

Burlington Police Chief Search Public Engagement Report

Introduction

Background

In April 2020, Mayor Weinberger suspended the Police Chief search due to the uncertain circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the goal of re-starting the search following the 2021 mayoral election.

In May 2021, Mayor Weinberger announced the Administration would resume the Police Chief and began the process with a robust public engagement effort to seek community feedback on policing in Burlington, qualifications our community would like to see in the next Police Chief, and the important priorities for our next Police Chief.

Mayor Weinberger also announced the two Police Commissioners and two City Councilors that would serve on the Search Committee:

- City Councilor Karen Paul
- City Councilor Jane Stromberg
- Police Commissioner Stephanie Seguino
- Police Commissioner Melo Grant

The stated goals of the public engagement process were to develop a report to guide the work of the Search Committee, update the Police Chief job description, and seek feedback from the broad community on policing in Burlington.

Public Engagement Methods

The public engagement process included a survey, which was available in eight languages. Mayor Weinberger and members of the Search Committee held listening sessions with the following groups:

- LBGTQ+ community
- Business community
- Youth – City and Lake Semester students
- Parents/education
- Black community leaders & activists
- Police Department staff
- Burlington Police Officers Association

Feedback from this community process was incorporated to develop the **Ideal Candidate** profile, which will accompany the position posting.

The Ideal Candidate

Public Safety through Transparency and Integrity

The Chief of Police in Burlington, Vermont will be committed to promoting public safety and providing it through fair, accountable, and effective policing. The ideal candidate will have a proven record of professionalism, integrity, transparency, cross cultural competency, and community engagement.

The Burlington Police Department has shown itself to be professional, skilled, and able to successfully embrace change and improvement. The ideal candidate will strive to reach the highest ideals of public service and personal conduct. This individual must be able to manage emergency situations and create a culture of transparency, accountability, and respect within the Department and the community by being fair, equitable, and a good listener to diverse community voices.

Recruitment, Training, Retention

The next Police Chief will provide clear direction and offer support to the dedicated police officers and administrative staff of the Burlington Police Department. The ideal candidate will care deeply about officer wellness and safety and understand the pressures that officers face in their line of work. The next Police Chief will recruit personnel who understand and appreciate police transformation, the history of institutional racism, and community participation in public safety. The next Police Chief will strive to build a police department that reflects not only our community as it is, but as we want it to be.

Racial Justice

Many communities across the nation are grappling with the troubling history of racism in the United States within policing and public safety. The ideal candidate will understand that history and desire to overcome the historical injustices of our institutions. They will be reform-minded and committed to working for racial justice and eradicating systemic racism in all institutions, including policing.

Burlington's next Police Chief will be responsible for collaborating in the development and implementation of several police transformation processes. These processes will require extensive community input and explore public safety models to provide our community with the requisite tools to collectively understand both our public safety needs and the future of policing in Burlington.

Strategic Visionary

The ideal candidate will have a demonstrated history of collaborative, empathetic, and innovative strategic planning, revolutionary thinking, de-escalation tactics and problem-solving skills in public safety and community policing. They will also be committed to and experienced with using current technology to obtain and analyze crime and other data for deployment and decision-making.

This individual will be a visible leader with a genuine desire to become an active and collaborative participant in all parts of the Burlington community and have a resolute commitment to developing long-term, collaborative and respectful relationships across the community. The Chief will have a demonstrated record of success with outreach and public engagement in a racially and culturally diverse community setting.

21st Century Policing

The ideal candidate will be committed to innovation, continuous improvement driven by data, and the principles and practices of 21st Century Policing. The Chief will understand the relationship between public safety and public health, and have experience addressing mental health-related issues. The ideal candidate will pursue a restorative vision of public safety that understands that a police response and/or criminal charges are not effective or appropriate for all problems at all times.

Survey Results

The Mayor’s Office conducted a survey that was open from May 14 to June 25. 588 individuals responded to the survey.

The survey was promoted through the Mayor’s email list, social media, and Front Porch Forum. It was also translated into eight languages and shared through the Trusted Community Voices group.

Toward the end of the survey period, we heard the feedback that it would have been useful to include more demographic questions, such as race, age, and gender. While we didn’t collect that information for this survey, the Mayor’s Office plans to publish more surveys and will include those questions in the future.

