

The city's 'tough on crime' approach to public safety

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In November's election, Aurora voters flipped what was previously a seven-to-three conservative majority on the City Council to a six-to-four progressive majority.

With the significant shift of the council's political leaning could come policy changes and reversals. The Denver Gazette asked both new and old councilmembers about their thoughts on specific hot-button issues in Aurora and whether or not they plan to attempt to reverse certain policies.

Newly elected progressive Councilmembers Rob Andrews, Amy Wiles, Alli Jackson and Gianina Horton are still in their first official month on the council. Other progressive councilmembers include Alison Coombs and Ruben Medina. Conservative councilmembers include Angela Lawson, Stephanie Hancock, Curtis Gardner and Francoise Bergan.

Gardner, Lawson and Medina did not respond to multiple attempts by The Denver Gazette asking them to answer a questionnaire.

Over the last several years, Aurora's conservative-majority City Council approved several ordinances that seek to crack down on crime in the city.

The city's lawmakers adopted a "tough on crime" mentality, enacting mandatory minimum jail sentences and harsher penalties.

In March 2024, the Aurora City Council finalized two ordinances making the penalties for retail theft convictions higher.

Also last year, Aurora police changed the department's pursuit policy to allow police to chase stolen vehicles.

The Denver Gazette asked each councilmember about their thoughts on the city's "tough on crime" approach, and whether or not they agree with it. Their answers are below, listed alphabetically by last name.

The Denver Gazette: Aurora's previous council took a very "tough on crime" approach, adding mandatory minimum jail sentences, allowing police to chase stolen vehicles, etc. Do you believe in this philosophy? Do you plan to try to reverse any of the previous council's public safety efforts? Which ones and why or why not?

Andrews: I want Aurora to be safe — and I want our approach to be smart, evidence-based, and fair. I'm open to revisiting policies that don't improve safety outcomes or that create unnecessary risk for the public and officers. We should prioritize preventing crime, targeting repeat violent offenders, supporting victims, and investing in proven strategies that reduce harm — not simply escalating penalties for headlines.

Bergan: Our "tough on crime" approach has been successful in reducing crime and making our residents safe, especially regarding repeat offenders. As a state and city, we have seen a significant increase in crime in recent years; our No. 1 responsibility is to protect our residents. We must remember that

there are real people that are the victims of crime and they deserve justice. Certainly, we must always ensure due process and that is the responsibility of our judicial system.

Coombs: I don't believe in any approach that relies on mandatory minimum sentences, and I will work with my colleagues to repeal those we have on the books. I have also heard community concerns about our vehicle pursuit policy and will ask for a review of the policy.

Hancock: Public safety policy should be judged by results, not labels. The previous council took a tougher approach because residents were feeling unsafe, and the facts show it's working: crime is down, accountability is up, and enforcement is improving. I do not support reversing policies that produce real results, like recovering stolen vehicles and holding repeat offenders accountable.

Being tough on crime doesn't mean being reckless. Policies should be applied responsibly and adjusted when the data shows it's needed.

As vice chair of the Public Safety Committee, I will hold that standard: keep what works, fix what doesn't, and stay focused on outcomes — safer neighborhoods, fewer victims, and a public safety system the community can trust.

Horton: As a criminal justice reform professional, I know that tough on crime approaches are not effective strategies to reducing long-term harm, and tends to contribute immensely to racial and ethnic disparities within the system. I firmly believe that any efforts to address crime must be rooted in data driven approaches that reduces the targeting of marginalized communities.

I believe there must be a hard look at the previous council's public safety efforts and determine what is in alignment with 21st-century policing recommendations, alignment with community-based policing efforts, and more modern policies that protect the constitutional rights of residents as well as their safety and the safety of law enforcement.

Jackson: I think framing crime as tough on crime or soft on crime is divisive and besides the point. I believe in holding people accountable for their actions while giving creative solutions that deliver results and improves people's lives. Like community service and social support provided by the government resources.

Wiles: I don't believe in mandatory minimum sentences, especially when it comes to minor level crimes like shoplifting. I would like to see more restorative justice options for low-level nonviolent crimes. Research shows that mandatory sentencing for misdemeanors accelerate prison/ jail growth, it removes judicial flexibility for situations that require discretion, and data shows it does not lower crime rates.