

From the Director's Desk:

Use of Force? What Defunding Police means

Four Chiefs of Police, the Sheriff and Colorado State Patrol Captain in Eagle County published a letter in the [Vail Daily](#) on June 3rd condemning the "murder" of George Floyd and noting the officer's "criminal intent" while calling for the community to "work with us to continue the building of trust." Many in the law enforcement community are as outraged as the protesters. How many of us have learned through videos in recent years what parents of color across the socio-economic spectrum have had to teach their children for years about a routine traffic stop that so many of us of privilege take for granted--assuming getting pulled over will not result in brutality or death. The country seems to be seeing this clearly together.



Of the George Floyd incident, Vail Police Chief Dwight Henninger said, "I haven't talked to anyone who approves of what happened." The continued fallout has spurred unusually swift action by the Colorado legislature with Senate Bill 217. His peers in policing leadership have also changed perspectives, "I have never seen the out-pouring of police chiefs rapidly condemning anything-ever--as they have the Minneapolis incident, or the firing of officers with consent of unions for misconduct within 24 hours. In my career, I've never seen those responses."

"To look back on history Rodney King, Ferguson, this is different. Since Ferguson, a lot has been done by police on building trust in communities. As bad as this is, I ask myself 'is that work down the drain or would this be much worse without it?'" He added, "there is no training that would even remotely recommend what (the officer) did." Police training has evolved to include community policing, holds and restraints, de-escalation trainings in recent years. For all that, Henninger acknowledged that this time, structural changes to the law appear imminent. "In some ways, this may be unfortunate," he notes, "Congress is considering a national use of force model, which has never been role of the federal government." He wonders, "do we want to go there?" while observing, "what will be passed nationally will be lowest common denominator which is less than the standards most local agencies have adopted."

With so many taking to the streets, millions watching, police use of force has not been under this much sustained public scrutiny since the Summer of 1968, Kent

State, or during the Civil Rights Movement. It may seem remote from the high country which has fewer of the explosive dynamics as other places, but we are not immune to the human impact of racism or injustices or to the resulting policy changes that appear to be coming down the pipe.

It has become a moment. For all that incremental change, years of local reforms may not be enough. The Colorado legislature has acted quickly in response to more than 12 straight days of protest in Denver and other cities across the nation with Senate Bill 217. The Legislature on Monday, sent SB 217 to the Governor to sign according to The [Colorado Sun](#).

As of June 11th, SB 217 is still an evolving work in progress. According to Eagle Police Chief Joe Stauffer, "the merits of the bill are sound. There are several that make sense (i.e. no "choke" holds, use of body cameras, an officer must intervene when another is using excessive force, etc.)," he notes, a number of those standards are already policy in many departments. However the liability provisions are an area where the legislature should perhaps tread with caution. While no one approves of police misconduct, which is already a costly insurance issues for municipalities, no one wants their civic infrastructure to go bankrupt impeding other basic services either.

Use of force looks different to citizens. Henninger says, "use of force always looks bad. We realize there is an ugliness when we see it. It isn't like on TV." Seth Stoughton, professor at University of South Carolina School of Law, former police officer and state investigator wrote in the [New York Times](#), "conflicting attitudes that civilians and law enforcement have toward use of force is glaring" with police evaluating based on a Supreme Court Case whether it was "objectively reasonable" or "justified" while citizens tend to ask, "was it avoidable." Interviewed by "Think" on NPR, Stoughton noted that most proposed police reforms are not new and have been proposed by various commissions for years. He says that many reforms have been adopted locally. He said, "the problem is not lack of knowledge of what to do, it is political will." Suddenly there is widespread political will driven by urgency to respond to public outcry.

The demands of protesters has made many politicians suddenly brave, even as the collective message of the protests has shifted. The window for change is often narrow. It is like a tectonic shift of continental plates; the pressure builds, then change is sudden, then nothing happens for years. The grass grows with roots across both sides of the rift. Today's situation is a recipe for change, not necessarily for good policy that tends to remain un-amended for years because of partisan gridlock outside of such moments.

The initial cause for protesting was to protest a murder caught on camera of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. Those protests called for rapid and higher sentencing of the officers. It was not obvious that the officer(s) would be charged at all. It had taken months for charges to be pressed in the February murder of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia. Protests quickly merged with the Black Lives Matter movement. It resonated across the country because of an accumulated number of recent deaths of black people at the hands of police caught on camera. No one likes an oppressive government. Suddenly a wider audience was exposed to how that works. Currently, the focus appears to be on broader police reforms which has escalated recently in messaging from protesters to somewhat confusing rhetoric around a "Defund Police Movement."