Survey respondents overwhelmingly expressed that an unwavering commitment to transparency and accountability, as well as having the courage to have difficult conversations to administer discipline or corrective action when necessary, were important qualifications for the next Police Chief.

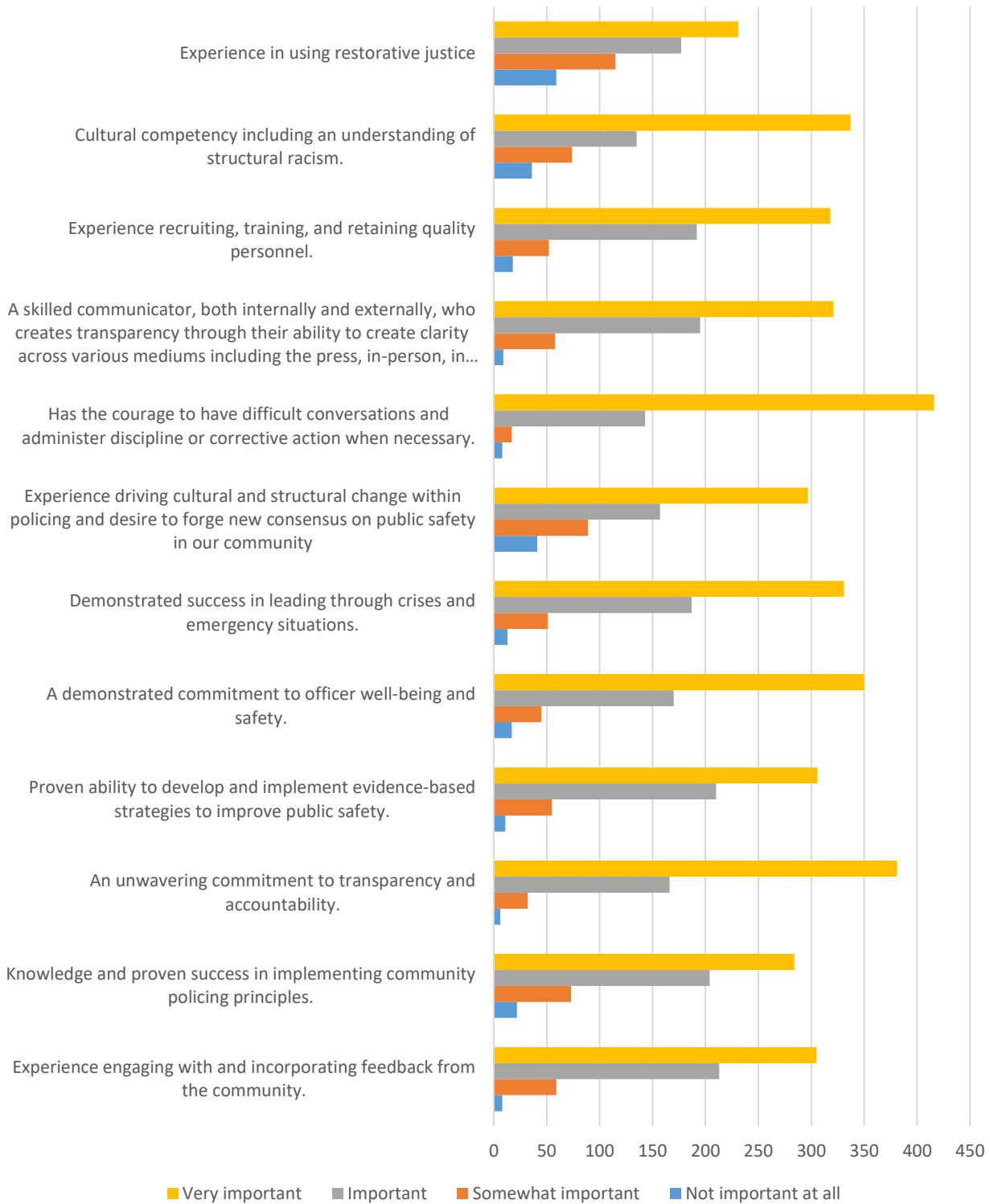
Respondents also agreed that building trust in the community, ensuring accountability and transparency within the Department, and improving officer training should be all be top priorities for the next Chief.

