

Written public comments received in advance of Feb 9, 2022 Finance Committee meeting

Received Feb 9, 2022 3:43 PM:

Ian Tapscott

to montaguefinancecommittee@gmail.com, WendyB-Montague

Greetings,

I am unsure of my ability to attend tonight's Finance Committee meeting. I am forwarding the questions I have for the Committee on the matter of police staffing increase, a police cruiser, and dispatch.

1. Has the police department provided evidence and/or reasoning behind a request for increasing their staff levels? I understand that an increase is being spoken about as necessary to meet "minimum staffing requirements." What is the rationale, and what statistics support these minimum requirements?
2. What evidence is available to support the idea that adding more staffing to the department will, in fact, serve the general public safety of our community as a whole. What is the return on this investment?
3. The police department often refers to itself as reactive, and that there is a desire to be more "pro-active." What does a "pro-active" police department look like in real time? What public-safety issues would this model potentially alleviate? Is there evidence to support the idea that increased policing would, in fact, be the most effective solution for said issues?
4. I understand that there is a standard practice of purchasing an additional cruiser every year. Has there been any investigation into the efficacy / necessity / cost-benefit of this practice?
5. Has there been any cost-benefit analysis into whether or not to maintain dispatch within the town budget over combining with the state?
6. What conversations have occurred, if any, about how to conduct a true assessment of the community's needs around public safety?
 - If so, where, and when, and what have been the findings of these conversations?
 - What measures have been taken to make sure that said assessment takes into consideration the needs of *all* community members?

****A brief comment** - it seems that there are plenty of public safety issues that present very real hazards to our community members' well-being. Just this week, I received a text message from the town, a "friendly reminder," that the town can charge anyone up to \$20 dollars a day for not clearing the snow/ice on the sidewalk. While I agree that snow and ice is a very real and significant safety concern, I also know that Montague has an aging population, and that people in general are struggling physically, financially, and emotionally. The struggle to keep up with snow and ice remediation (especially in a time when ice seems to be an increasingly prevalent concern) has very real consequences for our residents. This is just one of many examples of where perhaps \$84k a year, plus the cost of so many dispatchers, plus the cost of a new cruiser every year, may be able to make a very tangible difference in the safety of our community.

I understand that some of these questions may be considered more appropriately directed to the selectboard, as the policy-makers / police-commissioners. Unfortunately, I sent many of these questions to the selectboard two months ago, but never received a reply, nor can I locate a record of these questions being discussed.

I will be prepared to read these questions aloud at the meeting, if I am able to attend. If I am not, I would appreciate it if these could be read during the public comment period at the opening of the meeting.

Many Thanks,
Ian Tapscott
Precinct 6

Received 2/9/2022, 4:26PM

Ya-Ping Douglass

To montaguefinancecommittee@gmail.com, selectscity@montague-ma.gov

Subject: Please prioritize funding community-led safety initiatives instead of police

Dear Montague Finance Committee,

I am writing about the Montague Police Department's request for more funding.

I hope that finance committee members will take into account the call from the Movement for Black Lives and countless racial justice community groups across the country, in addition to

requests from local community members, to truly *reimagine* public safety, and to not fall into the traps of reform that have led cities across the country to continue pouring large portions of the city budget into police at the expense of funding vital social services, as they already have for decades.

The call from the Movement for Black Lives and racial justice groups is clear: do *not* give *more* money to policing. Instead, reduce the size, scope, and power of policing, and fund programs and initiatives that demonstrably benefit the community - affordable housing, harm reduction services, non-police/non-coercive crisis response, restorative and transformative justice initiatives, education, arts and youth programming, climate and environmental initiatives, etc.

Studies show that more policing (and reforms like better training, 'community policing', etc.) do not benefit the community or increase community safety - social services do. I hope the finance committee will take into account empirical data and also the consensus from racial justice organizations across the country that increasing police funding harms many community members, and comes at the cost of investing in tried and true programs that help communities thrive.

Here are a few examples from other cities which have already begun this process:

Seattle has decreased their police budget two years in a row and reallocated the money to affordable housing, support for houseless community members, climate justice initiatives, and city services. They even initiated programs for [participatory budgeting](#) so that community groups could have a direct say in how some of the money was reallocated.

Rochester, New York has defunded police for two years in a row and reallocated money to youth services and [non-police crisis response](#) services.

Somerville cut its police budget by 7.7% for the 2021 fiscal year and was able to start developing its non-police crisis response programs and send more funds to assorted social services.

Norman, Oklahoma diverted 4% of their police budget to social services for the 2021 fiscal year.

Richmond, California, [also reduced the police budget](#) to steer funds towards community safety and community needs.

I also want to share a resource page that highlights scholars, activists, advocates and organizations who advocate and fight for moving money out of the institution of policing and into programs and initiatives that help communities thrive. I know for some people this is a new concept, or may seem extreme, so I share this resource to shed light on the deep and rich history, wisdom, and experience that informs the widespread call from the Black Lives Matter

movement for cities to divest from policing and instead invest in community-led safety. There are hyperlinks to each individual's work, and to the organizations:

[Tinyurl.com/WhoNanLearnsFrom](https://tinyurl.com/WhoNanLearnsFrom)

At the bottom of [the webpage](#) are links to a handful of non-police crisis response programs and peer-led mental health organizations, as well. These are just one example of how funds diverted from police departments can be used to meet community needs.

I've attached a budget analysis for Northampton comparing the increase in department funding over time, from 1994 - 2022. I'm curious whether there is a similar such analysis for Montague dating back to at least as early as 1994 so that community members can see how Montague has allocated money over time, and what the trends are.

Regardless of budget trends, the fact remains that many people, especially many people of color, do not view increased police presence as a benefit to the community. For many people of color, including many people I am close to, increased police presence signals more danger and potential violence - quite the opposite of safety. The people that I know who fear police do not want police to be trained better and they do not want more "community policing." They want *less* police, period, and more programs that benefit the community.

I hope the finance committee can consider the best use of the ~ \$120,000, and the benefits that would come, for which community members, from allocating that money in various ways. Perhaps some of the organizations in town who work with many community members could be consulted about where the community members they are in touch with would like to see that money go. Some organizations that come to mind are the Brick House, Montague Catholic Social Ministries, and the Pioneer Valley Workers Center.

I am also curious what the Finance Committee and Selectboard's process is for evaluating budget priorities and requests. Are there any goals regarding equity or equity frameworks that are being utilized? What information sources and whose perspectives are brought to the table in evaluating budget priorities? If the police chief says something is good for the community, how is that weighed against various local community members' and organizations' experience with police and recommendations with regards to public safety? How do the Finance Committee and Selectboard members view the work of [leading scholars and advocates and organizations](#) who address community safety such as the Movement for Black Lives? What research and perspective informs the finance committee's and selectboard's approach to and understanding of what constitutes public safety, and for whom?

Thank you for your time in reading this and for all your work for our community.

Best,
Ya-Ping Douglass
Turners Falls resident

NORTHAMPTON BUDGET BY DEPARTMENT 1994 - 2022

