

**CITY COUNCIL LISTENING SESSION
ON POLICING IN CHARLOTTESVILLE
August 4, 2020
Virtual/electronic meeting, 4:00 p.m.
MINUTES**

Pursuant to Section 2-42 of the Charlottesville City Code, Mayor Nikuyah Walker called a Special Meeting of the Charlottesville City Council for the purpose of hearing public input about policing in the City of Charlottesville in light of recent events nationwide and a call for reform. The Charlottesville City Council met in a virtual / electronic meeting on Tuesday, August 4, 2020, with the following Councilors present: Vice Mayor Sena Magill, Ms. Heather Hill via telephone, Mr. Michael Payne and Mr. Lloyd Snook. Mayor Nikuyah Walker gave prior notice of her absence.

Vice Mayor Magill asked Communications Director Brian Wheeler to poll the audience to get an idea of how many people planned to speak so that appropriate time could be allotted to each speaker.

Ms. Magill called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m. and turned the meeting over to the City Manager.

City Manager Tarron Richardson shared the goal of the meeting and efforts made to date regarding conversations with members of the public about policing in Charlottesville which has been an ongoing conversation, and recently magnified with requests for defunding the police since the death of George Floyd at the hand of police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He asked the public to provide their thoughts on what defunding the police means, and how City staff and City Council could work toward building a stronger relationship with the public.

Ms. Magill opened the floor for public comment, with speakers given three minutes to comment. The following people spoke:

1. Mr. John Pfaltz questioned whether police should be defunded. He suggested having Region Ten respond to domestic violence situations.
2. Mr. Don Gathers spoke about support for the Police Civilian Review Board (Police Civilian Review Board).
3. Ms. Elizabeth Stark spoke about the meaning of defunding the police and supporting the Police Civilian Review Board for oversight.

4. Ms. Anna Mendez, Executive Director for Partners for Mental Health, shared a statement from the organization regarding priorities and how funds from the Police Department could be used for a continuum of interventions for mental health challenges.
5. Mr. Jeffrey Fogel spoke about the structure of the police department and the need to shift the culture of policing to a guardianship focus.
6. Ms. Kristyn Ardrey asked Chief Brackney whether current officers would be fired if the direction of the department changes. She asked Council whether other departments or agency budgets would be reviewed in order to support increased mental health funding.
7. Ms. Robin Francis spoke about the meaning of defunding the police as reinvesting funds and resources into areas such as translators and social workers. She spoke in support of a strong Police Civilian Review Board.
8. Ms. Susan Bashline, co-owner of a downtown business, spoke in support of the relationships that she sees between the police and the community. She spoke about the need to be able to call on police. She advised that once police respond, they know whether a situation is criminal or whether a mental health worker should be called.
9. Ms. Brenda Brown Grooms, local pastor, spoke in support of the police chief, in support of a police force, and advised that police do not need military equipment. She spoke about all departments working together for the greater good.
10. Ms. Ellen Contni-Morava expressed support of adding mental health workers to first responders. She spoke of reallocating funds to mental health services, crisis assistance, youth and community development, housing, and education. She spoke in support of the Police Civilian Review Board.
11. Mr. Roy Van Doorn, resident, spoke about challenges with misbehavior on the downtown mall. He shared information from a program in Burlington, Oregon.
12. Ms. Rosia Parker suggested abolishing police foundations. She spoke against militarized police, over-policing, and under-policing, especially in low income housing areas. She spoke in support of a strong Police Civilian Review Board and transparency.
13. Ms. Sarah Burke spoke about the need for mental health crisis response without police. She spoke about the correlation of defunding police to decreasing police staff. She spoke in support of a strong Police Civilian Review Board for oversight.

14. Ms. Sara Tamseu shared a negative personal story about an interaction with a Charlottesville Police Officer, who expressed dissent about the job. She spoke in support of defunding the police in order to support services that meet the needs of citizens.

15. Ms. Tanesha Hudson spoke about the desire to have officers speak out. She spoke about complaints that have gone unanswered. She spoke about the need to find solutions for policing in low income neighborhoods.

16. Ms. Ang Conn about the defunding police campaign, and the redistribution of funds to community-based support programs. She advised that many people who need to be part of the conversation are not able to participate in the Zoom forum.

17. Mr. Stuart Evans spoke as an individual and asked about the point of the listening session. He asked what City Council needs to know that was not already apparent? He asked why City Council has not asked the tough questions to the Charlottesville Police Department.

18. Ms. Lisa Castello, resident, expressed disappointment in a decision to remove school resource officers in Charlottesville City Schools, as the mother of a special needs student who has benefitted from their help.

19. Ms. Carol Thorn spoke as a mother of a special needs child, in support of school resource officers. She also spoke about the interpretation for laws and codes depending on the class of people. She advised that the laws and codes need to be reviewed. She spoke in favor of reorganizing the police department and reallocating funds accordingly.

20. Ms. Blakeley Calhoun acknowledged that not everyone has the same experience with police, but those who have been disparately impacted should be heard and action taken.

21. Ms. Nancy Carpenter spoke about FBI crime solving rates, the budget for police officer salaries, police academy training, police culture, mutual response, and the need for housing.

