

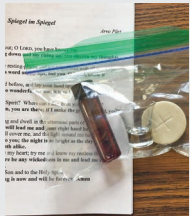
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Developer sued for damaging affordable apartment now plans to demolish it

The owner of 2003 Aldrich Ave. isn't sharing its cost estimate for repairing the building. Randolph Street Realty Capital plans to demolish it in September and build a market-rate apartment on the site. Photo by Isaiah Rustad

By Zac Farber

Lowry Hill East neighbors are mobilizing to try to save what was once a 25-unit affordable apartment from demolition, but despite the current owner having played a role in damaging the building, city officials say there's little to be done to stop it.

The city ordered the apartment at 2003 Aldrich Ave. to shut down in 2018, with families forced to move out, after cracks large enough to see through floors appeared in the facade and inspectors fretted that further shifts of the building could cause a gas leak and, potentially, an explosion. The building, which includes two retail spaces, has been vacant ever since.

SEE **CRACKED APARTMENT** / PAGE A14

Not so fast

Charter Commission's slow-rolling of public safety amendment follows pattern

By Andrew Hazzard

When the Minneapolis Charter Commission voted to use its full review period to consider an amendment to replace the traditional police department with a new public safety model — a move that will keep the issue off the 2020 ballot — Council President Lisa Bender wasn't surprised.

In many ways, the move echoes events that Bender saw play out two years ago. On June 23, 2018, Thurman Blevins, a 31-year-old Black man, was shot and killed by Minneapolis police during a foot pursuit. In the aftermath, Council Member Cam Gordon (Ward 2) proposed a charter amendment that would have given the City Council more power over police department operations. The council approved the amendment on a 7-5 vote and sent it along to the Charter Commission for review. Like this year, the body opted to take its full review, and the amendment was kept off the 2018 ballot.

The killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer has drawn unprecedented levels of protest, activism and attention to city government, including to the Charter Commission, a little-known, judge-appointed board that didn't even broadcast its meetings until the coronavirus pandemic began.

Now that board, and the role it plays in Minneapolis, is under more scrutiny than ever.

The proposed amendment would have eliminated the requirement for a minimum number of police officers and replaced the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) with a public health-based department of public safety using a combination of traditional peace officers, social workers and interveners to address crime and safety issues.

The City Council's intention was to create alternatives to armed police, to assert more direct power over the force and to increase the

SEE **CHARTER COMMISSION** / PAGE A6

Ilhan Omar wins big; Fateh ousts Hayden

Two seasoned local DFL lawmakers suffer primary defeats

By Nate Gottlieb

U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar, the first Somali-American elected to Congress, swept to victory over a well-funded primary challenger on Aug. 11 as two other progressive candidates of color — both second-generation African immigrants — staged primary upsets against established local DFL state legislators.

In Southwest Minneapolis, Omar bested the Uptown resident and media lawyer Antone Melton-Meaux on his home turf, winning every precinct in the Uptown area while also taking the neighborhoods along Interstate 35W.

Melton-Meaux won most of the higher-income, whiter precincts south and west of the Chain of Lakes, showing strength in a majority of the precincts won by former Vice President Joe Biden in the March presidential primary.

Omar won every Southwest precinct that went to Sen. Bernie Sanders, as well as

precincts in Bryn Mawr, Kingfield, Tangle-town, Linden Hills, Armatage and Kenny that went to Biden and Sen. Elizabeth Warren in March.

Out of the 40,389 ballots cast in 39 Southwest precincts, roughly 58.1% went to Omar, 40% went to Melton-Meaux and 1.9% went to other candidates in the five-way race.


Omar, a progressive hero whose left-wing views, political missteps and racial identity have attracted a variety of critics, won 58.2% of all votes cast in the 5th District — a 19-point margin of victory and a significant expansion of her base from the 2018 primary, when she won 48.2% of the district.

"We earned a mandate for change," Omar said in an election-night statement. "Despite the attacks, our support has only grown."


SEE **PRIMARY** / PAGE A12



Omar Fateh, 30, was overcome with emotion on Aug. 11 after defeating incumbent state Sen. Jeff Hayden in the Senate District 62 primary. Photo by Isaiah Rustad




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News

Public Safety Update

By Andrew Hazzard

Man shot, killed in Stevens Square

A man was shot and killed in a Stevens Square apartment Aug. 14.

Minneapolis police say they were called to an altercation on the 1700 block of 3rd Avenue South at about 4 a.m. and received additional reports that shots had been fired en route. At the scene, officers found an unresponsive man with gunshot wounds. Emergency medical care was applied at the scene by officers and paramedics.

The victim was transported to Hennepin

Healthcare by ambulance, where he was pronounced dead.

The man's identity has yet to be released by the Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office.

