



Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council

Committee Members:

Chair: Councilor Karen Foster

Vice-Chair: Councilor Jamila Gore

Councilor Marianne LaBarge

Councilor Garrick Perry

Meeting Minutes

Date: April 3, 2023

Time: 5 p.m.

Via Teleconference

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 5:01 p.m., Councilor Karen Foster called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilor Foster, Chair; Councilor Jamila Gore, Vice Chair; Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge and Councilor Garrick Perry were present. Also present were Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra, Division of Community Care (DCC) Director Kristen Rhodes and DHHS Commissioner Merridith O'Leary.

Councilor Foster announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

3. MINUTES OF JANUARY 3, 2023 AND FEBRUARY 6, 2023

Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the minutes of January 3, 2023. Councilor Perry seconded. The motion passed unanimously 3:0 by roll call vote with Councilor Gore abstained since she was not present.

Councilor Perry moved to approve the minutes of February 6, 2023. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

4. UPDATE ON DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY CARE (DCC) FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (DHHS)

Discussion with Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Commissioner Merridith O'Leary and Division of Community Care (DCC) Director Kristen Rhodes.

In full disclosure, Councilor Foster said that she had collaborated with Kristen Rhodes in the past.

Director Rhodes screen-shared a Powerpoint presentation.

Commissioner O'Leary gave an overview of the department's progression from the public health department to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) as it is now called. Today is a special

day because it is the first day of National Public Health Week, and this year's theme is centering and celebrating cultures and health, she presented. After amending Northampton's administrative code to establish the DHHS last May, Mayor Gina-Louise Sciarra moved the Division of Community Care (DCC) under this umbrella. The DHHS is responsible for protecting and preserving the health and well-being of Northampton residents. The DCC is a public health-led integration of Northampton's public safety systems; a non-police-based response focused on addressing racial and social inequities and supporting community members during times of significant challenges related to emotional distress, substance use, houselessness, meeting basic needs, navigating conflicts and other unexpected crises.

Inclusion in the DHHS not only gave Implementation Manager Sean Donovan a team to help support his work and vision but also gave the DCC a home that includes robust administrative and organizational support within a department that has a proven track record at the intersection of public health and public safety with programs such as DART, Hampshire Hope, the Northampton Prevention Coalition and other initiatives. DHHS had a vision for the DCC; namely, innovation that demonstrates the known values for directly addressing the social determinants of health and racism as a public health emergency. They measure success not by how many more calls are diverted from the Northampton police department but how they affect change and outcomes, Commissioner O'Leary shared.

Sean Donovan was with the DHHS for about six months. Much of his work around community assessment, discovery and relationship-building has laid a nice foundation for the continued development of the DCC. Sean also helped to create a framework for the unfolding structure and training for a community responder's role. In the absence of a DCC director for the last four months, work has carried on with the bulk of the lift being shouldered by DHHS Deputy Commissioner Michele Farry.

Commissioner O'Leary introduced Kristen Rhodes to both councilors and the public. Her official first day was three weeks ago, March 13th. She received a Master's in Education from Springfield College in Therapeutic Recreation Management and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Massachusetts in sociology with a concentration in social services and a minor in education and psychology. She has directed and provided programs for children and adult disability services for nonprofit organizations, charter schools, public schools and the state of Massachusetts. She has been a special education teacher and administrator and has directed programs for adults with disabilities and community-based and day habilitation programs. Throughout her work, her focus has been providing person-centered therapeutic programs for marginalized populations and working to create equitable access to those services and provide information and support to families and caregivers. She also has a background and expertise in trauma-informed practices, management and program development and comes with an earnest belief in the mission of the DCC.

Kristen Rhodes read a prepared statement describing the role and services of the DCC. Among other things, it stated that, "the DCC model includes [a] specialized, highly skilled and trained Community Care Response Team (CCRT) as a third tier to non-emergency and emergency needs responses."

