



REPORT to the MAYOR and MEMBERS of the CITY COUNCIL
From the CITY MANAGER

DATE: September 15, 2020

SUBJECT: Discussion regarding the Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement ("HOME") program.

ISSUING DEPARTMENT: City Manager

SUMMARY:

Issues:

Should the City of La Mesa implement the Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement ("HOME") program which would use social workers, medical professionals, and mental health professionals to respond to nonemergency calls for service to assist the homeless and mental health calls?

Recommendation:

Provide direction to staff regarding HOME, a proposed program that uses social workers, medical health professionals, and mental health professionals to assist the homeless population and respond to mental health calls.

Fiscal Impact:

The initial phase of the program would be funded using Community Development Block Grant ("CDBG") Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security ("CARES") Act funding. The second phase of the HOME program would be funded using State-funded Permanent Local Housing Authority funding over the next five years.

Strategic Goals:

- Safe community
- Continue to improve high quality municipal services

BACKGROUND:

The City Council previously directed staff to work with the Citizens Task Force on Homelessness (“CTFH”) to reexamine the City budget and determine funding opportunities to retain professionals or services in mental health, de-escalation, homelessness, and counseling for non-emergency calls. The City Council also asked staff to research best practices in other cities, return to the City Council with findings, and prepare a resolution amending the Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Operating Budget to provide funding to support staff’s recommendations. After conducting further research and discussing this issue with the CTFH, staff is presenting a potential pilot program for the City Council’s consideration.

DISCUSSION:

Municipal governments today frequently address issues related to homelessness that were once handled by federal, state, and county governments. The scope of policing has increased to include calls involving social work, mental health counseling, drug addiction, and specifically homelessness. In many cases, police officers are the first responders to calls related to homelessness regardless of whether that individual poses a threat to themselves or the community. In some cases, a police officer may not have the appropriate training to address the issue or these calls may not be considered an immediate priority due to other emergencies. In 2019, the La Mesa Police Department (“LMPD”) responded to 2,182 calls related to homelessness which represented 3.3% of all calls for service that year. This number also represented a 14% increase in calls related to homelessness compared to 2018. As cities continue taking on a greater share of services involving the homeless, the strain placed on local law enforcement agencies has the potential to affect core public safety services expected by residents.

An approach implemented by some communities is to recruit and train personnel with a background in social work that supplements law enforcement response to nonemergency calls related to homelessness. This may be especially helpful when working with individuals who may also suffer from mental health disorders or other related conditions that prevent them from being stabilized and self-sufficient enough for long-term housing. Dedicating personnel with the combination of training and education has potential benefits for the homeless population, the community, and the LMPD. This report will highlight a specific program from Eugene, Oregon and discuss its potential application to La Mesa. Staff will also discuss the proposed development of a pilot program using State grant funding sources.

Alternative Models

Staff conducted research, including a site visit, to one of the leading programs in the United States designed to redirect resources to nonemergency calls for service. The Crisis Assistance Helping Out-On-The Streets, also known as CAHOOTS, in Eugene, Oregon began approximately 30 years ago and is a mobile crisis response team

comprised of a social worker, a mental health professional, and a medical professional that respond to nonemergency calls for service. Members of the CAHOOTS team receive over 500 hours of training centered on crisis intervention, resolution, de-escalation, and social work. The team operates out of a van and is directly linked with the Eugene, Oregon dispatch system. The CAHOOTS program is a collaboration between local police and the White Bird Clinic operating in Springfield and Eugene, Oregon. The CAHOOTS team is dispatched to various nonemergency calls related to potential substance abuse issues, overdoses, and welfare checks. Approximately 50% of the calls addressed by CAHOOTS are related to homelessness.

The program is designed to assist those that do not pose an immediate risk to public safety using a team specifically trained to deescalate encounters and connect individuals experiencing a crisis with appropriate resources. The CAHOOTS team uses techniques designed to reduce trauma and harm with the goal of decreasing intervention by police officers. The program reduces the amount of police officer time dedicated to these calls. Data from 2019 indicates that CAHOOTS responded to approximately 20% of the Eugene Police Department's total calls for service; less than 1% of the calls addressed by the mobile crisis team required police assistance.

Over the past several years, the traditional law enforcement approach to homelessness was changed by court rulings. In 2018, the Ninth District Court of Appeals, which includes California and eight other states, ruled in *Martin v. Boise* that the imposition of criminal penalties for sitting, sleeping, or lying outside on public property for homeless individuals who cannot obtain shelter is unconstitutional. This ruling, along with changes in criminal penalties associated with drug offenses in California, created a paradigm shift regarding how counties and cities approach homelessness. As a result, traditional law enforcement is no longer the most effective tool to reduce homelessness.

Given changes in enforcement policies and legislation, the efficacy of using police officers trained to address issues related to homelessness has led to the development of new program models. These programs leverage professionals trained to address social issues along with networks of nonprofits that provide ongoing care in a managed setting along with transitional and long-term housing opportunities. Overall, this model has several potential benefits to the community and the City:

- Provides trained social and mental health professionals to address nonemergency calls that could be addressed through de-escalation and counseling.
- Addresses gaps in service for the homeless population such as transportation, assistance with documentation, and medical attention.
- Enhances services to the local homeless population, residents, and businesses to address nonemergency calls.
- Reduces the number of hours that police and fire services dedicate to responding

to nonemergency calls; allowing these agencies to address other core service needs.

