

Forward Together – Alternative Response Ad Hoc meeting

Dec. 21, 2021, 12 noon – 1:30 p.m.

Conference Room 2001, City Hall

Attendees: Will Kelly, Linda Mayo, Michael Baldwin, Leah Ashford, Dan Starr, Trish Christensen, Edgar Garcia, Brandon Gillespie, Tom Helm (online)

Will: Opened the meeting, asked for a volunteer to take the meeting notes. Leah agreed to do it for this session. He also asked if someone was willing to facilitate the sessions. No one offered to facilitate at this time. It was agreed to revisit at the end of the meeting.

Will: Then asked for a confirmation of the goals and focus of the group.

Chief Brandon: Reviewed what was presented at the Forward Together meeting in October, i.e. that there is a larger system in the County to support those with mental health, beyond what the alternative response model would be, which is focused on how law enforcement can be involved in that support process. Currently, if an officer has concerns about a mental health issue, then a 5150 hold is initiated to have the individual seen by a mental health professional. There is also a rest center on 5th street the individual can be taken to. Some cities have sobering centers, we do not. But an individual can also be taken to the emergency room.

The police are currently creating a CHAT team, to assist with non-violent mental health incidents. They are planning for 2 teams with 2 clinicians on each team, and 3 of those clinicians have already been hired. They are also requesting to purchase 2 vans, like the ones used by Cahoots in Oregon. They will make the request to the City Council in January.

In addition, the police have been reviewing their data to confirm mental health calls, by looking at all 172,000 police incidents in 2020 for key words that would indicate mental health issues, and also looking at all 'quality of life' crimes such as illegal camping, vagrancy, etc and found 19,000 incidents that could be related to mental health and/or homelessness. He indicated that in cross-referencing the two searches, there were only 3,000 incidents that had mental health directly noted, and he felt that they may not be recording this accurately as it seemed to him that more of the incidents could have been due to mental health, so they are looking at new ways to record this.

Linda: Asked how the police confirm if it is a mental health issue, stating that often someone might assume an individual is on drugs, when it is actually a mental health issue. (which the Chief agreed with)

Linda: Also asked if an officer had access to a database to see if someone is known to have mental health issues. She is aware of another police agency that had the ability to look up information on an individual that confirmed whether they had a history of mental health issues, before they arrived at the scene of an incident.

Chief: Confirmed that due to HIPAA(?) laws, they don't have access to that information. Even with the previous CARES team, with agencies in the city trying to work together, often agencies claimed they couldn't share information, so the police could not get confirmation of any mental health issues.

Chief: Then finished his recap of the October presentation by confirming that this issue of how police handle individuals with mental health is being highlighted nationally, and he is in support of finding better ways to handle this issue. He agreed that even with de-escalation and crisis intervention training, officers aren't experts on mental health issues. And he believes it would be helpful to have a clinician who can help diagnose the true issues at hand during an incident.

Will: Thanked the Chief for the review and then asked each person to share why they are part of the program.

Linda: Stated she is in favor of creating a program where the mentally ill find help and treatment vs. being put in jail. She mentioned that she is concerned because grants that had helped provide programs for this seem to have disappeared.

Leah: Stated she was in full support of the CARES team, as she heard that it helped homeless people to get off the streets vs. just being moved on, connecting them to family and resources, etc. She would like to see what we can learn from what worked with that previous team, and talk about what issues there are with getting a new CHAT group going – is it a money issue? Policy issue? Etc. And confirm how this group can help.

Dan: Confirmed that the Police Officers Association (union) is fully in support of these alternative solutions, looking forward to seeing how this group can get to a better solution for the community. Agrees that money is an issue, as we can't rely on a grant and then when those funds dry up it then goes away.

Trish: Agreed that grants would not be the solution; and glad to hear about solutions that are already in the works; and feels that the police can't handle all the issues coming up and would be more balanced to have other professionals able to handle some of the calls.

Tom (online): In support of all that has been stated already, also wondering how this could be made part of the police dept budget, but realize that could also be a concern if someone decides to 'reallocate' those funds when needed elsewhere.

Will: interested in finding additional examples/models of what is working in other police forces across the country and what might work for us here in our city. In looking at budgets, or funding, we'll be making recommendations to the City Council, so it would be good to discuss what recommendations we want to make. Staffing is also an issue if we can't find enough clinicians, as well as police officers. But it's good to hear we have found clinicians with lived experience, and years in Modesto already. Money, people & equipment are what we need to be thinking about.

