

Budget Town Hall Questions

May 6, 2021

Grand Rapids Police Department

- If the community does not agree with the police strategic plan, will you change course and refund the community with that money?

The Police Department Strategic Plan took into consideration and incorporated community feedback received from as far back as 2015 via many different events and forums and is still in the implementation stage. It was also informed by studies and input from various external experts as well as boards / committees / councils that have taken place over five years. It identifies three strategic priorities: safety, innovation and engagement. It is reflective of the collaborative efforts of Police personnel, other City departments and community input.

The plan also acknowledges 32 key items from the department's "WeHearYou" community feedback analysis. This includes:

- SAFE (Safe Alliances for Everyone) Task Force's focus groups and report (2015)
- #GRTalksBack community session (2017)
- Police Chief recruitment (2019)
- June 2020 town halls and a July 2020 City Commission meeting (2020)
- LINC Up / UCC / NAACP GRPD Strategic Plan Assessment (2020)

The plan includes over 40 specific metrics, many of which have been provided on the [Police Metric Dashboard](#), which will be evaluated over time. It would be premature to speculate on potential changes to the plan (less than one year after it was adopted) without providing adequate time for implementation and assessment. To view the strategic plan, go here: www.grandrapidsmi.gov/GRPDStrategicPlan

To learn more about the plan's development and community engagement go here: <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/files/assets/public/departments/police/files/plans/police-draft-strategic-plan-presentation-aug-11-2020.pdf>

- Recruiting Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) officers does not resolve that the policing system doesn't work and still does harm to BIPOC communities. Also, I'm uncomfortable with such strong allegiance to this "strategic plan." Does it include the recommendations of groups like Defund? [Answered on-air here:](#) https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=5153

The [GRPD Strategic Plan](#) was formulated and adopted after extensive public feedback from community meetings, City Commission meeting comments, interactions with boards &

commissions, and a variety of other stakeholders. To the extent a particular group provided feedback through those opportunities, that input would have been considered. To learn more about the plan’s development and Community Engagement go here:

<https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/files/assets/public/departments/police/files/plans/police-draft-strategic-plan-presentation-aug-11-2020.pdf>

- In the GRPD budget there is a line item titled “800-Other Services and Charges”. What is that for? – answered on-air here: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=4177

This information was publicly discussed during the City Commission’s Budget Review Workshop on May 4. Please see Slide 32 on the presentation located here:

<https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Meetings/City-Commission-Briefings>.

Additionally, below are the specific budget categories included in the “800-Other Services and Charges” budget rollup for the Police Department’s FY2022 General Fund budget. Budget rollups are commonly used to condense and present a large amount of budget data.

Object Type/Object	DESCRIPTION	PROPOSED 2022
Police (301)		
General Fund Operating (1010)		
800 Other Services and Charges		
8010	Contractual Services	1,760,000
8015	Contract Serv-Training	33,750
8240	Fees	650,980
8265	Police-Investigation	26,120
8400	Insurance Premiums	25,172
8450	Claims	772,990
8500	Telephone	148,500
8505	Employee Phone Reimbursement	65,000
8510	Postage	13,000
9000	Printing & Publishing	7,000
9110	Conferences & Travel	179,970
9130	Local Business Expense	5,000
9131	Food-Beverage	13,530
9140	Tuition Reimbursement-Scholarsh	86,540
9150	Memberships	8,370
9200	Electricity	1,000
9210	Natural Gas	500
9330	Software Maintenance Agreements	150,340
9340	Maintenance Service	1,020,471
9410	Equipment Rentals or Lease	252,198
9430	Buildings Rentals or Lease-Facility Mgmt	1,416,894
9440	Fleet Management Equipment Charges	1,601,334
9450	311 Call Center Services	29,526
9470	Employee Parking	290,000
9480	Computer Services-from IT	1,129,305
	GRAND TOTAL	9,687,490

- The City Manager recently said that if the Commission wanted to defund GRPD now would be the time to do that. Why wasn't this possible last year? – [answered on-air here: https://youtu.be/2k8y1LULak?t=4340](https://youtu.be/2k8y1LULak?t=4340).

Last year's motion to reduce the GRPD budget to the minimum allowed under City Charter was not made during the budget development process. While the budget can be amended throughout the year, a large reduction that is proposed for millions of dollars needs time for responsible consideration. While the City Manager did not present a budget recommendation to defund GRPD, now would be the appropriate time for Commissioners to bring forth such proposals if they wish to do so.

- Why is police budget getting preferential treatment over community services? Shouldn't the goal be to promote stability and reduce crime, not to find and punish crime? Giving the police more money is treating the symptom, not the cause.