- Allows the police department to advance proactive and community policing initiatives; provides the police department with direct resources to enhance its level of service.
- Reduces the cost of having LMPD respond to nonemergency calls for service by as much as 44%.
- Improves response times for emergency calls for service.

Proposed Program

Designing and developing a successful program similar to CAHOOTS will require additional research and time. At the same time, staff recognizes La Mesa also has short-term needs related to its homeless population that should be addressed consistently. Earlier this year, the City recently received one-time revenue through Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus Funding CARES Act funding ("CDBG-CV"), totaling \$262,416, which can be used to assist the homeless population. The City is also eligible to receive up to \$1.1 million over a period of five years through the Permanent Local Housing Authority ("PLHA") program. Using these funding sources, staff proposes building a pilot program called Homeless Outreach and Mobile Engagement ("HOME") under a two-phased approach. Phase I would use CDBG-CV funding to implement a one-year program managed by a local nonprofit that would allow the City to address immediate priority needs relating to homeless and provide additional time to develop the second phase of the program. Phase II would transition the nonprofit services to the City using ongoing funding provided by PLHA. The second phase of the program would allow the City to provide dedicated in-house resources that work collaboratively with LMPD.

Phase I: Expanded Outreach Program

Earlier this year, the City Council authorized staff to issue a Notice of Funding Availability ("NOFA") using CDBG-CV funds for homeless services totaling \$262,416. The City received three proposals. At the next City Council meeting, staff will recommend the proposal from People Assisting the Homeless ("PATH"). PATH's proposal would enable the City to expand its homeless outreach services by providing a full-time outreach worker along with a full-time mental health expert for up to one-year. The program would expand the number of hours and personnel assigned to work with the La Mesa homeless population. The proposal would also provide transitional housing services and other activities to support the program.

PATH currently works part-time in La Mesa under a grant provided through the San Diego Regional Task Force on the Homeless using State Homeless Emergency Aid

Program (“HEAP”) funding. HEAP is a one-time funding source and is expected to expire sometime within the next 12-months. The proposed use of CDBG-CV funding would allow Path to expand their hours and work more closely with LMPD to engage in outreach. There are, however, inherent limitations to the contract model. For example, the City would not have the ability to control decisions regarding hiring, training, and direct the daily work of contract employees. PATH would also not have direct access to dispatch calls. Consequently, staff believes the long-term implementation of this program is a good candidate for bringing these services in-house. Nonetheless, staff believes a one-year contract program with PATH using one-time CDBG-CV funding would provide immediate benefits to the community and allow time for the City to develop an in-house program with the support of the LMPD.

Phase II: HOME Pilot Program

The second phase of the pilot program would bring these services in-house as the HOME program. Staff proposes hiring a full-time outreach worker and a medical professional as its outreach team that would work a full-time shift between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. The City would also purchase and outfit a vehicle and directly connect the team to dispatch services. The team would coordinate daily with LMPD and address as many calls as necessary. Assuming the team would initially handle 50% of LMPD’s calls related to homelessness and mental health, the program would address approximately 5-10 calls per day. The LMPD would have the opportunity to implement new community policing efforts and other community engagement programs and focus on providing core services. Staff estimates the first-year cost of the program would be \$220,000 to \$250,000 with a recurring annual cost of approximately \$169,000 to \$180,000.

The City recently applied for PLHA funding through the State of California. This ongoing funding source provides up to \$1.1 million over a five-year period that may be used for homeless outreach and mental health services. The State is currently reviewing the City’s application but confirmed the proposed use of funding is consistent with the grant guidelines. If approved, the annual funding would provide approximately an average of \$200,000 per year that could be dedicated to this program. The State is scheduled to notify the City of the grant award sometime in October. To further support the program, the City would allocate an additional \$30,000 annually through CDBG funding to provide supportive housing services. Based on the ongoing available funding sources, the City could fund the program entirely through grants. The City would develop and track key metrics to measure the program’s effectiveness.

Next Steps

Should the City Council provide direction to implement the two-phased approach discussed in this report, staff recommends the following next steps:

1. On September 22, 2020, authorize staff to award a contract to PATH to provide expanded outreach and mental health services to address the short-term needs of

the La Mesa Homeless population.

2. Subject to approval of the Permanent Local Housing Authority ("PLHA") grant by the State of California, accept and appropriate funding in the Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Operating Budget.
3. Direct staff to further develop the HOME program and provide the City Council with an Implementation Plan as part of the budget adoption process for Fiscal Year 2021-2022.

CONCLUSION:

As municipalities continue taking on a greater share of local services related to the homeless population, data from programs implemented in other communities suggest it is less efficient to use traditional police officers from a cost and service perspective. Programs similar to HOME reduce the amount of time and cost associated with the traditional law enforcement approach and can improve outcomes for the homeless population and those with mental health issues. Staff identified a model that could be applied to La Mesa using one-time and ongoing grant funding sources and is now seeking further direction from the City Council.

Attachment(s):

None

Reviewed by:



Greg Humora
City Manager

Respectfully submitted by:



Carlo Tomaino
Assistant City Manager