Budget amendments shuffle MPD funding, divert $242,000 into violence prevention

Reclaim the Block disrupts Jacob Frey’s press conference, calling on Mayor to give communities “more than lip service”

Minneapolis, MN--The Minneapolis City Council met for much of the day to propose and vote on amendments to Mayor Frey’s 2020 budget. In spite of hearing hours of testimony on Wednesday from community members calling on the council to shift resources out of the Minneapolis Police Department’s (MPD’s) $193 million budget in order to make significant investments in violence prevention, solutions to the opioid crisis, and youth homelessness services, the department is still slated for an $8.2 million raise from last year.

In response, members of Reclaim the Block and Black Visions Collective disrupted Mayor Frey’s celebratory press conference, parading through the conference with large balloon lips and dumping a backpack full of pennies on the floor, and chanting, “You care about the cops more than the many, you gave them gold and gave us pennies,” and “The people aren’t for purchase, we need more than lip service.”

One of the major demands of community members who testified at City Council hearings was for deeper investment in the city’s newly-founded Office of Violence Prevention (OVP), which takes a public health approach to issues of violence. Many council members spoke in favor of support for the office but in the end the council added only $242,000 to OVP’s budget.

“Every penny invested in violence prevention is desperately needed in our city,” said Kandace Montgomery of Black Visions Collective and Reclaim the Block. “But we’re tired of pennies & lip service. It’s time to move real dollars to the things that keep us safe.”

Throughout the budget process, Frey repeatedly affirmed his belief in “safety beyond policing,” although he was not willing to propose any significant shift in resources away from the police department. Because of chronic issues of understaffing and lack of transparency about MPD officer counts, Mayor Frey made an amendment to shift funding originally intended to hire 14 new officers into a different part of MPD’s budget to fund police cadet classes.

Frey was the candidate endorsed by Bob Kroll and the Minneapolis Police Union in his bid for mayor.

Other significant amendments included a $200,000 investment to further build upon the findings of the 911 work group and conduct an efficiency study of MPD’s staffing. Some Council Members expressed concerns that this $200K investment will not be sufficient to complete this
work. The council also passed an amendment that would move funding from a vacant position in CPED to fund a new position to enforce the city’s wage theft regulations, after multiple workers from Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucah (CTUL) testified about their experiences of wage theft.

Council Members Ellison, Bender and Gordon introduced an amendment to make a more significant investment in community safety, by moving $500,000 from MPD in order to fund responses to the opioid crisis, youth services and street outreach, and domestic violence programming. The amendment failed 10-3.

Although many community members, including representatives of grassroots outreach and harm reduction organizations, spoke to the urgent need to fund solutions to the opioid crisis in the face of skyrocketing overdose numbers, no new money for this issue was added to the amended budget, beyond the original $400,000 that Mayor Frey proposed.

The next step in the budget process is a final city council hearing on Wednesday at 6pm. The council will vote on the amended budget at this time.

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