Question 1: Qualities

What qualifications are most important to you in our next Police Chief?

Quality	Percent marked as “Important” or “Very Important”
Has the courage to have difficult conversations and administer discipline or corrective action when necessary.	95.7%
An unwavering commitment to transparency and accountability.	93.5%
A demonstrated commitment to officer well-being and safety.	89.3%
Demonstrated success in leading through crises and emergency situations.	88.9%
A skilled communicator, both internally and externally, who creates transparency through their ability to create clarity across various mediums including the press, in-person, in group settings, and on social media.	88.5%
Experience recruiting, training, and retaining quality personnel.	87.9%
Experience engaging with and incorporating feedback from the community.	88.5%
Proven ability to develop and implement evidence-based strategies to improve public safety.	88.64%
Cultural competency including an understanding of structural racism.	81.07%
Knowledge and proven success in implementing community policing principles.	83.9%
Experience driving cultural and structural change within policing and desire to forge new consensus on public safety in our community	77.7%
Experience in using restorative justice	70%

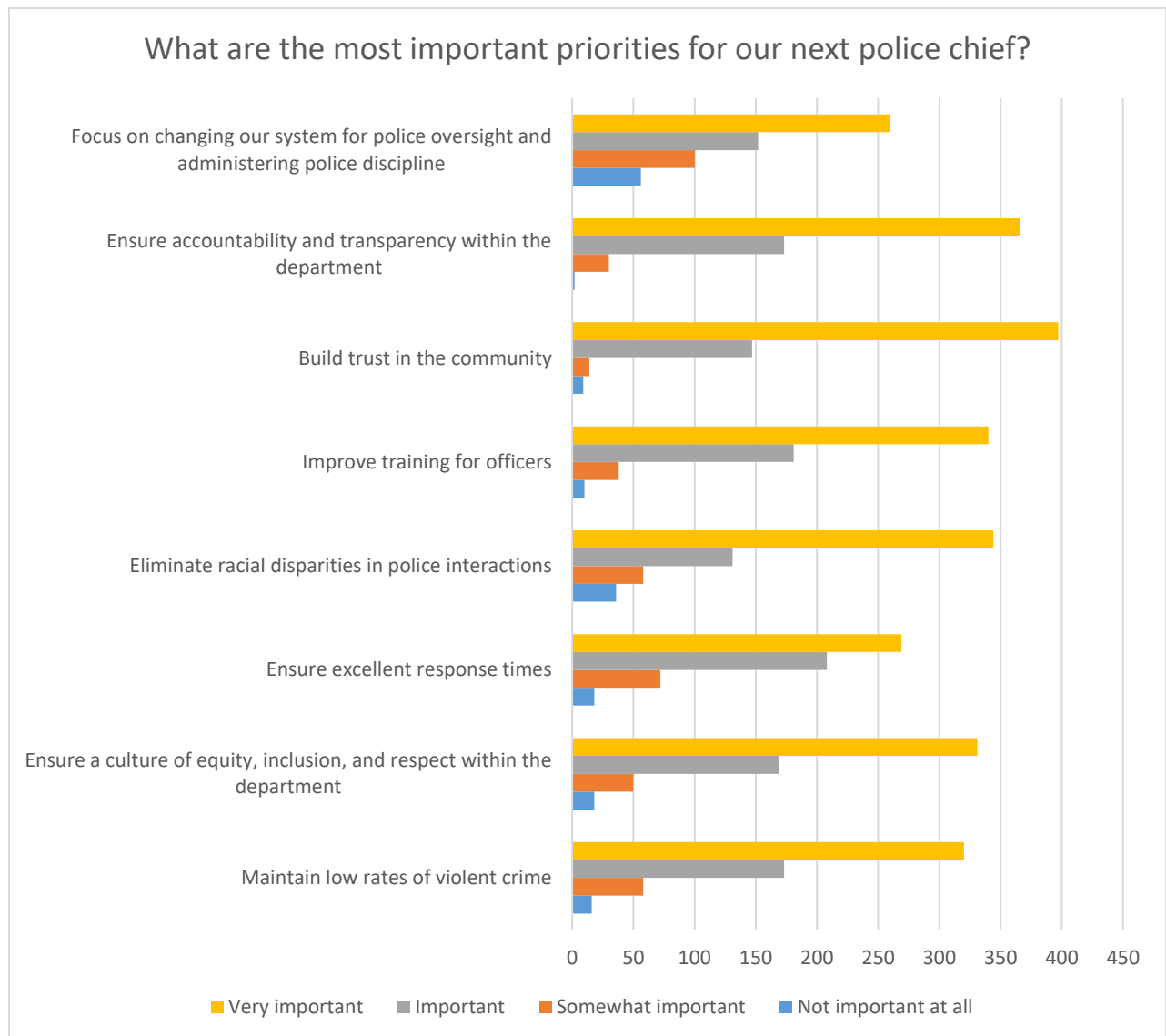
What qualifications are most important to you in our next police chief?