The death marks the second homicide in the 5th Precinct this year. Citywide there have been 49 homicides in 2020, a figure that already has surpassed the total for 2019, according to police data.

5th Precinct vandalized

A group of protesters vandalized Southwest Minneapolis' 5th Police Precinct on Aug. 15, breaking windows and marking the site with graffiti.

A group of about 50 people marched toward the precinct headquarters at 31st & Nicollet shortly after 10 p.m., according to the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD).

Inspector Amelia Huffman, who commands the precinct, said the group broke windows and launched large fireworks into the building, which was also covered in graffiti and paint.

The graffiti included anti-cop rhetoric, the message "blood on your hands" and profanity directed against police union leader Lt. Bob Kroll, whose name the protesters wrote as "KKKroll."

Huffman told the South Uptown Neighborhood Association that the group came to the

building at a time when police were responding to two separate shooting incidents in Southwest, at 27th & Colfax and 36th & Hennepin, leaving few officers at the precinct headquarters. The precinct called for backup, but the group fled before more officers arrived, she said.

No arrests have been made in the incident, according to MPD spokesperson John Elder.

"This unlawful and senseless behavior will not be tolerated," Police Chief Medaria Arrodondo said in a statement. "Acts such as these do absolutely nothing to constructively engage and activate true and real needed reforms."

The Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association said it "is tired of being nice and politically correct to people who destroy, burn and loot" in a Twitter post responding to the incident.

NOTED: Historical metal stop signs and part of a switch stand have been reported stolen from the Como-Harriet Streetcar Line, according to the Linden Hills Neigh-

borhood Council. The historic trolley has not been in service this season. Park Police are investigating.

FROM CHARTER COMMISSION / PAGE A1

city's leverage over the powerful police union.

Critics of the amendment have argued that it leaves questions about the future of public safety unanswered, that it would decrease mayoral power and that it would be a dangerous change at a time of heightened violent crime and flagging police morale.

But the council voted unanimously to place the amendment on the ballot, saying the decision should be left to voters.

Minneapolis residents largely disapprove of the MPD but have mixed views on decreasing the size of the force, according to a new poll conducted by the Star Tribune, KARE 11 and MPR. While 66% of residents have an unfavorable view of the department, the city is split on whether to decrease the size of the force; 44% oppose a reduction in force, while 40% support it. (The poll's margin of error was 3.5%.) However, 73% of residents said the city should redirect some police funding to social services like violence prevention, drug treatment and mental health programs.

When the Charter Commission voted 10-5 to use the full 150 days allotted to it by state law to review the proposed amendment, instead of the minimum 60 days, it effectively prevented a vote on the issue this fall at a time when urgent change is sought by many residents.

How we got here

Minneapolis took longer than other large Minnesota cities to adopt a home rule charter. While St. Paul voters approved a charter in 1900, Minneapolis voters rejected adopting one that year and several attempts failed before the charter was adopted in 1920. Since its adoption, major changes to the city's constitution have been rare and contentious.

"It's something people have been fighting over for more than 100 years," said Michael Lansing, an associate professor of history at Augsburg College.

Most voters don't pay any attention to the Charter Commission, he said, but the body is essentially a standing constitutional convention. The commission itself doesn't have much power — its recommendations are nonbinding — but it does have the ability to delay.

"In some ways the Charter Commission doesn't matter, but in other ways it matters greatly," Lansing said.

The unique structure of the police department within the city charter today emerged from a mid-20th century political battle, according to Lansing, who is researching a piece about the MPD and the charter for Minnesota History magazine. The police union of the 1950s, led by Carl Johnson, became more adept at city politics. At the time

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FROM **CHARTER COMMISSION** / PAGE **A6**

the union did not have collective bargaining power and fought for an ordinance that set police wages at 85% of the maximum salaries of the largest trade unions in Minneapolis. The ordinance, approved in 1954, was seen as a big win for the police union and helped structure the union's relationship with members of the City Council, Lansing said.

In 1960, a proposed charter amendment would have changed Minneapolis from a weak-mayor government to a strong-mayor government. The police union feared a strong-mayor system would limit its bargaining power and the influence it could exert on individual council members, Lansing said, and organized labor in general opposed the amendment, which failed.

In the 1961 election, the police union maximized its power. Feeling undercompensated and overworked, members backed a charter amendment that established the staffing ratio requirements that exist today (1.7 officers per 1,000 residents). That year, Lansing said, the union had its members actively support all incumbent council members. With the support of labor unions, the City Council and the mayor, the charter amendment won easily.

The victory led the union to want more, Lansing said, and in 1962 it pushed for another charter amendment that would have boosted police wages to match the maximum salary of the largest trade union. The Charter Commission rejected this amendment, but it made its way onto the ballot, where it was soundly defeated by voters.