The budget priorities were set by the City Commission last fall. Public Safety Reform and Crime Prevention were two of them and specifically included the development of a department strategic plan to improve operations and neighborhood relations. Additionally, GRPD currently funds nearly \$18 million of the \$20 million of the City's investments in crime prevention programs. More specific information regarding those investments can be found beginning on page 41 of the May 4 Commission presentation located here: <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Meetings/City-Commission-Briefings>.

- What are the plans to re-allocate funds from the GRPD to community-based resources?

In the FY2022 budget, the Police Department's budget was reduced by three full-time staff positions to specifically address community needs. One position was moved to the Office of Equity and Engagement to bolster support for neighborhood programs like the Neighborhood Summit. Another position was moved to the City's Office of Communications which will help support that department's ability to build out social platforms and other ways to get information to the public. The third position was allocated to the Community Development Department to address residential lead-based paint hazards and housing issues. Another three positions were relocated to the Dispatch Department. The budget recommends a post-budget process to allocate a portion of the ARPA investment the City expects to receive.

*NOTE: The following questions all relate specifically to calls for defunding the GRPD. The response to all the following questions can be found below. **This topic was addressed on-air here:***

<https://youtu.be/2k8y1LULak?t=2723>

- Over the past year, the community has repeatedly called for defunding the GRPD. This budget includes an increase of \$700,000 for the police department. How is this being responsive to the community's requests?
- Why are you not listening and responding to the Grand Rapids community members' demands to defund the police department? Change is needed now.

- Why is GRPD getting \$700,000 more than last year? Shouldn't they be penalized for the many instances of unwarranted force towards Black and Brown civilians in our city?
- Why haven't you listened to the thousands of voices who said to Defund the GRPD to the charter-mandated 32%?
- Why is GRPD getting an increase of \$800,000 in the 2022 budget when thousands of residents are calling to defund GRPD and when they have spent the past year terrorizing black citizens? Why does this additional \$800,000 have to go to the GRPD instead of providing services to the community?
- Why have you not listened to the hundreds of community voices who have called to defund the police to 32%?
- I support efforts to defund the police nationwide and particularly in Grand Rapids. I believe those funds should go towards supporting community initiatives that actually keep citizens safe. The role of police in society should be minimal. Infrastructure, housing, healthcare, community development, etc. are all better ways to use our tax dollars. What are your intentions moving forward regarding police funding? How will you respond to the nationwide and citywide call for defunding?

When developing a budget there are a number of considerations – including input from all corners of the community – that weigh into the City Manager’s budget recommendations. This includes public participation on boards and commissions throughout the year where there is opportunity for public feedback or participation. There is opportunity for public comment at all evening City Commission meetings and specially scheduled workshops. The public was able to directly request clarification during the May 6 City Town Hall Meeting. The community also is represented by two Commissioners for each of the three Wards of Grand Rapids. You may contact them through their email addresses on the [City website](#) to relay feedback.

GRPD’s budget increased by a fraction of the amount necessary to meet previously established cost drivers and contractual obligations. The department actually absorbed the majority of these cost increases by moving vacant positions to other City departments like Communications, Office of Equity and Engagement, and Community Development. The department also offset costs in nonlabor through finding efficiencies. If you look at slide 35 from the presentation on May 4, this was described in detail where the net increase is under \$700,000. That presentation is located here: <https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Meetings/City-Commission-Briefings>.

Please note that while the total dollar amount increased by nearly \$700,000, the total percentage of the General Fund used towards the Police Department’s budget decreased from nearly 39% to 35%.

Cure Violence

NOTE: The following questions both address Cure Violence. The response to both questions can be found below. Both questions were answered on-air here: <https://youtu.be/2k8y1LUlak?t=4576>.

- Why is the City relying on private funding for Cure Violence and not just funding it fully in the budget? Doesn't this run the risk of the program ends if the funding dries up?
- Will you raise the amount for the Cure violence project? And take that money from the PD budget?

The causes of violence are multi-faceted and while the City is committed to addressing and preventing violence, many organizations are needed. There is currently funding for the Cure Violence program. The City's initial investment is \$75,000 a year over three years for a total of \$225,000. We are appreciative of our community's support in helping to reduce violence in our neighborhoods. Spectrum Health, in particular, has made a monetary commitment of an additional \$300,000. The private funding allows the City to further enhance the Cure Violence program. We are also encouraged by private entities that want to address crime in Grand Rapids and want to be part of the solution. Any additional future investments will be assessed as the program is implemented.