Michele Farry elaborated on the services and activities of the community response team. Part of what they can't be specific about right now is exactly what its role will look like and what types of calls it might respond to. As part of an information gathering process to identify critical needs and inform the DCC's work, a Law Enforcement Action Partnership known as LEAP is doing an extensive analysis of three years' worth of dispatch data provided by the Northampton Police Department. Public health officials are also engaging with the public through listening sessions and interviews with key informants and stake-

holders. She identified 'key informants' as being a unique combination of people who have been part of the development of the DCC from the beginning, including members of the Northampton Policing Review Commission (NPRC), systems partners and community organizations. Interviews are being conducted by UMass, which is serving as the city's research partner in addition to documenting the program's development for presentation in a significant report.

They will be excited to report back in a few months after this data has been gathered with some well-defined phases of implementation, Deputy Commissioner Farry related.

Kristen Rhodes spoke about the scheduled training for the community response team. Over 150 hours of specialized training is planned. An incredible group of people will be providing training, including Human in Common, which will provide equity, diversity and inclusion trainings, Wildflower Alliance, Growing a New Heart and Community911 Training, Inc. which provides mandatory training for all Medical First Responders to make sure staff are ready to assess any immediate medical needs and provide first aid for minor injuries on site.

The team "will utilize trauma-informed practices, racially and culturally-informed practices, peer supports, crisis response, collaborative problem-solving, harm reduction practices and, of course, first responder training," Director Rhodes advised. The trainings were curated into a robust training series that will drive the work of the CCRT, equipping responders to enter a multitude of situations utilizing tools to best support an individual based on their individual needs. The trainings 'center the individual' and teach how to respond to a situation with professionalism while keeping safety as a priority and ensuring that the response is culturally-minded, trauma-informed and a collaborative process.

The DCC staff will be moving into the ground floor of the Roundhouse building in the space formerly occupied by the Smithsonian, and its community room will open to the public in July of 2023, Director Rhodes continued. It will be staffed by the DCC coordinator and community care response team. It will have a living room model of support with immediate responses from staff, a safe place to rest and relax, identification and referral to community resources and access to public health nursing. The space will also host CCRT community events, ongoing specialized training and group meetings. People will have access to case management on a walk-in basis.

Rhodes discussed some of the considerations in designing, staffing and furnishing the community room. Operators want everyone to feel welcome and safe whether they are experiencing a crisis or not. Among other things, this means having a calm and predictable, sensory-friendly environment with some semi-private areas. To encourage the building of relationships, the space will also have chairs, couches and areas to foster communication and interaction.

A new DCC website will be going live later this week with links to resources, information about the division itself and bios of community responders as they are brought on board and hired, Deputy Commissioner Farry shared. A telephone number will also be going live with a direct line to the DCC that is HIPAA-compliant and textable. An independent free email will be monitored by the DCC coordinator.

Michele Farry reviewed a timeline of significant events in the Community Care Response Team's development. Although Northampton did not originally receive funding through the Equitable Approaches to Public Safety (EAPS) program, thanks to the advocacy of Representative Lindsay

Sabadosa and Senator Jo Comerford and some late funding allocated by the legislature, city leaders found out in November of 2022 that Northampton was awarded \$450,000. With an infusion of money needing to be spent by June of 2023, DHHS staff got to work in December to prepare for the contract award by starting the process of awarding contracts, expanding the scope of services for research and securing interim space in the Roundhouse building.

Meanwhile, administrators posted and interviewed for the director's position and were able to bring Kristen Rhodes on board. They have also been working to develop the job descriptions for community responders and the DCC coordinator and are very excited to have a signed offer letter for the new coordinator, who will be starting soon.

Deputy Commissioner Farry reviewed some of the milestones expected this spring, including furnishing and moving into the new space and bringing community responders on board. To facilitate readiness for implementation, the DCC is also arranging equity, diversity and inclusion training for city staff.

A soft launch is planned sometime in July, by which time they expect to have the feedback from their consultants and the receipt of deliverables such as operational policies and procedure manuals that they have contracted with experts to design.

They will have more clarity at that time about what the community's biggest needs are and what should be tackled first. They want to have community responders out in the community and visible as soon as possible so people can start engaging with them. They are hoping July will be filled with community events, trainings, a lot of engagement and fact-finding and working out the early kinks in the refining of their system.

There will be differentiation in the roles of some of the community responders. Defining what those roles are is something they are looking forward to teasing out internally.

