

NEW ORLEANS
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CITY HALL

From Answers to Action

Post-Election Policy Making: Public Safety

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BACKGROUND

In 2016, the City Council and the administration asked voters to approve a new 5-mill property tax to increase funding for recruiting, hiring, equipping and paying officers of the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD). BGR supported the proposition, observing that the additional funding would help NOPD to rebuild its depleted ranks, reduce incident response times and provide better public safety outcomes.* BGR also called on the City Council and the administration to hold the NOPD accountable for achieving departmental goals and to carefully calibrate funding to the NOPD's true needs.

Despite widespread concern about NOPD's capacity to respond to crime problems, voters rejected the millage proposition. Its defeat raised questions about the City's ability to address the future funding needs of NOPD.



* BGR, *On the Ballot: New Orleans*, April 9, 2016, p. 11, available at <http://www.bgr.org/reports/bgr-reviews-tax-propositions-for-streets-public-safety/>.

PUBLIC SAFETY

In July 2017, BGR asked the mayoral and council candidates the same three questions regarding the need for additional NOPD funding, funding strategies and accountability for the department's performance.



Would you seek an increase in funding for NOPD? Why or why not?

Mayor LaToya Cantrell

I would consider increasing funding for the NOPD in order to fund the Chief’s retention plan and also to fully fund our crime lab and homicide division. However, prior to pursuing additional revenue, I would ensure that all unallocated revenue within the department is being properly spent.

Councilmember At-Large Helena Moreno

I believe that NOPD should be given the tools needed to effectively fight crime. If they are given the resources they need, then NOPD leadership should be held accountable to achieve results. Benchmarks should be set and met.

Councilmember At-Large Jason Williams

More money is not the answer.

NOPD is adequately funded and needs to be more strategic and innovative to find ways to retain senior officers and attract new recruits.

The resources allocated to NOPD are more than adequate, the safety issues proliferating in our communities are not problems of an underfunded police force. I will continue to invest responsibly in our NOPD so they have all the tools they need to protect and serve, but repeatedly increasing budgets for identical outcomes has to stop.

Restructuring

Recent changes to civil service job tracks for officers are helpful, but considering the breadth of possibilities for improvement, those are relatively small changes. We need to re-envision the way our public safety officers interact with our community so they are protecting and serving all of us.

Councilmember Joseph “Joe” Giarrusso, III (District A)

Yes. Funding is needed for a significant pay raise to boost retention, recruitment, and to enlarge the force as well as to fund other priorities such as technology and ensure proactive measures such as community policing.

Councilmember Jay H. Banks (District B)

Yes. We must pay our officers much more to be competitive with regional departments. Beyond that, we need our good experienced officers to stay.

Councilmember Kristin Gisleson Palmer (District C)

Yes, I support a pay raise increase and would support an increase in funding directed at the hiring and retention of officers. Furthermore, funds should ensure that advancement testing is administered every 2 years, not 5. Officers need a clear path towards career advancement.

Councilmember Cyndi Nguyen (District E)

Improving the quality of life for the people of District E will be my priority. As a nonprofit Executive Director for the past sixteen years, I have extensive experiences making things happen with a small budget. As the next city councilperson for District E, I will work closely with the Police Superintendent and partners to explore and reexamine the NOPD budget to ensure that funds are being used effectively. I believe that the people of New Orleans have been taxed too much and we need to do a better job on how we spend taxpayers’ funds. With limited knowledge and understanding on NOPD’s current and past spending, I am undecided if I would seek for an increase in funding for NOPD. According to my research, NOPD operated on a much smaller budget 6 years ago with more officers and now we have a bigger budget with less officers. What happened? I support our men and women in blue.



What funding strategies would you support to pay for the future needs of NOPD?

Mayor LaToya Cantrell

The NOPD does not need a massive allocation of additional resources. Much of the future needs of the department can be funded through the natural growth of the general fund.

Councilmember At-Large Helena Moreno

NOPD benefits from a variety of funding sources, including dedicated millages, general funds, and grant funds among others. I strongly support the interest from the business community to partner in programs that benefit the police department. Costs related to the consent decree are also slated to decrease during the next Council's term, opening up resources for redeployment.

Councilmember At-Large Jason Williams

After restructuring and changing the way NOPD does business, I will re-evaluate their budgetary needs at that time.

Councilmember Joseph "Joe" Giarrusso, III (District A)

I believe that necessary funding can be found within the city's existing revenue structure without the need for additional taxes. Moreover, I support increasing the number of exempt properties on the tax rolls so the City is collecting its fair share and collection of any other available tax or fee.

