

Des Moines Peoples Town Hall

July 21, 2021

Des Moines City Council has spent over a year punishing members of the public who criticize the city government and the Des Moines Police Department. Council has consistently and blatantly targeted Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, especially women. When council went to virtual meetings on Zoom they would mute people they disagreed with, sometimes resorting to kicking out members of the public during meetings. Council further restricted speech by introducing new rules and putting controversial items in parts of the meeting that did not allow public comment. Now that meetings are in person, council is escalating their punishment of residents even further, using direct violence in response to speech.

At the July 19, 2021 meeting, council ordered DMPD to violently arrest a Black woman for standing on her chair. Mayor Cownie's last words in the council chambers were to order the officers to "go do their jobs". The action of standing on a chair does not violate any of council's rules but Mayor Cownie arbitrarily decided the action was "disruptive". In past meetings, council carried on with business amidst loud chanting in the council chambers, so the suggestion that one person silently standing on a chair was too disruptive to continue the meeting is a blatantly lie.

Council has continually ignored their own rules (and constitutional law) and instead followed their own feelings to criminalize members of the public and physically remove them from public meetings. When council does decide to follow arbitrary rules, they do not apply them equally amongst the members in the meeting. In this same meeting, other members of the community stood and interrupted speakers but were not declared disruptive, asked to leave, or arrested. This proves that the increased restrictions in the past year were targeted.

Council must stop using violence against members of the public who they do not agree with. Council must stop applying rules selectively to target individuals and communities they do not agree with. This is a violation of basic, essential speech rights.

Council must end their contract with the Conley Security Group, a group run by Tom Conley, a man who has made violent and racist comments towards the people he is now paid to search and surveil.

Council must allow comment on items such as DMPD funding, especially given that Ward 4 councilmember Joe Gatto has admitted that they are being placed on the Consent Agenda to avoid potential criticism.

Council must make public meetings accessible to all. Council must offer hybrid meetings to those who are unable to attend in person and they must stop using security as an excuse to block members of the public from bringing items such as food and water into City Hall.

Council must fire Scott Sanders, fire Dana Wingert, follow the recommendations of the marijuana enforcement task force, defund DMPD, and invest in our communities.

Until the city stops this violence, it is our duty to call attention to these escalating acts of violence.