Trish: Regarding equipment, what is the van we're using already?

Chief: Confirmed they took a current van and were able to wrap it with the CHAT logo. But the Sprinter van that Cahoots has is able to offer a more open space where a person might feel more willing to have

a discussion, with a partition if needed – but doesn't feel like being held in a police car. This is what they would like to purchase.

Dan: It also provides more room to carry resources – like clothing, or space to bring along a pet.

Will: Asked if we could talk a little more about the issue of the budget.

Chief: Stated that if the CHAT program were put under the police dept – it would add to the budget, and we would need to justify that. He isn't too concerned with which dept it sits under, but has found it's good if it starts under the police, so they can come along if there is a concern about violence to the call. In some cities it has come under the fire dept, and in some under the health dept. In Oregon it's a separate non-profit.

Right now their current CARES program is straight grant funding of (\$800,000?) from HUD mainly for homeless; and now there is an additional \$800,000 from xxxx? to hire 2 additional clinicians for a total of 6.

Leah: Asked if the clinicians were able to handle some incident calls, so the current police officers didn't have to handle those calls, couldn't that be covered within the current budget?

Chief: Stated his concern there is that we don't have enough officers right now. Did have 90-100 on patrol, but now only have 80-85. Detective have minimal number. Only 4 traffic officers. The top 2 complaints are homeless and traffic. Right now traffic accidents are taking lives, and if he could hire more traffic officers at this time, I would hire traffic cops as it's costing lives.

Leah: Agreed that it would be good to see police officers at the level that is needed. Also asked if they were able to use CHAT workers for a certain number of calls, could the officers who might normally handle those calls be moved to traffic.

Chief: Stated that could be a possibility, but it would need to be reviewed based on current data.

Mike: Brought the group back to their ultimate goal, which is for this group to make recommendations to the City Council. He then shared what he had captured as the ideas so far from the group:

- a. Finding ways to share information – possibly allowing 1-2 official clinicians to have access to HIPAA info so they can ensure officers are aware if there is a mental health history (without sharing specifics about that history)
- b. Finding a way to better track data for mental health calls
- c. Finding creative options for funding new programs to support mental health related calls
- d. Self-defense training for clinicians
- e. Possibility of creating a non-profit to do the alternative response work

Chief: Agreed to research a couple of items we are considering. He is also talking with the fire chief regarding the model where a medical professional is sometimes part of the team – nurse, EMT, etc.

Chief cont: Looking to see if a clinician could go out with an EMT. Getting the community's opinion on that would be helpful. Would like to know whatever solution we decide on will actually be the best solution.

Dan: Stated that long-term, his opinion is that the new CHAT team should be under the police dept. Nationally the police are being looked at closely with how they handle mental health related incidents, so it makes sense to have it under the police so they can have direct input on how this group is handling these calls.

Will: Asked for closing thoughts from each person.

Trish: Requested introductions of each Ad Hoc committee member present. She shared that she is currently working with the Modesto Chamber of Commerce.

Dan: Stated that he is a Sergeant with the police dept and is over the POA.

Leah: Shared she was formerly in HR with Gallo for 20 years, now has a coaching/training business, and is on the Board of City Ministry Network.

Mike: Works with the City and is a facilitator for Forward Together

Linda: Is a mother of 2 daughters with schizophrenia; and part of an advocacy group called NAMI-National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

Will: Is with the Stanislaus Tuolumne Labor Council

Brian: Is the Police Chief

Edgar: Is with City Manager's office

Tom (online): Communications chair for local chapter of ACLU

Will: Thoughts for next session?

Leah: Would like to confirm what has been learned from the previous HEART, CARES teams, etc.

Chief: Agreed they can research some lessons learned from those groups

Will: Asked if Mike could keep a record of the list of possible recommendations he had stated.

Linda: Asked if the group could discuss the possibility of creating a review panel to look at how mental health cases were being handled by the police.

Will: Asked if the group could get even rough numbers of what it might cost to scale up for the CHAT team. Also, would love to hear how the current transition is going in the police dept with new leadership. And how could the group get additional data to help with the recommendations we want to make.

Tom: Stated that it seems the group is on the right track. We all want this to grow and expand. So let's look at where we can find the funding to help this grow, along with the capacity to handle the calls.

Will: Asked if someone was willing to facilitate next time.

Leah: Confirmed she was willing to facilitate if someone else takes meeting notes next time.

Will: Asked if everyone was willing to complete a Doodle poll for a January meeting time, calendars were brought out and a meeting date was selected.

Meeting adjourned.