Councilmember Jay H. Banks (District B)

We should prioritize our city budget around public safety - especially making sure we have sufficient manpower on the streets from NOPD, but also ensuring that there are services to help young people avoid trouble in the first place. In my experience at the Dryades YMCA, when we provide enrichment and opportunity for kids, they avoid some of the worst pitfalls in our communities and stay on the right track.

Councilmember Kristin Gisleson Palmer (District C)

Since I left office in 2014, the city's revenue has increased \$100 million. I believe funds can be re-allocated from within the existing budget.

Councilmember Cyndi Nguyen (District E)

In reference funding for future needs of NOPD, I want to partner with group/organization that specializes in developing innovative funding strategies. We need to develop a strategic plan on how we address those future needs. I believe that when we have strong economic development projects that create jobs, it will help to curb crimes. I believe that if we invest early in our youth, it will save money in the future. With these strategies in place, we may not need to find support to pay for the future needs of NOPD.



How would you hold the NOPD accountable for achieving its departmental goals?

Mayor LaToya Cantrell

Accountability starts at the top, with the appointment of a police chief provided the autonomy to do the job. However, with that autonomy comes accountability, and that strategy would shape the rest of the department.

I would also want to ensure that we are leveraging our analytic capabilities to the fullest to measure the metrics that most directly correlate to crime and violence reduction. We have a robust budget dedicated toward information technology, and performance and accountability, so we have the capacity to do this.

Finally I would encourage public interaction with the NOPD so that police are attuned to the feelings of the public in relation to their goals.

Councilmember At-Large Helena Moreno

Along with the variety of transparency and accountability measures introduced through the consent decree, I will look to bring our law enforcement leaders together on a quarterly basis to testify in a full City Council hearing regarding metrics and progress. The Council must step up and hold high-stakes Council meetings on the city's number one issue in order to hold our law enforcement leaders directly accountable for progress.

Councilmember At-Large Jason Williams

Departmental goals aren't just some numbers that high-ranking officials get to show to Council once a year during budget season. The performance we expect is only as sophisticated as the metrics against which we measure - a simple, meaningless goal is not a measure of accountability. The way NOPD does business needs to be held accountable and pushed to evolve and innovate, and setting appropriate goals is one way to monitor and encourage that progress. Goals should affect and detect meaningful change, not set an imaginary finish line to cross by a certain date.

Appropriate Goals

First and foremost, we need to make sure we are setting the right goals. Holding NOPD accountable to performance goals doesn't mean hitting an arbitrary numerical target. If we are setting the wrong finish lines, we won't end up where we need to be.

Entire Organization

Accountability extends to all corners of the NOPD, and departmental goals must reflect the performance of NOPD as a whole, from the bottom to the top, from new recruits to senior officials, officers, civilians, and administrative personnel.

Transparency & Repercussions

If appropriate departmental goals aren't being met, we must know why. Cultivating transparency within the NOPD means better troubleshooting and identifying obstacles. ...



How would you hold the NOPD accountable for achieving its departmental goals?

CONTINUED

Councilmember Joseph “Joe” Giarrusso, III (District A)

The first step is to develop a single public safety plan with participation from the city government and the criminal justice system. This plan should include clear goals and quantifiable metrics as to upgraded management, manpower in patrols and specific units, investigation clearances and response times. In addition, I support an “integrated and strategic planning process for all criminal justice agencies” as set forth in the Forward New Orleans 2018 Platform.

Councilmember Jay H. Banks (District B)

We need public and transparent data available for all to see. We need leaders at NOPD and at the City Council to work together across the criminal justice system to make sure we are truly coordinated in our fight against violent crime. Focusing on our communities and restoring police-community relationships will help build trust and also hold NOPD accountable on a grassroots level.

Councilmember Kristin Gisleson Palmer (District C)

I would support quarterly reports from NOPD to the city council that highlight the progress being made in regards to recruitment and hiring. In addition, I would encourage a third party background check to accelerate the hiring process.

Councilmember Cyndi Nguyen (District E)

I will hold NOPD accountable by (1) tracking and monitoring their activities that are dedicated to reducing crime and increase public safety; (2) Connect with organizations and networks that have the tools, resources and platforms to protect and put NOPD accountable; (3) Evaluate & enforce current policies and develop new policy, if needed, that will play a role in holding police officers accountable for their actions.