She referred to the presentation as a high-level overview of activities related to the DCC. Being in public health and starting a DCC by inception has been incredibly exciting. There have been some challenges that have pushed them to make sure they are working diligently to develop a program that mitigates any future potential harm in a way that is trauma-informed and inclusive. They are working with people who have done this in a lot of different landscapes and are sharing their lessons learned.

Mayor Sciarra said she hoped they all see what she sees, which is just a remarkable team. She is very excited by how thoughtfully and carefully they are building this program and is extremely proud of them.

Councilor Foster opened the floor to questions from councilors.

Councilor LaBarge welcomed Kristen and commended Michele Farry. She asked who some of the community stake holders are.

Deputy Commissioner Farry named behavioral health providers, social services, Cooley Dickinson Hospital and other public safety divisions. They were also able to collect some contextual knowledge from the Senior Center, Forbes Library, faith-based partners and public health inspectors who often get first-hand accounts in people's homes. She commented positively on the wide group of individuals and organizations with connections to the DCC.

Other areas in which they are interested in making sure they build stakeholder relationships are entities on Main Street such as transportation providers, business owners, etc.

Councilor LaBarge asked the hours of operation of the DCC.

They are imagining they will be doing a rigorous amount of training during the onboarding process that will follow a typical city schedule (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.). They envision a lot of community engagement during this period and will continue to assess capacity on an ongoing basis. Depending on the scale of operations and their ability to do the work and do it well, they will continue to expand those hours.

When she went to Portland with Sean, they found that the higher call volume is when the community is awake and businesses are open. The greater challenge for coverage is overnight where there is a bigger gap in systems of care.

Not only do they have wonderful models in different parts of the state and other states, they have hired a national consultant called LEAP to analyze three years' worth of calls coming into dispatch, and this will tell them when their calls are and when community responders need to be available, Commissioner O'Leary reiterated.

Councilor LaBarge asked if calls would go directly to the DCC.

When the DCC launches, a small public information messaging campaign will be launched along with it to clarify what the DCC does and does not do, Deputy Commissioner Farry advised. It will remind people to call 911 for emergencies. They know from their substance use work at DHHS that there is a population that will not use the 911 service, and the DCC may be able to provide care for those people who would not otherwise call 911, she added.

They anticipate the DCC-CCRT being a workforce development effort since there will be people with all different skills and professional and nonprofessional backgrounds, she noted.

People will be able to reach the department by phone, by walking into the community space, by email or by text. The community can request services without going through dispatch, she indicated.

The public health team fielded additional questions about possible sources of funding and additional plans for community engagement.

The program has EAPS funding which they hope will be renewed, Commissioner O'Leary confirmed. They are also looking at applying for SAMSA funding. Among other things, the health department will be making certain parts of CCRT training available to community and collaborating agencies, she added. For example, they are offering a foundational training in Interrupting Racism to all city employees. They want to make sure they are teaching and educating as they are all learning.

Deputy Commissioner Farry said she imagines CCRT members being constantly embedded in the community landscape. They have settled on two CCRT teams and are buying two vans to have a presence at community and city-sponsored events. The DCC itself has averaged sponsoring one

significant community event a month and has had terrific responses to its various initiatives. They would like to continue hosting subject matter experts.

The 'Power of Truths' is coming up and the Northampton Prevention Coalition (NPC) will participate. A lot of interdisciplinary work has been happening with the DCC and DHHS, she pointed out.

Councilor Foster asked about the plans for an advisory board.

As part of the recent listening sessions, they heard from people who expressed interest in volunteering for the DCC advisory group, Deputy Commissioner Farry said. Once these sessions are transcribed, they expect to have a list of names. They would like to engage the advisory group in some way in the hiring phase for community care responders. She hopes to hold an initial meeting by the end of April or early May.

Councilor Foster asked if it would be a structured city board or commission with a particular make-up and number of members.

As part of the peer participatory process, it will be a consensus group that will provide feedback but not be a decision-making body sanctioned by the city, Deputy Commissioner Farry stated. The group will contribute to a vision, mission statements and goals and help to devise standards, norms and group agreements.

Councilor Foster asked if it would be a standing committee with a fixed number of members.