The political power of the union faded over the '60s during the civil rights movement but rose again in the late 20th century, Lansing said. Today, the union, led by Lt. Bob Kroll, who spoke onstage at a 2019 Donald Trump campaign rally, has more power over the rank and file than the police chief, he said.

He thinks changing the public safety system in Minneapolis will be a multi-year process.

"Any system or structure that can be made by people can be unmade by people," Lansing said.

Role of the commission

Many have criticized the body as an unelected group that trends older, whiter and wealthier than the city as a whole. The 15-member commission has just three members of color. Members predominantly reside in South and Southwest Minneapolis, according to data compiled by the Minnesota Daily.

"People in Minneapolis have been in the streets for months demanding change, only to hear from the Charter Commission that there haven't been enough studies and consultants," said Sophia Benrud of activist group Black Visions Collective. "When white supremacy is the law of the land, it is a luxury to say we need 'more time' before we can make change. Every single voter should have had the chance to vote on this amendment in 2020. This should have been our decision, not the Charter Commission's."

The Charter Commission heard hundreds of public comments on the amendment before its decision and received more than 5,000 written comments. Most comments made in hearings called for the body to let residents vote in November.

For those upset by the commission's decision, there's little immediate recourse. Commissioners can only be recalled by the chief judge of Hennepin County District Court or by an amendment to the state constitution. Commissioner terms last four years, and current terms don't expire until 2022 and 2023.

The day of the vote, the Charter Commission debated its own role in city government.

"I don't think we've come to a consensus as a commission of what our job is," vice chair Jan Sandberg said.

When considering a charter change, the commission can vote to recommend approving, rejecting or proposing an alternative amendment.

Commissioners supporting the delay

said there is additional legal review and public engagement needed on the amendment. Those opposed to taking more time largely disagreed with the amendment, but thought the commission was outside its role to keep it off the ballot this year.

"I'm concerned this motion will be viewed by our residents and council as a delay tactic," Commissioner Toni Newborn said.

Commissioner Andrew Kozak, who voted to use the additional 90 days, said the body should use its delay to safeguard against poor amendments.

Charter Commission Chair Barry Clegg said the body knows it is unelected but has a job to do under state law. Part of its role is to decide if a charter change is well-considered and that he believes the council's amendment was not.

"Charter changes should be discussed for months, not hours," Clegg said.

Commissioner Al Giraud-Isaacson, who proposed a failed amendment that would have eliminated police staffing requirements in the charter, said the commission had enough time to make a recommendation or propose alternatives. He said he would recommend rejecting the amendment, but thought the body was outside its role if it sought to improve the proposal.

"This should be going to the ballot in November and the ultimate decider and safeguarders should be the people and voters of Minneapolis," Giraud-Isaacson said.

Council reaction

Council Vice President Andrea Jenkins (Ward 8) said she believes voters should decide the issue and the council will continue to try to engage residents on the issue.

"It doesn't deter us — we're going to move on that path," Jenkins said.

People in Minneapolis are fed up with the government system set up by its founders, Jenkins said. But the Charter Commission, she said, serves as a de facto judicial branch in that system and has a role to play.

While many have said they fear delaying a vote to a nonpresidential election year in 2021 will lead to lower turnout, Jenkins believes there will be substantial interest in municipal elections next year — when City Council seats are on the ballot — and that residents will want to participate.

Many commissioner comments indicated disagreement and skepticism with the substance of the amendment, which Bender believes is outside the body's purview.

"I think it's really too bad and there was a clear outcry from the community to have a chance to vote on this," Bender said.

The 2020 election will likely have record voter turnout, she said, and putting it on the ballot this year would have been a good gauge of how people feel about making a large change. Bender thinks it's likely there will be a signature campaign to put a similar amendment on the ballot. A civilian petition to amend the charter must garner 5% of the total votes cast in the city in the last state general election, which would mean at least 10,356 signatures.

It's good that people are paying attention to the commission, which will soon be redrawing ward lines after the 2020 census results, she said.

Council Member Linea Palmisano (Ward 13) said that while she's not sure what the Charter Commission will do with its additional 90 days, she does think there is a benefit to aligning the likely vote on the amendment with the year-long engagement process the City Council approved to learn more about what residents want in public safety.

"I think it's good that we have a whole year more to hammer out something that people can say yes to," she said.

Palmisano voted with her colleagues to put the question on the ballot because she felt residents deserve to decide the future of public safety, but feels there are improvements needed to the amendment. She sees the Charter Commission's role as ensuring the City Council thinks through all angles of a change and didn't see the move as a pocket veto or as the commission overstepping its bounds.

"Ordinances are things that can change all the time; our charter really shouldn't," she said.

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