De-fund police? What? No police? How does that work? Sounds like chaos. I'm happy to live in the West, but I don't have any romance about returning to the Wild West where we constantly size each other up based on our sidearms. Thank you, professional law enforcement. Figure this out, please. If you think COVID is stressful, contemplate a balkanized

world policed by militias. Injustice would prosper and commerce would die. Unfortunately, how police are using force each night to address the protests is adding fuel to the debate. Remember that when polled, most Americans value public safety just above clean water. It must be recognized that for segments of the population, especially those of color, police don't appear to be trusted agents of public safety.

At ground zero in Minneapolis, the police may actually be disbanded! According to the [Associated Press](#), a majority of Members of the Minneapolis City Council support disbanding the police department, with one Councilmember saying "we are going to dismantle.. the department, and when we're done, we're not simply gonna glue it back together. We are going to dramatically rethink how we approach public safety and emergency response. It's really past due." Mayors in LA and NYC are already proposing diverting funding from police to other services in response.

What is the de-funding idea about? At a micro level it makes sense. At a macro level, not much. [Forbes](#) reports that "certain police functions can be handled by different departments. The fire department, for instance may be the ones to deal with drug-overdose calls. Mental health professions could respond to distress calls more effectively. What isn't being discussed openly? It isn't really about the police. What has been defunded already is the social safety net which more Americans these days are experiencing due to 20 million unemployment claims. Other than those who are actually wanting to dismantle police departments, most of what is being discussed has to do with de-funding certain aspects of police-para-military equipment (riot gear), tanks and some of the most blunt tools of crowd management such as tear gasess. What is not talked about so much? Re-delegating roles that have fallen back on police over time.

"Defunding" by that definition aligns with actions already taken by many agencies in the high country in recent years like Police collaborating with Project Hope, a mobile crisis intervention group that has been doing that work for a decade this year. Project Hope has recently come to the Eagle River Valley. Chief Henninger puts it this way, "we have defunded so many social services, so much so that the Social Services person of last resort is the 25-year old police officer without a lot of life experience who is out there at 3 in the morning." He continues, "I remember being that young police officer trying to help a married couple who have been married for 40-50 years, when I myself had not been married or had much life experience, but you work it out."

Chief Henninger sites a successful co-responder model that Eagle County agencies copied from a previous partnership in Pitkin County. "Through a partnership between law enforcement agencies, the Community Paramedics Program (Eagle County Paramedic Services), and the Hope Center we stabilize a

scene and they take actions to keep person out of emergency, or needing a lengthy transport to a mental health facility. The Paramedics follow up in the days after an incident. In the county this program has reduced emergency room visits by 74% in year and a half and reduced transports to mental health facility in Grand Junction by 64%."

There is hope for many places which are already far down the road to recognizing that police are not the proper tool for addressing many of our maladies. Michelle Muething, LPC, Executive Director of the Aspen Hope Center, puts it this way, "law enforcement became a huge partner for us. Performing a psychological evaluation used to involve an officer driving the person to emergency room to have assessment - that was expensive and out of place." It also took the officer out off-line for hours. Now, Muething says, "If law enforcement shows up and identifies a situation, they are often calling us while in route. As soon as we feel safe, we tell the officer OK you can go. We may sit with the client for 3 hours in their living room." Unlike that police officer, that crisis clinician has 6 years of schooling and two years of licensing to specific to mental health crisis intervention as well as an entire organization that is geared to follow through with ongoing contact from stabilization through recovery-and that police officer can focus on what they are trained and paid to do, focus on public safety.

Police Departments have been forced to take on far too many problems that are social and societal issues, not law enforcement issues. It could be that de-funding if viewed as a reallocation of responsibility and re-prioritization of the work that is truly about community policing, enforcement of laws, screening out bad actors within the agency, and reforms and trainings around proper use of force, then that makes sense.

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NWCCOG Statement of Support

Northwest Colorado Council of Governments is fortunate to represent 28 high-functioning counties and municipalities as members while providing many direct services to underserved, at-risk populations across our rural region and beyond. Both the communities and leaders throughout our region have responded admirably to both the health crisis posed by COVID-19, and the economic hardships that have followed in its wake.