They are trying to make it as accessible as possible so they are going to be assessing people's willingness and availability to meet, Deputy Commissioner Farry said. More information is to come.

Councilor Foster asked if the former Smithsonian space is a temporary location until the resilience hub is up and running and Deputy Commissioner Farry confirmed it will be a short-term site.

Councilor Gore said she heard a public comment at TPC about CCRT members doing traffic stops instead of the police. She asked if that is something they have thought about.

She wouldn't say it is something they have thought about or discussed, Deputy Commissioner Farry said. So far, none of the models they have looked at do traffic enforcement. In some cases, community responders are not allowed to respond to calls in a roadway. She can understand there is probably a call for that but at this time there hasn't been any discussion of anything related to traffic control. They would like to hear more about why people are asking those questions as they are always willing to listen, she noted.

There being no further questions, Councilor Foster thanked DHHS members for joining them.

Deputy Commissioner Farry thanked councilors, saying they have felt very supported by the council and the community.

5. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

A. 23.276 Appointment to the Arts Council, referred to City Services - 3/16/2023

Arts Council

Ronald Smith, 14 Emily Lane, Northampton

Term: February 2023-June 2026

To fill a vacancy

She and Ronald Smith had a great conversation, Councilor Foster reported. He is a music teacher at Northfield Mount Hermon and a working performer. Of his interest in the Arts Council, Mr. Smith said he had always known it was there but described himself as being on the outside looking in and said he wanted to be on the inside. He had a conversation with Brian Foote about the council and the work they do. His real interest is in how he can be helpful and serve the arts community in Northampton.

She moved to positively recommend the appointment of Ronald Smith to the Arts Council. Councilor Gore seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

None.

7. **ADJOURN**

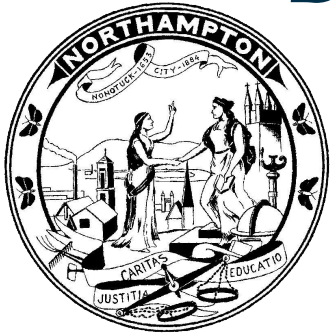
There being no further business, Councilor Perry moved to adjourn. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

Prepared By:

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City of Northampton
Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Community Care



Merridith O'Leary, Health Commissioner
Michele Farry, Deputy Commissioner
Kristen Rhodes, Director, Division of Community Care

Division of Community Care – DCC

The City of Northampton and the City of Northampton's Health department in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health are developing a new division, The Division of Community Care (DCC). The DCC is focused on addressing racial and social inequities and supporting our community members during times of significant challenges related to emotional distress, substance use, homelessness, meeting of their basic needs, navigating conflicts, and other unexpected crises.

The DCC is a Public Health led integration of Northampton's Public Safety systems and non-police-based response. The DCC model includes specialized, highly skilled and trained Community Care Response Team (CCRT), as a third tier to non-emergency and emergency needs responses. The DCC at its inception is an innovative model that incorporates a variety of equitable, diverse responses, for all people, while centering its most vulnerable community members with supportive trauma informed care practices, embracing of peer support philosophies, and responding when people experience struggles throughout the community landscape. As a new employment role in the city's staffing infrastructure the DCC will carry out this mission by valuing people with lived and living experiences, integration of prevention strategies, harm reduction practices, provider of public education opportunities and serve our wider community, and a wide array of peer-to-peer support practices.

Community Care Responder Team – CCRT

- Provide on-the-ground emotional support, advocacy and resource connections for the community
- Respond to calls deemed appropriate for this Northampton Program Model community responder team
- Respond to nonviolent community calls while centering its most vulnerable community members
- Outreach and relationship-building with community members, businesses and social services.