Budget Process

- The review timeline and the length of the budget does not allow for full community participation. What would happen if you voted no on the budget? [Answered on-air here: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak](https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak).

By Charter, the City Commission needs to adopt a balanced City budget in May. Failure to adopt a budget by the end of the fiscal year could result in State examination and/or control of the City's finances, which could include a government shutdown.

- Are there plans to start the process over, this time with participatory budgeting by the community? – [Answered on-air here: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=5738](https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=5738)

There are no plans to start the budget process over. By Charter, the City Commission needs to adopt a balanced City budget in May. Failure to adopt a budget by the end of the fiscal year could result in State examination and/or control of the City's finances, which could include a government shutdown.

Staff have recommended a post-budget process for the Commission to determine allocation of a portion of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money to be received by the City. While we are still developing that process, we anticipate that public input and engagement will be a key component and welcome the community's participation.

- Defund the GRPD is the only group of people who have done any work to make this budget information accessible to the citizens who are directly affected by it. Why isn't this a service that the city provides? Why is there also such limited accessibility to meetings (hours long in the middle of a typical work day)? Why are there only limited opportunities for questions from the community squeezed into only 3 weeks? As an affected tax paying citizen I feel that the budget has ALREADY been finalized and all the rest of this is just to appease us and make us feel like we have a say when we really don't. - [Answered on-air here: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=3092](https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=3092)

We certainly understand the desire by the community to be better informed and will continue to assess ways to communicate an incredibly complex topic in ways that are easier to understand. Currently, the fiscal plan and all presentations are located on the [City budget website](#). While work sessions occur during the day, they are also being recorded and are available for the public to view later. Opportunities for public comment are available at every evening City Commission meeting and special budget workshops as well. It is key to note that the Charter requires the City Manager to present a proposed budget to the Commission, but it is not official until the elected body formally votes to adopt it. Residents that wish to provide feedback should contact the City Commission. That contact information can be found [here](#).

- What steps did you take to promote this town hall with the community?

The town hall was advertised via the media, community distribution email lists, e-newsletter, neighborhood associations, and social media. This was done both as part of the overall budget adoption process in late April and as a stand-alone announcements as we got closer to the event.

- What is the average number of community members that attend budget planning meetings throughout the year? How does the city support community members in access to these meetings and the understanding materials they put out?

We do not track the number of public participants at meetings where the budget is discussed. All public meetings are posted in accordance with state law and, often, announced via our social media and community outreach channels. Additionally, we take feedback from the community throughout the year in a variety of ways concerning their thoughts, priorities and preferences which inform the development of the City Manager's proposal.

- Why is the process so inaccessible to the public? There are hardly any overview documents/charts, everything is buried in hundreds of pages of PDF. Hard to find stuff on the website unless you know what you're looking for. Is this really participatory with the public?

As a half-billion-dollar budget with multiple funds, departments, revenue streams, pensions, capital outlays, and unique debt issuance and funding requirements, the City budget is admittedly complicated. Understanding this, we provide a series of budget work sessions where we provide more digestible information and presentations on key areas of the budget. These presentations are open to the public, announced weeks in advance and recorded for those that might not be able to watch them live. All presentations are located on the City budget website. We certainly understand the desire by the community to be better informed and will continue to assess ways to communicate an incredibly complex topic in ways that are easier to understand.

Pandemic Relief and Recovery

- From what you have presented, we'll continue to have income tax issues for the next several years. I know there's money to help us address the impact of COVID but why wouldn't we just fully reopen the city and allow people to get back to work and paying taxes? Answered on-air here: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=3978.

Our ability to fully reopen is dependent on the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) guidelines. City services will fully reopen once guidance indicates it is safe to do so.

- What happens if the pandemic gets worse?

We will follow guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the State of Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). Locally, we will continue to deliver local services in a safe manner as we have done since the first COVID-19 orders last spring.

- What are we going to do when the American Rescue Plan funds run out?

We plan to continue monitoring income tax performance and to adjust the expenditure budget should relief funding run out. This is not a concern for the next two to three years. We can start to prepare now should revenues not recover as expected and relief money not be available.

Housing

NOTE: This item was also addressed on-air here: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=3620.

- There looks to be money to address our local housing crisis in the short term, but this is a systemic problem. I want to know what investments you're making to address this in the long term. How does this budget help solve the housing crisis?

