



## Committee on Community Resources and the Northampton City Council

### Committee Members:

*Chair: Councilor Garrick Perry*

*Vice-Chair: Councilor Marissa Elkins*

*Councilor Alex Jarrett*

*Councilor Rachel Maiore*

### Meeting Minutes

**Date: March 21, 2022**

**Time: 5:30 p.m.**

**Virtual Meeting Via Zoom**

1. **Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call.** At 5:32 p.m. Councilor Garrick Perry called the meeting to order. Present were Councilors Garrick Perry (Chair); Alex Jarrett and Rachel Maiore. Vice Chair Marissa Elkins was absent. Also present were Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Department of Community Care (DCC) Implementation Director Sean Donovan and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.
2. **Announcement of Audio/Video Recording**  
Councilor Perry announced that the meeting was being audio and video recorded. He said he had the pleasure of attending the Holyoke St. Patrick's Day Parade with the mayor and Vice Chair Marissa Elkins. For all councilors not able to make it in person, he knows they were there in spirit.
3. **Public Comment**  
Councilor LaBarge thanked councilors who attended the St. Patrick Day's parade and especially the council president. Being a long-time Rotary member herself, she expressed pleasure to see Barbara Devlin, Project Chair of the Northampton Rotary Club's Tree Planting Project.
4. **Rotary Day of Service - April 16, 2022**  
Barbara Devlin shared details of an upcoming event – the Northampton Rotary Club's Tree Planting Project scheduled to take place on Saturday, April 16, 2022. She let councilors and residents know how they could support this special day of activity.

Rotary Club members have been working with the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) and Tree Northampton and will be planting 15 trees each at Jackson Street and Ryan Road elementary schools. Tree Warden Rich Parasiliti is one of the key contacts together with UFC Chair Susan Lofthouse. She encouraged anyone interested in volunteering to contact her. They are also accepting donations toward the project. Rotarians are trying to partner with the city to promote tree planting within the City of Northampton.

Councilors thanked Barbara for letting them know about this exciting activity and her work in organizing the event.

## 5. Department of Community Care Update

Department of Community Care (DCC) Implementation Director Sean Donovan updated members on steps being taken toward establishment of the new municipal department. Last week marked three months of his starting work as implementation director. It has been a harrowing three months for both their city and country. To be not only establishing a new department but to have a public health-adjacent department start at this time has been really challenging. A lot of his colleagues in the health field have been putting in long hours to address the Omicron outbreak so some who he wanted to connect with months ago he has only just been able to connect with last week. He has been putting his feet to the ground and talking to people but he wanted to give the caveat that it's been a tough three months in which to do so. He is very grateful with the mask mandate lifted that there is movement away from the height of the pandemic.

A lot of his work has been connecting with stake holders on a lot of different levels – people within the city on public safety and public health teams, non-profits, people who provide meals and drop-in services and getting out on the streets and talking to the general public. His meetings have ranged from official to very in-passing on the street. He has been spending a lot of time at the Manna Community Center and attended a meeting there today with the resiliency hub coordinator. A lot of what he's been focusing on is trust-building and making sure that not only is he connected to these groups but that they're connected to each other. With the help of others, he made a Northampton support and resource guide which he offered to share with the council clerk. It has been a great project to get to know people and resources as they shift out of COVID protocols and a good agenda for him to follow since all of these resources are lower, no-barrier resources and part of the fabric of what he would call 'greater community fare.'

A lot of his connections are leading toward starting an implementation group or working committee (name yet to be determined). They are also looking at having a separate advisory council of people with largely lived experience to provide continued accountability and feedback, not only to the implementation process, but to the working department itself. He has been building relationships to figure out who those people are. Before they can even form a group there almost needs to be asset-mapping to determine who needs to be at the figurative table. Toward that end, he is really glad the council is taking on the issue of looking at structural barriers because he is starting to look at that too; people who aren't paid to come to these things.

He is looking at developing provisional organizational charts and how they might respond to calls and how they might be able to compensate people for their participation.

From meetings with the public safety team and public health, he has also been connecting to already-existing community responder programs such as CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On the Streets) in Eugene, OR, and a Crisis Response Unit and Familiar Faces program in Olympia, WA (a similarly-sized city as Northampton), he shared. This program tries to pair peer responders with people repeatedly getting wrapped up in law enforcement and/or the hospital system but not getting what they need. He thinks the policing review commission's recommendation of having a different first responder team is essential and also having people out of the first responder rhythm who can connect more deeply with community members falling through the cracks. He is envisioning a structure for the department that includes a community responder team and also people that can be supporters or navigators.

A third piece he is thinking about for the initial department is one that focuses on community and public education. Talking to people he really feels that they need a structural change; i.e. - having another response team that's not law enforcement and that's not clinical – but they also need a culture shift. He is hoping that initially this can be educational opportunities that mirror training given to 1<sup>st</sup> responders. He

wants the community to have a sense of some of the practices first responders will be using and to learn some of those skills themselves. He thinks they could offer some events perhaps recorded by Northampton Open Media (NOM) that could talk about how to use harm reduction principles to support someone using drugs or someone who is suicidal. He is hoping other people in the city will have some buy in. He would also like people with lived experience to have more input around this.