22. Mr. Harold Folley spoke about personal experience with police interactions, and about redirecting police funds toward community engagement.

23. Ms. Karen Waters-Wicks, member of the Charlottesville Police Foundation Board of Directors, spoke about the desire to have a police department that is engaged in community policing and non-biased. She suggested that affordable housing and support for mental health services do not have to come at the expense of defunding police. She advised that she would like to see accountability, a functioning Police Civilian Review Board, and adequately compensated police.

The meeting recessed at 5:30 p.m. and reconvened at 5:45 p.m.

24. Ms. Sarah Hoeing, residing outside the city, but working in the city, spoke about the concept of a social crisis aid system, referencing the emergency medical aid system initiated in the 1970s.

25. Ms. Robin Hoffman spoke about changing policies to confiscate and stop the sale of military-grade firearms.

26. Ms. Patricia Eldredge spoke about the lack of accountability for the police department. She spoke in support of the Police Civilian Review Board and redirecting funds from police to social services.

27. Ms. Lillian McVey spoke as a community mental health service provider and advised that training programs for police have not been working. She spoke about the need to re-evaluate systems with Region Ten and the Department of Social Services.

28. Mr. Devin Coles, local pastor, spoke about reforming the police department to strengthen moral judgment and transparency of data. He was not in support of defunding police. He suggested that officers have thorough psychological screenings. He spoke about the need for a higher level of accountability in the police department and the justice system.

29. Ms. Myra Anderson spoke as a person who has experienced mental health crisis and had interactions with police and Region Ten. She spoke in favor of reallocating funds from police to mental health support; however against placing funds with Region Ten. She spoke about the opportunity to create a system unique to Charlottesville. She proposed a working group to include people who have been disproportionately affected.

30. Ms. Marion Votaw shared personal experience with police doing a good job; however, she spoke against the criminalization of children. She spoke as a mother of a child with severe mental needs and the desire to have options besides a police response.

31. Ms. Sue Lewis suggested that the 911 system could be used for services other than police by asking more questions. She suggested training officers for specific portions of the city to build relationships. She spoke about the law of unintended consequences.

32. Ms. Cherry Henley shared that the policing problem is a black problem, a problem with how police officers respond to black people. She spoke about police accountability and the need for the Police Civilian Review Board.

33. Mr. Nicholas McCarthy Rivera, resident, spoke about defunding the police by 60 percent and putting the funds to community-directed services besides Region Ten.

34. Ms. Joan Fenton suggested that funds from the police department loss of officers could be reallocated. She advised that as a downtown business owner, the only option she has for helping someone in distress is to call 911. She spoke about the need for a new system to distinguish between police response and other response.

35. Mr. Kent Schlusel spoke as an individual in support of work done by police, and about the events of August 12, 2017 being directed toward Jewish people. He spoke about unintentional consequences and suggested looking at deconstructing the duties of police officers. He suggested that the community could use training as well as the police.

36. Mr. Rory Stolzenberg shared his experience with the events of August 12, 2017, which deteriorated trust with the local police department. He spoke about City costs related to local protests.

37. Mr. Jared Cale shared a positive exchange between police and neighborhood children. He advised that the training budget for the police department is low for what would normally be spent for training a department of that size.

38. Ms. Cecilia Mills, resident, advised that a dialogue is needed versus a listening session. She asked about de-escalation training and implicit bias training for officers. She spoke in support of the Police Civilian Review Board.

39. Ms Tracey Hopper, resident, spoke about events of August 12, 2017, and the targeting of African-American people in addition to Jewish people. She spoke in support of a strong Police Civilian Review Board, transparency of personnel records, demilitarizing police, reducing the size of the police force and paying officers better.

40. Ms. Katrina Turner, resident, spoke about Council support for the Police Civilian Review Board. She spoke about officer training and police being fearful.

41. Ms. Jojo Robinson spoke about accountability and giving the Police Civilian Review Board more authority. She spoke about a lack of trust for the systems in place.

42. Mr. Bellamy Brown spoke about community policing and multiple issues. He spoke of the "us against them" culture in policing. He advised that comparatively, the Charlottesville Police Department budget is not abnormal. He spoke about the need for a collective solution.

43. Mr. Bashir Khelafa advised that reform and improvement may be necessary, but spoke against defunding. He spoke about improvements that he has noticed in downtown since the implementation of officers on the mall. He suggested discussing the reason why the defunding requests began.

Councilors made closing comments.

At 6:54 p.m. with two Councilors having lost connection to the meeting because of power outage, Ms. Magill adjourned the City Council meeting for lack of quorum.

Dr. Richardson advised that he would continue being involved in the community. He spoke about the importance of allowing many voices to be heard during this meeting without response.

Ms. Magill reconvened the City Council meeting at 7:01 p.m. as the quorum was regained. Councilors continued comments.

Police Chief RaShall Brackney made comments and stated the importance of starting with this listening session to hear what the community sees as issues needing to be addressed. She made comments about having a safe, healthy community, and a collaborative effort to reach community safety goals. She suggested having a variety of listening sessions based on separate topics.

Vice Mayor Magill adjourned the meeting at 7:12 p.m.

BY Mayor Nikuyah Walker

BY Kyna Thomas, Clerk of Council