

WATCH NOW: Crown Point officials address armed bystanders amid peaceful gathering

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TOPICAL URGENT

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Twenty-one bystanders stand along the Erie-Lackawanna Trail on Monday, watching as protesters walk back from the Lake County Government Center.

Provided

CROWN POINT — Following Monday's peaceful gathering in downtown Crown Point, a video began circulating on Facebook and Twitter, showing a line of armed bystanders as protesters made their way back to the square.

The video, which has been viewed more than 175,000 times on Twitter, shows 21 people standing near the end of the Erie-Lackawanna Trail. Eight of those pictured are holding rifles, while the group passed by.

Police officers are shown at the end of the trail, observing the scene.



Dozens gathered in downtown Crown Point on Monday, protesting the May 25 death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old African American man who died after a white Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for several minutes.

On Tuesday, Crown Point Police Chief Pete Land discussed the videos during a monthly forum hosted by Mayor David Uran.

"There were individuals — not related to a police department, just private citizens — that had their personally owned rifles displayed," Land said. "In Indiana, that's legal. You don't need a permit. You can do a rifle or shotgun. You need a permit if you have a sidearm and you're going to carry it outside of your house or business, then you need a permit."

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Indiana Code 35-47-2 details the regulation of handguns in the state, however, there is not plain language when it comes to carrying rifles and shotguns.

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Land said the police department did "check out" people along North Main Street wielding rifles to make sure they knew what the department's intentions were with the protest.

"They have a right to do that," Land said. "We were definitely on top of that. As soon as that became visible, we had officers up there and checked on them."

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Land added officers accompanied protesters along the Erie-Lackawanna Trail, which is the route police asked the protesters to take back to the square following a trek to the Lake County Government Center.

In the hours following the gathering, Uran commended those who participated in the "very safe but appropriate protest opportunity for people to exercise their First Amendment rights," during the monthly City Council meeting.

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Uran said city officials received a heads-up late Sunday that the group would head to the city.

"I don't think anybody disagrees that when it comes to enforcement of laws and enforcement of suspects being apprehended that a level of force needs to be done within the rules and regulations and don't cause harm or injury to people or death," said Uran, a former Crown Point police officer.

"That was the message that was perceived out there. It was a peaceful demonstration. They were allowed to be out there."

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Uran echoed the same message Tuesday, again emphasizing the protesters had a right to gather under the First Amendment.

"I think the tone was set very early that this was going to be very peaceful, and we weren't looking for any issues as far as violations of laws," Uran said.

Uran added the video does not capture the overall protest.

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"If you're going to capture what took place in Crown Point as that was the only moment that took place, that does not put Crown Point in a very favorable light," he said.

District 2 Councilwoman Dawn Stokes, who walked to the government center with protesters, said it was disheartening to see the video and the play it has received on social media.

"What I saw out there as far as protesters go, the protesters that were there at the courthouse were a lot of young people, young people I recognized from past graduates of Crown Point High School, current students of Crown Point High School; business owners in Crown Point. A lot of local people out there, and I just really can't commend everybody enough for what went on yesterday," Stokes said.

Gallery: Protesters gather in Crown Point