Amidst the chaos of the last few months and the slow but crucial reopening of our communities, our nation is now experiencing a different type of crisis altogether. Though it may seem distant in miles from us, we cannot help but be impacted by current events set in motion by extreme police brutality committed against George Floyd. Though many of our constituents may work amid destination resorts, and thrive in healthy communities, living in the shadow of wealth and privilege does not spare residents of our valleys from human adversity or shield them from the damaging impacts of racism, injustice or inequality wherever it occurs.

We all feel the impact and recognize the importance of speaking up. NWCCOG stands with those demanding an end to systemic racism and violence, while continuing in our mission to support local leaders as they develop and uphold public policies worthy of our values, our humanity, and our best selves.

Thinking of a pet for your loved one?

Consider a four-legged friend with very low maintenance

The Alpine Area Agency on Aging has been working with our partners and caregivers to provide some furry comfort to local older adults in the form of robotic pets - a low-tech, adorable means to help fight the impact of social distancing and loneliness. A 2014 study found that the influence of animals, both real and robotic, demonstrated improvements in behavioral symptom scores and physical health and imply that the presence of animals can reduce cardiovascular risk. In addition to these benefits, robotic pets are non-shedding, hypo-allergenic, don't need to be fed, watered, walked, or cleaned up after. Guaranteed house-trained and well behaved!

Jackie, a Grand County resident, received Misty just before Mother's Day. According to Jackie's daughter, "Misty is a delight! She purrs, licks her paw, meows and is the next best thing to a real pet."

If you know an older adult who might be interested in a robotic cat or dog, please contact Ceci Peterson cpeterson@nwccog.org for more information.



A "Moonshot" for solar?

Only 9 more installations to reach the goal

Just a bit over three years ago, Ryan Harry Director of the Weatherization Assistance Program for the Colorado Energy Office, challenged his team to install 300 rooftop solar arrays in their client's homes who live in the Xcel Energy service areas. Ryan remarked in a recent email, "Possibly the most striking part of the challenge was that we had no idea what we were doing and had to learn fast. After all we were the first state in the US to do rooftop solar within WAP."

Fast forward to today, and there are 291 systems interconnected with 51 systems in the queue. This success story depended heavily on teamwork from WAP organizations throughout the state. Doug Jones, Director, and Nate Speerstra, Manager, of NWCCOG's Energy Program, along with Marcy Child of HRWC, were mentioned as having "installed arrays on the Western Slope and all over the central part of the state at a fast rate."

NWCCOG is working on its ninth installation with more to come. Jones is excited about the opportunity installing solar provides, "This is a great steppingstone to build on. We're not only changing the way we think about energy by moving more toward renewables, but we're also doing our part in support of climate change advancements. " He went on to say the Colorado Weatherization program is, "moving toward helping lower income families while also being a driving force toward using a more sustainable energy sources - which in turn helps with incremental improvements in our climate."

To date, WAP has recovered over \$1.74 million in rebates.

The state team will be challenged to continue their efforts. Ryan went on to say, "I'm excited to keep doing something no one else has done before in WAP and look forward to expanding beyond Xcel and into other utility territories."

After the pandemic? Celebrations!

Example array:





[See NWCCOG Coronavirus Resource Guide here](#)

NWCCOG strives to not duplicate resources compiled elsewhere. For municipal actions taken, [CML](#) has the best resource. For current public health orders, those should be sought from your county website. There are numerous resources for businesses or individuals kept up to date regularly. If you would like guidance on what is the best resource for your needs, contact Jon and I will guide you there.

[Coronavirus Anxiety Workbook](#)

THANK YOU

So many of our Members are doing tremendous front-line public service through this difficult time; if you are one of them, Thank you, you are appreciated more than ever for your public service. I've been privileged to be on daily update calls with both Eagle County and Summit County EOC, and it is assuring to listen in to collaboration going on in real-time.

NWCCOG offices are closed to the public and most staff are working remotely so please contact them by phone or email. AAAA is in full-tilt mode adapting to meet the needs of Older Americans across the region. Energy Program Employees are working with strict safety protocols for themselves and their clients. The Elevator Inspection Program has suspended mosts field inspections and are catching up on a back-log of remote work. More than half of our programs and nearly 50 employees regularly work remotely. For more detailed and current status, please call your usual contact at NWCCOG.

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please forward them to this link.*

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Next NWCCOG COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, July 9, 2020

Full Council Meeting

Location: TBD

Time: 10:00 a.m. - TBD

Primary Agenda Items: Approval of 2021 dues; discussion re: Annual Planning Meeting Agenda

Northwest Colorado Council of Governments

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