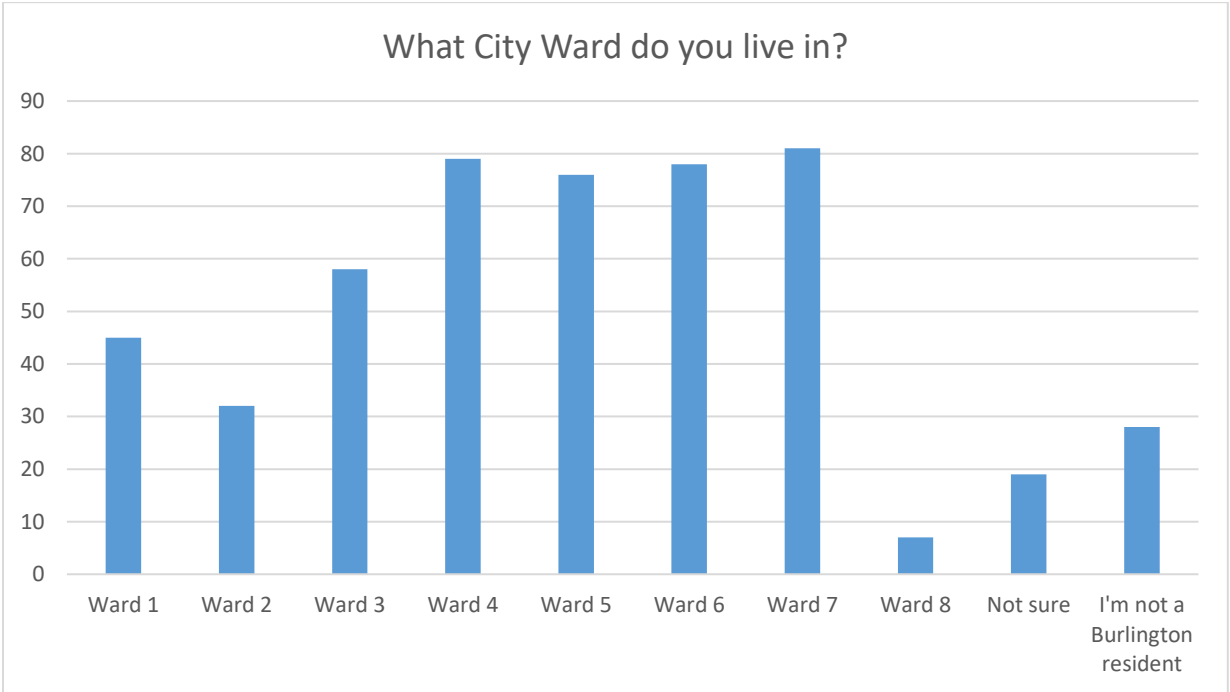
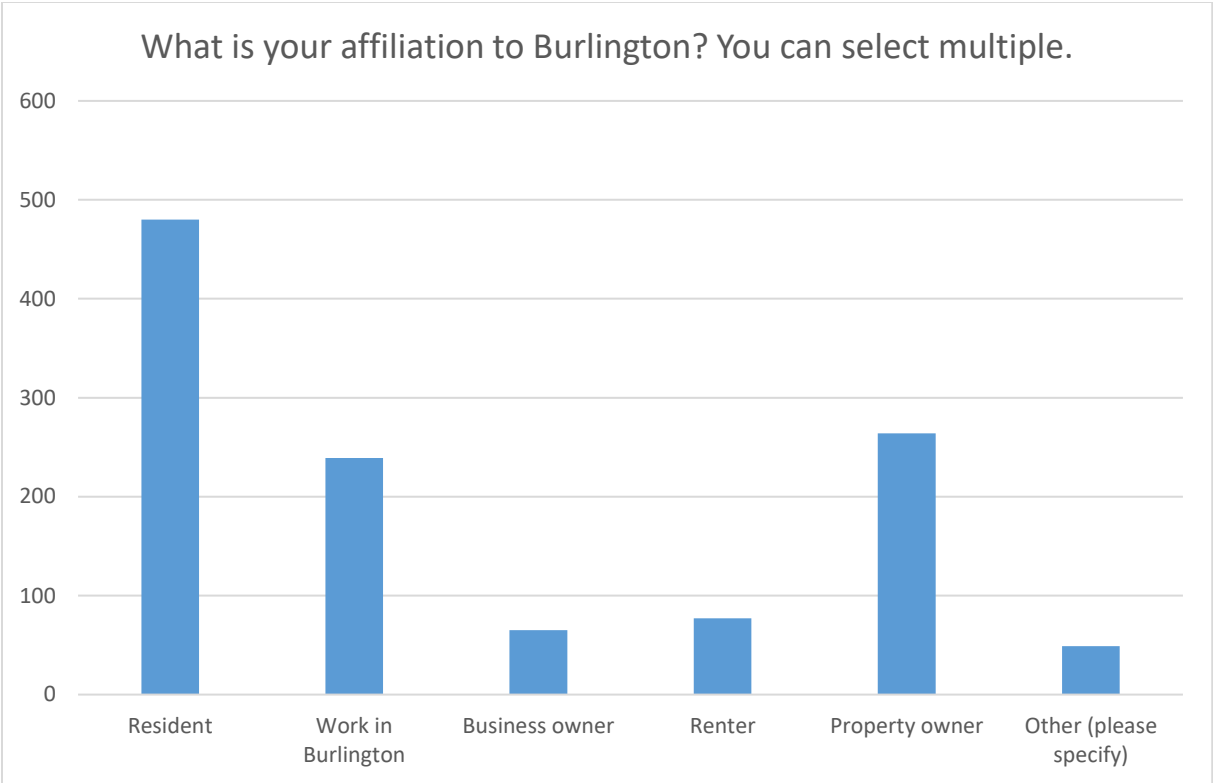