He is also working on Requests for Proposals (RFP) for consultants. It has been his first time writing RFP's so he has needed the support of his colleagues in public health to help him. The RFP's would be for consultants to help with dispatch data analysis and also with hiring.

He did write an overall RFP that would get the unicorn consultant that could do all these different things but, talking to people in these fields, it seemed that wasn't possible. He knows Amherst was able to work with a group that was able to provide feedback about their CRESS team, which is getting ready to hire. Northampton's model is a little bit different than CRESS, so he wanted consultants experienced with peer-led and 'power with' (as opposed to power over) response and harm reduction responses.

He offered to respond to any questions.

Councilor Jarrett thanked Director Donovan for the update. In terms of giving people stipends, one of the things they looked into when he was on the Northampton Housing Partnership (NHP) was to see if a nonprofit could give grants for public service since the city doesn't have a structure for that, he shared.

He has talked about that possibility with a couple of people and welcomes any resources around that, Director Donovan said. He talked to people in the city who have used similar models in the past and some of them might be applicable to the DCC.

Councilor Jarrett asked what kinds of calls he sees the DCC responding to in its first year of operation, and what that might expand to in future years.

He imagines the first year will start midway through fiscal year 2023, Director Donovan said. Provisionally, as a guess, they would get started a little bit earlier than half-way through FY2023 and would start on a smaller scale. Given that they are trying to have a team that is non-clinical and non-law enforcement, he wants to be very clear with protections around their team's integrity so they don't end up having mission drift into being law enforcement or risk-assessment adjacent. Police are not always the best fit for some types of calls but sometimes there are other forms of involuntary detentions such as Section 12 or Section 35. Not that those are the worst types of calls but they want to focus on other ways of responding to people. They might try to do a smaller range of call types really well and build from there.

He has time set aside this Friday with Police Chief Jody Kasper and Dispatch Director Kelly Schuetze to look through a month's worth of dispatch data to see what percentage of calls their team could potentially respond to. This will be an important time to workshop their different ideas of safety and dispatch protocols.

He expects consultants will do a deeper dive but they really need to start with something. They are going to look at calls coded as mental health that don't involve violence. The thing he's learned is that sometimes call types that are labeled a certain way don't actually align with what happens on the ground. They will be diving into dispatch data to look at what's really happening

He thinks there was uniform interest in having the new community response team address so-called mental health calls; but, even with that, what does that mean? What gets classified as mental health can have a whole range of different issues. Also some calls get coded otherwise but actually have some component of mental health.

They have some ideas of the types of calls they will respond to but he thinks they have to play it out. They are going to try to figure out where there is overlap. He has been to the call center for half a day twice and will be there Friday from 6 to 10 p.m. He is hearing from dispatch that they get a lot of calls from people who are lonely and the DCC may respond to some of those too. Sometimes calls where no first responder is dispatched escalate over time. They are exploring dispatch diversion and also whether they would have a separate number allowing people to go around dispatch altogether.

In talking to the director in Olympia, WA, their program didn't start out taking calls directly, they started out being in the community. He suggested the possibility of having a regular presence in a public parking lot where people could come to them. He imagines the build-up will involve things like that before they actually take calls. It seems like having a community presence before actually responding to calls makes sense.

Councilor Jarrett asked what he sees as the working relationship with the Northampton Police Department (NPD). He mentioned different scenarios – the DCC on its own, the DCC with the NPD as back-up, co-response, etc.

They do have at least one person who is a trained social worker, which is a different discipline than he is expecting the majority of their response team to have, Director Donovan said. Clinical Support Options (CSO) has one clinical social worker who co-responds with the police right now. He's not looking to echo that. They are still working out what it might look like if a call edges toward violence or disruption. In 2019, models like CAHOOTS responded to 24,000 calls and only 311 ever required police back-up. They are not copying and pasting the CAHOOTS model but are taking a lot of inspiration from them.

He is hoping they will not have to involve the police much as well. There are times when they probably are going to be on the scene together even though they are not co-responding. They are not setting up a co-response model even though there are models where clinicians are embedded with police. He wanted to be clear that's not the model that has been recommended or the mandate received. One of the conversations he has been having is about well-being checks. Family members or service providers sometimes make a request of law enforcement for an officer to check up on a person who is either not doing well or struggles with drug use or suicidal thoughts. It has come up a lot in his work as a facilitator of peer support groups that people have felt trauma from people initiating police officers coming to their door.

He acknowledged that sometimes wellness checks end up with someone being found deceased. He sees an institutional harm reduction benefit to their team being able to respond to well-being checks but he doesn't know if it would cause them to become too wrapped up in the law enforcement framework to have sustained community trust. One of the questions he is asking is does the benefit outweigh the potential mission drift.

