

Embargoed till 7:00PM September 3, 2020

Letter of Resignation from the Burlington Police Commission
Mark A. Hughes
September 3, 2020

My resignation from the Burlington Police Commission is effective immediately.

The statutory authority, delegated powers and design of the commission render it ineffective. The City Attorney and the Police Union Contract further limit any authority that the Commission would have to provide adequate oversight. The Department's gatekeepers ensure limited visibility of the Commission into the BPD. The investigation and disposition of the social media matter leading to the resignation of Chiefs was a complete failure and continues to be unresolved. Despite these conditions, I continued to serve.

The handling of the discipline of the three officers involved in violence must be framed with historical race data on traffic stops, search rates, arrest rates, use of force and more. The challenges must additionally be contextualized with racial inequities in housing, employment, education, economic development and more. This is systemic racism.

Operation Phoenix R.I.S.E. is a start in addressing systemic racism in Burlington. "Restructuring Public Safety" is the "R" in Rise. In addition to reducing the uniformed officer budget by 30 percent, work is underway to better understand community values and vision for services and assess the department for restructuring. All parties must be committed to seeing through in earnest this plan, which was arrived at in a democratic process.

Currently our Deputy Chief, a former mayor a former chief of police and others instead choose to engage in divisive campaigns that seek to undermine any hope for it's success. The mayor has a responsibility to address this and lead.

The Racial Justice Alliance calls for the removal of Officers Corrow, Belavance and Campbell included hundreds of callers that spoke for hours in public testimony. The BIPOC-led protesters in Battery Park are asking for the same thing. These BIPOC folks are emblematic of all black folks in this city and I am concerned that their asks are not being considered in light of the 401 year-old problem of racism, the current racial reckoning of a nation or the commitment to change in the City of Burlington. The flat out dismissal of their demands is hypocritical as we declare racism as a public health emergency as the top concerns for danger or death of black folks like me in Burlington is interaction with a police officer.

These protesters have been peacefully protesting for the past ten days at risk of their lives with folks with live weapons on site, being fired upon with B-B guns and numerous other threats. Focusing on their on the potentially threat they pose on so-called public safety ignores the proven threat that policing has had on our black community from inception to present day, indicated nationally and here in the city of Burlington. Strategic and political decisions to elevate the concerns of anosmia ridden residents resulting from this cry for justice reveals the priority to return the privileged white residents to slumber, not protect the woke black folks of Burlington.

The problem is not that this administration does not have the ability to take action on this demand. This administration chooses not to take action because they are unwilling to accept the cost of doing so. This administration is unwilling to consider that cost that black bodies have paid throughout history or the pornographic levels of wealth acquired by white people as a result it – **unwilling to consider the cost that the folks of the BIPOC-led Movement in Battery Park are willing to pay**. At the time of this resignation, there has been no emergency meeting scheduled for the Police Commission or the City Council. In the absence of such quorum, no action can be taken to a vote; vital votes that would be required to take the actions of terminating these officers or asking for their resignations at a minimum, despite the city attorney's skillful fiduciary advice. The mayor has shown no political will or intestinal fortitude to act unilaterally on such decision.

I stand with the Racial Justice Alliance in support of the demands of the BIPOC protesters in Battery Park. I can no longer do so while serving as a Burlington Police Commissioner. It is not likely that anyone in this administration should be surprised by my position. I ask that the Police Commission and the City Council to convene in emergency sessions and do what you know you must. I ask the mayor to be a history-maker by placing a priority on the protection of black bodies above money. I call on the community to dial in to this moment, support this movement and vote! Black Lives Matter!

Sincerely,

Mark A. Hughes