Question 2: Priorities

What are the most important priorities for our next Police Chief?

Quality	Percent marked as "Important" or "Very Important"
Build trust in the community	95.9%
Ensure accountability and transparency within the department	94.4%
Improve training for officers	91.6%
Ensure a culture of equity, inclusion, and respect within the department	88%
Maintain low rates of violent crime	87.1%
Eliminate racial disparities in police interactions	83.5%
Ensure excellent response times	80.3%
Focus on changing our system for police oversight and administering police discipline	72.5%





Qualitative data

The survey also included space to provide written comments and feedback. Of the 588 respondents, 263 included some written feedback.

Themes from the listening session discussions were consistent with the categories listed below. However, due to the fluid nature of those conversations, they not quantified in each category. Some of the consistent themes discussed included rebuilding trust between police and the public, wanting to move towards re-defining public safety in our community, wanting to live in a safe city, and concerns about levels of crime and the perceived feelings of safety in Burlington, especially downtown

The qualitative data from the comments of the survey was coded into the following categories:

1. Personal characteristics and leadership management
2. Public safety transformation
3. Specific experience preferred
4. Rebuilding trust with the community and strong communication
5. Importance of police accountability, transparency, and reducing use of force
6. Reducing crime, staffing concerns, and concerns about police morale
7. Standing up to politics or outside influence
8. Commitment to racial equity, inclusion, and belonging
9. Local versus outside candidate
10. Preferred demographics of next Police Chief
11. Support of current police leadership
12. Changing our community's response to mental health calls
13. Feedback about the survey
14. Reducing the role of policing in our community

1. Personal characteristics and leadership management

50 respondents identified personal characteristics or leadership skills that they would want to see in the next Police Chief, including being a good listener, strong communicator, compassionate, effective manager, and have integrity.