He is aware that some of the most high-profile deaths or killings involving law enforcement have involved calls their team would probably not be sent out on alone and therefore wonders if there is any benefit to the community of their team doing co-responses in some situations. He mentioned the situation of Orlando Teller, III who was shot in Springfield.

If they have to be just an inch wide and a mile deep in what they're going to do well; that's fine by him.

Councilor Jarrett said he hears that he's embodying the spirit of the policing review commission's recommendations and being so thoughtful about the steps that they're going to take, so he appreciates that. He thinks not devising a co-response situation seems entirely right although he acknowledged they might be on the scene at the same time.

Councilor Jarrett asked him to describe the hiring and training process for new responders.

They are learning from other models, Director Donovan said. Amherst is going to start having responders respond this summer and he is meeting with CRESS Director Earl Miller tomorrow. What he wants is to be sure people can be competent crisis navigators; not necessarily people with the best credentials such as advanced degrees. One of the things he has learned is that there are a lot of people that go to social work school but don't know how to be in a crisis situation. There are licensed clinical social workers who are great in crisis situations but he is not sure they learned that in a degree program.

The community has already put a lot of money into retooling and retraining law enforcement and they have decided to do something different. He is looking for people who have demonstrated that they are capable crisis navigators. He wants to make sure their team is getting some training in connection and situational awareness and learning to respond in 'power with' ways so that consent is obtained whenever possible.

Discerning between situations that involve conflict and those that don't is also an important skill. Not all situations involve conflict because there may be differences in power. He wants to make sure responders are trained in conflict resolution but also in determining if it is a useful tool for a particular situation. They will also need training in harm reduction skills such as how to use Narcan, laws and regulations, the roles of other 1<sup>st</sup> responders and dispatch and data management systems.

Councilor Jarrett said he has had some conversations with folks at CRESS, including a member of the implementation team, Russ Vernon-Jones, and he would be happy to connect him.

Councilor Maiore said her immediate concern is whether he is getting the support he needs. If and when he doesn't feel like he is, she hopes he will engage people. She's interested in knowing if he's feeling like he has the necessary resources. She will reach out when the budget comes out and make sure he feels like he can launch this when he's ready.

From what she's read about other models, so much depends on the training of dispatchers. She hopes he will be involved in developing assessment tools and dispatcher training because it's very important to making sure calls end up in the right hands.

He is not quite sure what those are going to look like because they are still developing them, Director Donovan said. A lot of them are in the Pacific Northwest for some reason. Portland Street Response has developed a lot of 'decision trees.'

He and Kelly Schuetze have talked about the DCC having its own center with call takers and 1<sup>st</sup> responders being cross-trained as dispatchers and community responders. He thinks part of that is not just having good tools and training but also mutual trust. They are exploring doing some trainings together.

Regarding support, he feels like there's pretty wide interest in the city for this department to be successful and he's grateful for that, Director Donovan said. He does feel like there's support.

With regard to public education, that's something he thinks the council could be really helpful with. He has them in mind for helping to engage the community.

Councilor Maiore said she is inspired that he is already talking about the sustainability and mental health of his team.

As someone who's been institutionalized in his life and dealt with suicidal thoughts for a lot of his life, he knows lived experience is a valuable, Sean said.

Councilor Perry thanked Director Donovan for coming. This is a herculean task. One thing that stood out to him is how impressive it is that he is stepping back and taking a look at things from a bigger picture view. He really enjoys that he is talking about education and a cultural shift. Understanding that this isn't a process that he is going to come up with overnight is very important. He offered his assistance to him with his skill set from years of running Bishop's Lounge and being in the nightclub scene. He knows what it's like to have people coming to look for either a bathroom or a warm place. He thinks having a place people can turn to will go a long way.

He can imagine seeing a DCC van in the neighborhood and what joy it would bring and he would love to be part of a kick-off event for the department in Pulaski Park. He is glad to hear he is meeting with Earl Miller and would love to get together with them both. He sees this as not just a Northampton problem; he would really like to do more collaboration with different departments and different communities.

He is interested in hitting the streets with him, he added. Around here, he calls the metric of people having lived experiences 'street cred,' and he wholly supports people who have that cred being part of this department.

Director Donovan said he loves the idea of a kick-off event and would love to take him up on connecting to nightclubs and bars. He has talked to people about the fact that part of community safety is having more of a presence in the community.

The culture shift he envisions involves sharing space, sharing food and creating beauty and meaning and art together. He thinks it is a huge part of why they would want to care for a neighbor rather than being afraid of them.

6. Items Referred to Committee

A. Set Date for Community Forum on Prohibiting Brokers' Commissions from Being Charged to Tenants

Members agreed to hold the community forum on April 25, 2022 at 5:30 p.m.

7. New Business

8. Adjourn. Councilor Jarrett moved to adjourn; Councilor Maiore seconded. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 3 Yes, 0 No with Councilor Elkins absent. The meeting was adjourned at 7:01 p.m.

Prepared By:  
*Laura Krutzler, Administrative Assistant*  
*(413) 587-1210*