Planning over 150 Hours of comprehensive multi-disciplinary training for Community Responders

- [Human in Common](#), which specializes in providing professional diversity and Ethical Upstander training for nonprofits, municipalities, businesses and schools
- [Wildflower Alliance](#), a grassroots peer support, advocacy, and training organization with a focus on harm reduction and human rights
- [Growing a New Heart](#), a collective of like-minded professionals in the fields of social justice advocacy, sexual and domestic violence, addictions, art, communications, dispute resolution, community building and self healing
- [Community911 Training Inc.](#), which helps professionals, businesses, and community members improve their response to and influence better outcomes for all who are at risk for, or suffer from, acute and chronic medical emergencies
- [Stephen Murray, MPH, NRP](#), an overdose researcher and harm reduction program manager at Boston Medical Center, who provides expert technical assistance around the topics of overdose prevention, emergency medical services, and harm reduction
- [Healing Racism Institute of Pioneer Valley](#), which is guided by a diverse group of individuals who believe that facilitating a sustained process of understanding the root causes and impact of racism can serve as a catalyst to overcome the historic and ongoing impact of racism on our society

DCC – CCRT Community Room and Offices



DCC Staff will be moving to the new location on the bottom floor of the Roundhouse building Mid to Late April.

The space that was formerly the Smithsonian will be our Community Room. It will open for the public July 2023.

- Staffed by DCC Coordinator and CCRT
- Living Room Model of Support
 - Immediate response from our staff
 - A safe place to rest and relax
 - Support from CCRT during difficult situations
 - Linkage with referrals for needs such as housing, healthcare, food and mental health services
 - Identification and referral to community resources
 - Access to Public Health Nursing
 -
- Hold CCRT community events, opportunities for learning, on-going specialized trainings and group meetings
- Access to resources and case-management
- Administrative HUB and offices