Representative comments:

- Empathy; learning-orientation; innovative thinker.
- Being a compassionate, empathetic person.
- Innovative thinker willing to look at new ways of improving community safety open to feedback
- Be able to listen deeply and without interruption
- So much above says "experience, experience, experience." I'd like to see more about commitment and an openness to learn
- Calm and respectful of differences
- Someone who is not only an excellent communicator but is also an excellent listener.
- Someone who is extremely personable and who genuinely wants to interact with city residents.

2. Public Safety Transformation

56 survey respondents indicated a desire to see the Police Chief lead the transformation of public safety in our community.

Representative comments:

- Change the mindset of policing.
- This individual needs to accept not only Burlington's commitment to change policing but America's commitment to change.
- Someone who has a track record for change. Burlington is poised to reshape policing and the new chief needs to be committed to structural and systemic change.
- Find someone who will champion change. No more fear tactics sending letters to my home about the danger of changing how we keep our community safe.
- The kind of change we want is not going to happen easily. The police union needs to be engaged in a positive way. The union could have a very important role to play in terms of work force development, ongoing training and helping to identify and support officers experiencing trauma.

3. Specific experience preferred

50 respondents indicated the specific experience or background they would like to see in the next Police Chief. Some respondents indicated they would want to see someone with a policing background. Some respondents indicated they would want to see someone from a non-traditional background, with experience other than policing.

Representative comments:

- Walked the streets in previous jobs; not always been in management.
- Actual experience as a police officer.
- Experience in enforcing the law in a medium size police force.
- Have worked as a police officer (in a real city) in a patrol capacity for a significant period of time.
- This person does not need to be someone with prior police experience. A civilian might be able to move the police department and its staff in ways a veteran officer might not be able to do.
- I would encourage search committee to step outside of thinking that the next Chief has to come with the law enforcement background. Public safety is much broader concept than law enforcement.
- This individual **MUST** have excellent administrative experience in police work and commit to strengthening the police force to serve all community needs.

4. Rebuilding trust and strong communication with the community

47 survey respondents wrote about how they would like to see the next Police Chief rebuild trust between the community and Police Department. This was also one of the key priorities that was discussed in the listening sessions. Also, those respondents indicated they would like to see a Chief who is a strong communicator.

Representative comments:

- Able to find common values, commitments and incentives with an apparently divided group.
- This chief **MUST** be able and willing to recognize that the only way to create trust between all community members and the police is to take accountability that works both ways. A chief cannot hide behind the police union; they need to be able to do what is best for the entire community, not just the insular community of police officers.
- I believe that Burlington needs a new face to lead the changes in policing to moving forward with the systemic racism that has existed for years. He or she must have excellent verbal skills, both for internal and external purposes. Must be able to demonstrate not only strong communication skills, but demonstrate a history of successful outcomes. The latter is a tall order given the history of systemic racism throughout our country.
- Ability to communicate a shared community goal between different and complex social groups.
- We need and have an opportunity to build trust and more effective public safety and health agencies in Burlington. We need to hear from the hose involved they can find the trust to openly work in this direction.
- Proven track record of collaboration with community and City.

5. Importance of police accountability, transparency, and reducing use of force

46 survey respondents wrote about the importance of police accountability, transparency, and reducing police use of force.

Representative comments:

- Able to stand up to the police union when police do wrong.
- With increased training and accountability other inequities will/should be course-corrected.
- Experience appropriately dealing with officers in disciplinary settings.
- Being willing to collaborate with a community oversight board that has actual enforcement authority.
- Stop police from using choke holds and keep them from using unnecessary force.
- The leader knows how to take responsibility for inappropriate actions/police abuse of power vs surface performative acts.

6. Reducing crime, staffing concerns, and concerns about police morale

45 respondents indicated concern with crime in Burlington and Police Department morale. They indicated they wanted to see the next Chief focus on and prioritize supporting officers.