This budget allocates \$250,000 in FY2022 and another \$500,000 in FY2023-26 for the City's Community Master Plan. A significant amount of time will be devoted to discussing current and future housing policies and determining what changes are needed to meet the housing needs facing our community. The FY2022 budget also plans to invest \$5 million of American Rescue Plan Act funds in the Housing Fund. This will provide funds to incentivize development, support affordability and leverage additional resources and will supplement the \$900,000 already saved for this purpose.

- "Housing? Folks are working their butts off just to show they make 3x the amount these apartments and other ppl who rent out are asking for. So why is it so hard to get a loan to own a home pay less and not kill ourselves trying to provide for our families?"

The City is creating the Grand Rapids Housing Fund which will have a board with the intent of addressing issues around housing. It is the intent of this body to meet and set up a long-term strategy. While home loan financing is outside the City's scope, there are actions the City can – and has – taken to help address the housing crisis. Establishing a Grand Rapids Housing Fund is one example but so is making policy adjustments to encourage more housing growth while

protecting and renovating the existing housing stock. Housing and homelessness were specifically covered during the May 11 Commission Budget Review. That information can be found beginning on page 10 of the presentation posted here:

<https://www.grandrapidsmi.gov/Government/Meetings/City-Commission-Briefings/All/2021-05-11-FY2022-Budget-Review-Workshop>.

Equity

- What have you done to support our Black, Indigenous and People of Color business community? – answered on-air here: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=4935.

We are very intentional in our contracting efforts. We've made significant strides in supporting our Micro-Local Business Enterprises (MLBE). One significant initiative was the raising the MLBE bid discount from 3% to 9%. Additionally, we've prioritized grants to increase equity and are currently working with the state to open additional opportunities related to brownfield programs. The Inclusion Policy for Economic Development Policies became effective January 1, 2021 and has already shown good results. Preliminary results from the City's Small Business Grant Program show that an estimated 50% of awards went to applicants that identified as Black, Indigenous and People of Color. The Third Ward Equity Business grant program also made 16 grants to businesses in FY2020.

- How does the amount of what you are calling equity projects compare to the amount last year? Addressed on-air here: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=5507

\$15 million in projects that advance equity were identified in the FY2021 Adopted Budget. \$25 million in projects advancing equity were included in the Proposed FY2022 Budget. This reflects an increase of \$10 million in direct equity spending. In addition, the City as an organization has embraced equity as a core value and, as such, strives to approach all our work with an equity lens.

Economic Development

- Can/will the city support local small-scale developers? – Answered on-air: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=4935.

Yes. We are very intentional in our contracting efforts. We've made significant strides in supporting our Micro-Local Business Enterprises (MLBE). One significant initiative was the raising the MLBE bid discount from 3% to 9%.

- Given the current economic situation, does it make sense to continue providing tax breaks to businesses and developers? – answered on-air here: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=4743.

These projects are important to job growth in our region which means income tax growth. Income tax is the main revenue source for City operations. While we lose some property tax revenues as a result of the establishment of businesses and developers in our City for the first 5

to 10 years, we gain more income tax revenue through their employees relative to what we would have earned in property tax revenue.

Also, on May 11, it was recommended that City Commission consider allocating ARPA resources for investment in small businesses concierge services to assist with business growth.

Misc.

- What is the plan to increase number of Electric Vehicle charging stations? Answered on-air here: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=5600

There is currently no dedicated money in the budget to increase public EV charging stations, but we continue to work with our energy partners and private entities to encourage continued expansion – both locally and statewide.

- Can you help us understand what's included in the fiscal sustainability and efficiency category (of the investments slide of the presentation)?

This category is intended to improve efficiency in City operations and create cost savings in the long term. An example of this is the consolidation of accounts payable or Human Resource functions. By investing in scanners and software, staff time can be reallocated to enhance other City services.

- What "growth" rate is/was used to determine the estimated balance in General Fund moving past the current fiscal year? Or is the estimate shown in the slides based off federal/state funding? ["To clarify - Was the inevitable economic recovery and expansion that will happen as we open up from the pandemic factored into this and if so how and at what rate?"]

The growth used for income tax revenue in the General Fund was conservative for FY2022 at 2%. It is estimated at 6% for FY2023 because we expect more recovery by that time. The final three years are set at a 3% growth. Yes, anticipated recovery was included in the revenue projections. Because the City anticipates receiving relief funding, the expense budget was built on continuation level of services.

- As part of the special events line item, is ArtPrize a portion of that? That event makes a positive economic impact in a big way which I feel is important to this year's success for GR. Answered on-air here: https://youtu.be/_2k8y1LUlak?t=5667

Yes, we have funding to directly support ArtPrize, in addition to a number of other local festivals throughout the year.