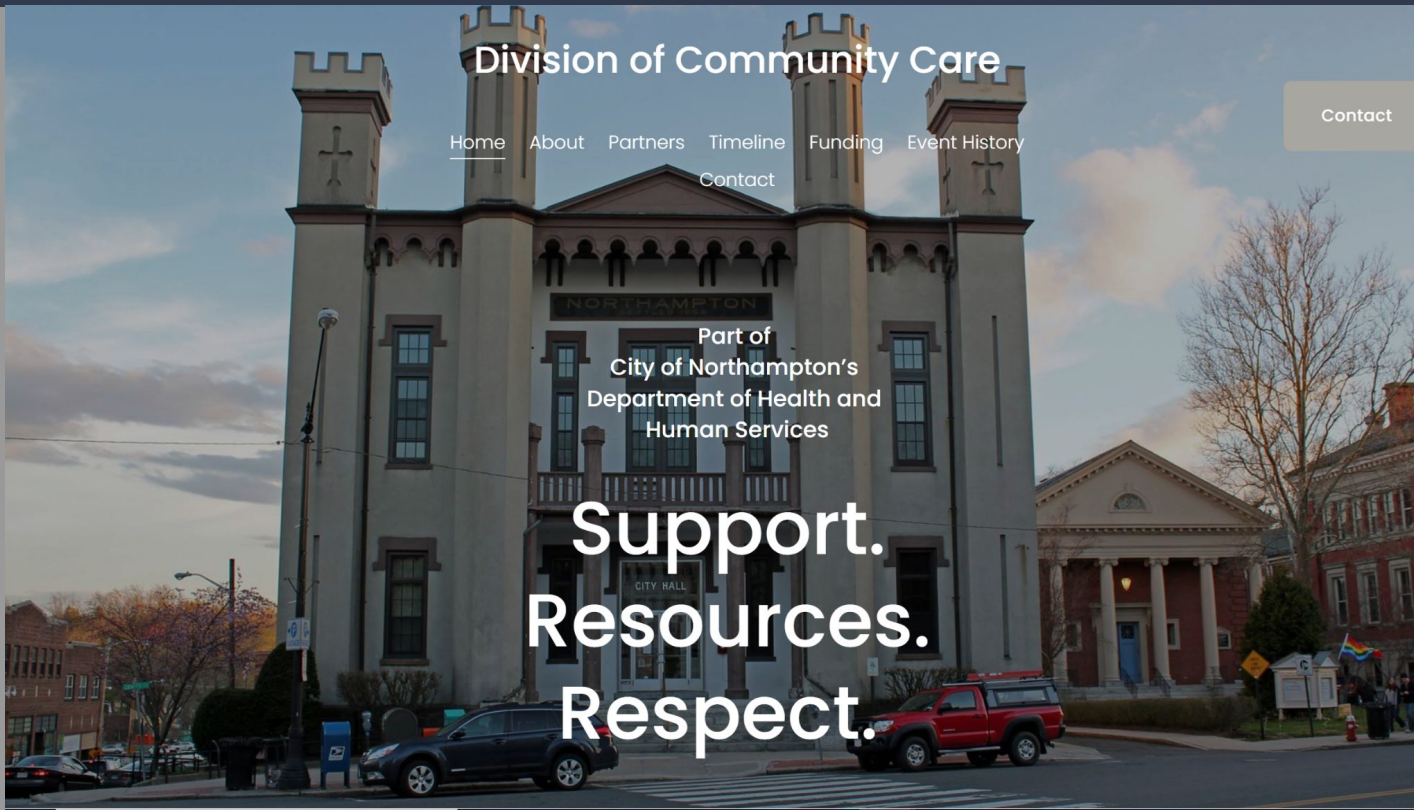
Community Space



- All are welcome - Inclusive
- Trauma-Informed Lens
- De-escalation Semi-Private
- Designed Intentionally
- Shared and Flexible Space for DCC and Community Engagement
- Calm and Predictable Environment
- Sensory tools and Strategies

The space is currently being painted and is ADA compliant. We will be moving in the furniture and completing the space over the next few weeks.

Division of Community Care Website



Division of Community Care

[Home](#) [About](#) [Partners](#) [Timeline](#) [Funding](#) [Event History](#) [Contact](#)

Contact

Part of
City of Northampton's
Department of Health and
Human Services

Support.
Resources.
Respect.

Community Care Response Team (CCRT) Timeline

Northampton receives the news of late award and EAPS grant funding from Department of Health

For innovative work within the intersections of public health and public safety.

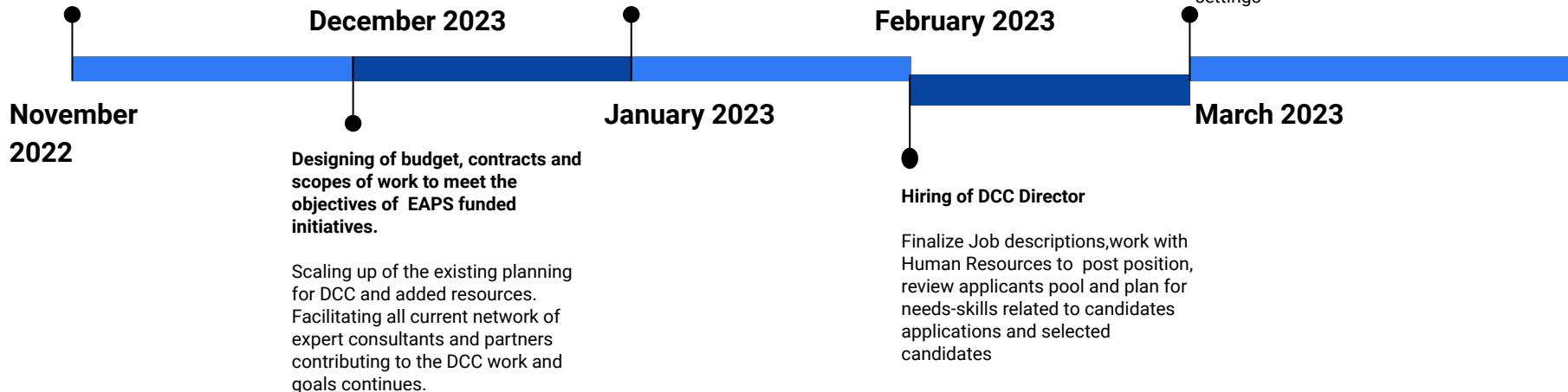
Robust data preparations and expert consultants help refine the DCC model and needs advising.

Listening Sessions (LS) - Key Stakeholder Informant Interviews Begin

- (LS) Identify preferred composition of listening session participants
 - Engage community partners to promote the listening sessions, determine/provide accommodations
 - Develop listening session protocol(s) and questions
- Facilitate listening sessions in multiple settings

Equitable approach to Public Safety

Contracted by the the Department of Health and strategies are approved to begin the work



Community Care Response Team (CCRT) Timeline



Thank you!

Questions and
Contact
Information

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