Representative comments:

- With all of the issues a new police chief will be facing, there is still a strong need to show support and understanding for the current members of the department.
- We need a good police chief. Racism is a problem in policing and all levels of society. We are no exception. But to decimate and neuter a badly needed BPD is the wrong way to go about it. We don't need a defund. We need more. At the same time let's address issues and the small fraction of problem officers or policies.
- We want a healthy Police Department and want more police officers seen in the community! We miss seeing them as a presence in our community. We want to feel protected. We believe this can be accomplished.
- Our overall community wants police protection and wants the police to be important members of our community. We need to be careful in how we move forward and how we bring respect to the difficult job of policing. We need to find a way in our community to respect the police and the difficult job that they do as we all would not hesitate to call for help if needed and they are expected to be there to serve us. The community has a responsibility too to assist the police in performing their jobs with community watch groups and following the law and helping others when we can. We expect the police to be there no matter what. How can we all help to make their jobs easier should also be a goal.

7. Standing up to politics or outside influence

33 respondents indicated they wanted to see a Chief who was able to operate outside of politics or political influence.

Representative comments:

- Must be able to reason with anti Police activist politicians in elected positions. Must be able to show the community the damage done to the Police over the past year by senseless activist Burlington Politicians.
- Less emphasis on optics and political savviness, more focus on actual change.
- The ability to step away from politics and enforce the law as it's written.
- Ability to stand firm against inside + outside influence. Refusal to bow to the most vocal thereby putting those less able to put forth their thoughts in a public forum at disadvantage. Taking a safety first, for public and officers, attitude.
- Ability to make decisions that benefit all citizens and not simply in response to a loud vocal smaller segment of the population that is being given an unsubstantiated weight in decisions making that affects all citizens.

8. Commitment to racial equity, inclusion, and belonging

37 respondents wrote about their desire to see a Police Chief who is committed to racial equity, inclusion, and belonging, and dismantling structural and systemic racism.

Representative comments:

- Committed to ending police violence against black and brown people.
- Proven ability and the courage needed to affect culture change within law-enforcement to create greater community accountability and address racism and other problems with unequal policing of disempowered groups.
- Proven ability and the courage needed to affect culture change within law-enforcement to create greater community accountability and address racism and other problems with unequal policing of disempowered groups.
- Showing the city that she understands the fear her fellow BIPOC community members feel, and that she can control her police and protect our community.
- We need a police chief who leads by example, one who confronts personal implicit bias and works to mitigate it.
- Someone who is able to look outside their own system is important. Someone who cares deeply about the people of Burlington, but especially BIPOC community members, and making them feel safe.

9. Local versus outside candidate

27 respondents indicated they wanted to see a candidate who was familiar with Burlington or Vermont, or promoted from within the Department, or lives in Burlington.

Representative comments:

- I want the new Police Chief to live in Burlington.
- I would like the next police chief to be from our area.
- I would also focus on candidates within the department as internal candidates already have a bond to the community and a working knowledge of the the infrastructure surrounding issues. It happens all too often where an external candidate is brought in at deferment to the department and community. Change is not always for the best versus slow and measured movement.
- Familiarity with Burlington.

10. Preferred demographics of next Police Chief

27 respondents indicated specific demographic traits they wanted to see in the next Police Chief, including gender, race, and sexual orientation.

Representative comments:

- I hope that all efforts are being made to recruit candidates who are Black, Indigenous and or people of color.
- Google "police chief search" to see how other cities are doing it. Columbus Ohio just picked a Black woman from Detroit. That is EXACTLY the chief we need, and they did it with community participation.
- The most important thing to me is that the police chief be a person of color or, at the minimum, antiracist with qualifications to show for it.

11. Support of current police leadership

25 respondents indicated support for the current police leadership and Acting Chief Jon Murad.

Representative comments:

- John Murad had done a fantastic job and should be considered for a permanent chief position.
- I believe that the BPD already has an excellent leader in Jon Murad, and I believe that he would be an excellent choice as Chief of Police.
- We have a positive acting chief who has handled the situation in BTV and the police dept very well. Why do a national search when we have a solid individual in our midst?
- I am opposed to the expense and effort of an outside/nationwide search for Chief when we have an excellent person with superior experience and qualifications here now. An outside search on the recent past bypassed an different excellent candidate already here, brought in a Chief from the outside who turned out to be very problematic, ethically and stability challenged, and created many problems for the Department and City.

