

Widespread opposition against “Cop City” police training center at Atlanta city council meeting

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To the chagrin of government authorities in the state of Georgia, a groundswell of opposition was revealed again to their relentless attempts to impose by force the building of “Cop City,” a military-style police training center costing \$90 million approved by the Democratic Party-controlled city council in 2021.

The latest display of mass opposition came on Monday, May 15, when the Atlanta City Council held a pro forma hearing over spending \$30 million in public funds for the facility. An additional \$1 million is also going to be allocated for a gym at the site. The total funding is supposed to come to \$33.5 million.

Several hundred Atlanta residents showed up to voice their opposition when the city council called for public comments. The session extended for about 7.5 hours, prior to council members introducing legislation to allocate tax funds to the facility. In addition, at least another 100 persons were denied even an opportunity to sign up to voice their opinions.

The voting by the 14-member city council to approve this funding is scheduled to occur on June 5 but could well be postponed as a political maneuver by the city council to pretend they are taking opposition sentiments into account.

This huge military-style “public safety training center,” if built, is to be funded in a “public-private partnership model.”

The rest of the approximately \$60 million cost is to be raised by the “non-profit” Atlanta Police Foundation (APF), the largest of the 150 such foundations raising funds for police forces across the country.

The APF, whose governing board and trustees are full of corporate executives, is collecting funds from sponsors such as Coca Cola, Norfolk Southern, Home

Depot, Delta Airlines and UPS, all of which directly benefit from this “law and order” campaign.

The facility is to be built on 381 acres of heavily forested land area in neighboring Dekalb County, which has already been approved. The land is considered, by the government authorities themselves, as a crucial green space necessary for the environmental health of the whole Atlanta metropolitan area.

During the May 15 hearing, one of the activists, Rukia Rogers, stood up and cited the example of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.: “Dr. King reminds us that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. So, what is the injustice here today? The injustice is that we continue to invest in a system and a culture of militarization and policing entrenched in injustice and oppression.” She further pointed out, “[This] is a system that murdered Tyre Nichols by police officers who received extensive training from right here in Atlanta.”

Another speaker denounced the January 16 brutal police murder of 26-year old environmental activist and anti-Cop City protester Manuel Terán “Tortuguita.” “Somebody who was just barely older than myself was shot 57 times while sitting on the ground with their hands up.”

Mykal Alder June, another activist, stated, “We do not want further militarization of our police force, we do not want more people murdered in the streets, we do not want these \$33.5 million spent on a facility designed to train police for war against us!”

Showing their disinterest and contempt, the city council members were hardly paying attention to what these hundreds of opponents were saying but instead

were seen talking to each other or playing with their cell phones.

The city council's contemptuous attitude to democratic opinion was further made known by Councilman Michael Julian Bond, the son of now deceased civil rights activist and longtime Democratic Party politician Julian Bond.

Bond, who is a member of one of two committees that is to review the funding proposal, commented to *The Guardian*, "I appreciate their passion. But that doesn't absolve us from serving public employees." In other words, no matter the opposition, the city council is determined to impose this police militarization training facility no matter what.

Earlier on April 13, the Dekalb County zoning board unanimously rejected an appeal against the land development permit filed by activists. The appeal cited violations of numerous existing laws, including those against excessive sediment discharges and severe destruction of the environment.

Despite irrefutable evidence cited during the April 12 hearing, the Dekalb County board ignored not only widespread opposition to the building of "Cop City" but even claimed that it had performed "due diligence."

All of the authorities in the state—starting with the reactionary Republican Governor Brian Kemp, the Democratic Party politicians on the Atlanta City Council, Democratic Mayor Andre Dickens and those in Dekalb County—are united in railroading popular opposition using violent and illegal methods.

The authorities continue to characterize opponents as "outsiders" because of the participation of out-of-state activists and characterize the peaceful events organized by activists as the handiwork of "terrorists."

They have unleashed police forces to terrorize opponents of Cop City by arresting activists and charging them with domestic terrorism.

On April 28, the authorities charged three activists, Julia Dupuis, Charley Tennenbaum and Abeeku Vassall, for distributing flyers in a neighborhood in Cartersville, a town about 45 miles northwest of Atlanta.

The leaflets stated that a murderer lived in their midst, referring to a police officer who lived in the Cartersville neighborhood and who was supposedly involved in killing Manuel Terán on January 16. The three activists have been charged with the felony of

"intimidating" and "stalking" an officer of the state.

In addition to these latest arrests, the authorities charged 23 randomly arrested music festival attendees with draconian "domestic terrorism" charges in March and held them in jail without bail.



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