

# Mayor Rhodes-Conway: Reimagining public safety

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The murder of George Floyd, the shooting of Jacob Blake, and the Black Lives Matter movement have renewed questions about the role of the police in our communities. We know that the Black community has been harmed by racial bias in policing and the criminal justice system. I am committed to both improving policing in Madison, and working with the entire community to reimagine what public safety means to our city.

I want to share what we've worked on so far, where we are heading next, and how the 2021 Executive Operating Budget I release next week will continue to support these efforts.

First, we are in the process of multiple changes that we hope will help create stronger relationships between the community and the police and help build trust. The Police and Fire Commission is in the process of selecting a new police chief with input from the community. The PFC has received over 40 applicants from across the country and I am hopeful that they will be able to hire a chief to be in position to start work in January.

We are also in the process of standing up Wisconsin's first Civilian Oversight Board on policing, which will soon hire an independent police monitor. The Civilian Oversight Board and police monitor have long been advocated for by the Ad Hoc Committee on Police Policy and Procedure. Our initial appointments to this board were announced recently and the Common Council will add two more names this week.

I am hopeful that the added transparency created through these efforts will help increase trust between the community and the police.

Additionally, the City is strengthening its response to the surge of violence that we've been experiencing this year as a result of the COVID-related economic turmoil. We are seeing significant increases in shots fired, auto thefts, and burglaries from 2019 to 2020, and we must do all we can to stop these trends. Our residents are rightly concerned about this spike and the police are keeping their focus on responding to and investigating reports of violent incidents in the City.

We continue to support the efforts of the Community Safety Intervention Team, which brings together multiple levels of government (City, County and school district) to work in partnership with community organizations to reduce gun violence in the community. We will build on this effort by partnering with the County on a major new investment creating a Violence Prevention Unit at Public Health Madison Dane County aimed at identifying and addressing root causes of violence. We'll also be expanding contractual support to community organizations focused on violence prevention and interruption in the community. You can read more about these new efforts here in the Wisconsin State Journal.

Finally, we are starting to reimagine public safety and think deliberately about what jobs are best performed by police and what jobs might best be performed differently. You'll see some of these changes in the 2021 Executive Operating Budget I am releasing on Tuesday. It will show up in Public Health, Community Development, Transportation, and in the Police budget. This is a very tough budget year, and nearly every department is facing cuts. The Police Department is no exception. Reduced revenue (due to COVID) compounded with contractual obligation from the previous administration to raise pay in MPD, make our job harder this year. We have asked the police union to come to the table to reconsider their contract, but they have not yet agreed. Nonetheless, we are moving forward.

We started this work a year ago when we began the process of moving parking enforcement operations from Police to our Parking Utility. This year, my budget will show that we've continued to identify these opportunities to shift programs and responsibilities off of police and onto more appropriate responders.

Community groups made the case that our schools are over-policed and the data shows disparate results. This summer, in a big win for the advocates who had been working on this for so long, the school board worked with the City to cancel the contract for officers in schools as they work to envision a new way of providing safety in the school system.

This fall we are partnering with the County to investigate models of responding to behavioral health crises with social services instead of law enforcement. The City is informed by successful models of this program in Eugene, Denver, and elsewhere. This model cannot only create a better support system for those in crisis; it also significantly reduces calls to the police which helps them to focus where they are most needed - on violent crime.

In 2021, my focus will be on building the City's support for violence prevention and alternative response models, which will take calls and responsibilities off MPD, while at the same time keeping the police focused on responding to dangerous and violent crime.

I invite you to share your thoughts on this topic. As always, you can contact me at [mayor@cityofmadison.com](mailto:mayor@cityofmadison.com) or (608) 266-4611.