12. Changing our community's response to mental health calls

22 respondents indicated they would like to see a Police Chief that re-imagines the way our community responds to mental health calls, including prioritizing de-escalation training.

Representative comments:

- Having a thorough understanding of de-escalation techniques especially with people who are mentally ill and trains officers in these techniques such as wearing plain clothing and not using flashing lights on the car, as well as calling a social worker to a scene to help deescalate.
- Skilled in addressing trauma and the clear capacity to de-escalate a situation without weapons or violence. Understand that personnel without weapons must be present when responding to calls. Capacity to to work with non-police personnel and integrate them into the response teams.
- Create a focused plan for how the police department works with mental health agencies to allow mental health workers outside of the police control to use de-escalation techniques with people in crisis. Support the de-militarization of the police department.
- Has a proven ability to implement Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) within the police department to de-escalate and effectively manage mental health crises.
- Willing to acknowledge issues that should not be within the purview of policing - such as mental health crises - and work with other organizations to allow for coverage by more appropriate personnel.

13. Feedback about the survey

22 respondents shared feedback about the survey, primarily that they wished the qualities and priorities could be ranked as opposed to selecting importance.

Representative comments:

- This survey seems to be leading and unprofessional. Asking "priorities" but then not having us rank them, seems like a novice mistake. If everything is a priority, what does that mean?
- It is hard to differentiate between the important and very important. In some respects, they are all very important. I want to recognize that this is asking a lot of one person.
- Thank you all for putting this together, but in a strange way, and although I did not answer like this, there is a way in which every one of these questions should be extremely important. It's like they are in an echo chamber and all reflect the same viewpoint. Just a thought if you were going to drill down on this, that more variation in how these questions are thought out may be worthwhile. Oh, and just reading the last line kind of tips the cap that this was pulled from a survey in Lincoln Nebraska feels off-putting.
- I can't imagine how you think you will get valuable, nuanced information with this survey. Poorly conceived and written, biased questions indicate "correct" answer

14. Reducing the role of policing in our community

21 respondents indicated they would like to see a Police Chief who is committed to reducing the role of police in our community or defunding the police.

Representative comments:

- Open to identify functions that can be shed away from police to other, unarmed professional groups.
- Commitment to building a social wellness first response unit of unarmed specially trained officers, social workers, or mental health professionals.
- A desire to fundamentally change the way our city does policing, and a commitment to joining the movement to reduce police funding across the board.
- The only way I would even remotely trust a police chief is if they themselves aggressively advocated for the police budget to be dramatically and permanently cut, increased funding to non-police emergency services, and if their goal was to entirely disarm the police force of all projectile weapons within one year.
- We do not need more police, we need less police. Work with the community rather than policing it.

Interview Question Examples

What quality/experience would you bring to the position of Chief of Police that you think has been missing in our community?

What would you do to advocate to the legislature and other authorities for increased funding to non-police emergency services?

The new Chief will need to have many difficult conversations about racial equity and representing the needs of the whole community. How will you do this?

How will you envision the Police Department's collaboration and work with social services and mental health providers in designing a new community policing strategy for Burlington?

Do Black lives matter to you, and if so, what does that mean?

How would you go about ensuring de-escalation training and policies are fully embedded, understood, and used?

Describe structural racism and its relationship to policing.

Is it essential for police to carry guns?

How would you improve the morale of police in Burlington?

Do you believe the way policing is done in our country needs to change, and if so, in what ways?

Do you understand the arguments for police abolition, particularly around redistributing funds for community support? How do you respond?

Talk about your experience, successes or challenges, in addressing community divides. How would you go about that work in Burlington?

How do you plan to approach the divide in this community between those who want to reduce the police force and the budget and those who want to maintain funding and the number of officers?

What steps would you take as Chief to make all residents feel safe and valued?

What steps would you take to discipline an officer who harmed a member of the community during police work?

Do you believe we need to radically change the way we imagine public safety in our society?

What do you think as a police officer is the most important element you can contribute to maintain peace and harmony in Burlington?

If a decision came down to a choice between supporting Police Officers or the desires of the public, which would you choose and why? Could you give an example of a time when you had to make a similar choice?

How are you going to keep officers from leaving this Department?

How would you put more emphasis on improving the way our community handles mental health issues?