the police department budget is being cut by 6% in the proposed budget. CAO Schad replied that most of CEDO's budget comes from grant funding, which isn't reflected in the general fund, and that any cuts or increases look drastic. Councilor Freeman said that around 21% of the general fund is being allocated to the police department and voiced frustration that the City has been unwilling to invest in direct services to the communities that need them.

Councilor Hanson said that policies addressing the climate crisis need to be more represented in the budget, especially if Burlington is to meet its net zero energy goals.

Councilor Shannon noted that CEDO has been very successful in its ability to obtain federal funding and grants, and has been able to be successful without tapping into the general fund. She noted that a decrease in federal funding for CEDO over the years has meant that the City has begun using general fund money to address the gap, which was never its intention.

Councilor Carpenter said that it would be helpful to have the full budget picture in terms of departmental budgets and funding, not just general fund allocations for them.

The City Council entered into executive session at 9:15 PM.



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4. ADJOURNMENT

4.01 Motion to Adjourn

RScty: AACoonrad