

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

March 18, 2024

12:00 p.m.

Councilman Denny Whayne Conference Room (Bush Building, 4th floor)
840 Boonville Avenue

MEMBERS

PRESENT: Heather Hardinger, Chair; Derek Lee; Callie Carroll; and Craig Hosmer.

MEMBERS

ABSENT: None.

COUNCIL

PRESENT: None.

STAFF

PRESENT: Jason Gage, City Manager; Maurice S. Jones, Deputy City Manager; Katie Towns, Director of Public Health and Welfare; Rinda Davis, Assistant Director of Public Health and Welfare; Julie Viele, Public Health Program Representative; Douglas Gudeman, Community Health Advocate; Erica Little, Health Program Administrator; Angie Atwell, Community Health Advocate; Jody Austin, Public Health Program Representative; Judge Wendy Garrison, Chief Judge of Municipal Court; Judge David Mercer, Municipal Court; Jenny Deppe, Probation Officer; Brock Rowe, Director of Building Development Services; Brad Musick, Assistant Director of Building Development Services; Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement; Jordan Paul, City Attorney; Ragan Wright, Assistant City Attorney; Anita Cotter, City Clerk; and Julie Greer, Deputy City Clerk.

GUESTS: Jack McGee, *Springfield Daily Citizen*; Ashley McCormick, Springfield Recovery Community Center; and Katie Cheavens, citizen.

Councilwoman Heather Hardinger, Chair, called the meeting to order at approximately 12:04 p.m., and roll call was conducted. Present: Derek Lee, Craig Hosmer, Callie Carroll, and Heather Hardinger. Absent: None.

Councilman Hosmer moved to approve the minutes of the February 21, 2024, meeting as presented. Councilwoman Carroll seconded the motion, and it was approved by the following vote: Ayes: Lee, Hosmer, Carroll, and Hardinger. Nays: None. Absent: None. Abstain: None.

Councilwoman Hardinger noted the next item on the agenda was the consideration of reinstatement of the Jail Diversion Program. She turned the meeting over to Jason Gage, City Manager.

Mr. Gage introduced Katie Towns, Director of the Springfield-Greene County Health Department, and Judge Wendy Garrison, Chief Judge of Municipal Court, as the presenters. Judge Garrison noted Judge David Mercer, Municipal Court, and Jenny Deppe, Probation Officer, were also in attendance. Ms. Towns noted Rinda Davis, Assistant Director of Public Health and Welfare, Erica Little, Health Program Administrator, Jody Austin, Public Health Program Representative, Angie Atwell, Community Health Advocate, Douglas Gudeman, Community Health Advocate, and Julie Viele, Public Health Program Representative, who comprise the Health Advocate Team were also in attendance and had been very integral in the partnership development.

Ms. Towns gave an overview of a previous partnership between the Springfield-Greene County Health Department and Municipal Court. She explained this program had shown success in decreasing recidivism and increasing the health and mental health, as well as substance abuse and recovery utilization, of the jail population.

She noted today's discussion would provide an understanding of what a community health advocate was and propose a model which would meet the needs of the jail population based on evidence which had been shown to work to reduce the jail population and recidivism.

Ms. Towns explained the Health Department identified mental health and substance abuse as a priority health issue as far back as 2016; this was done through the Community Health Needs Assessment. Staff members then reviewed this and published a report in 2019 which showed the affects of mental health and substance abuse in the community as well as some proposed solutions. Through these efforts, it was determined there were spots within the criminal justice system where there were opportunities to intervene.

Ms. Towns noted the Community Health Advocates (CHAs) in the Criminal Justice System program was approved in February 2020 to address the mental health and substance use problems identified in the 2019 mental health and substance use assessment. Funding was granted by Greene County in 2020 through the Greene County 1/2-cent General Sales Tax. The program began implementation in July of 2021 with the first client being accepted in August of 2021.

Judge Garrison explained she and Judge Mercer commonly saw individuals with mental health issues at Municipal Court. Usually, they saw them on the In Custody Docket, and they were in the jail because of the mental health issues as well as some substance abuse issues, homelessness, or physical health issues. Because of the mental health issues, these individuals often acted out, causing them to have frequent contact with law enforcement, and they had multiple citations for minor offenses such as trespassing or obstructing a police officer. She explained as judges, they were often at a loss as to what to do with the individuals. If they were to be let out of the jail, they would probably not appear for court until they were arrested again. They could also be a danger to themselves and community members and continue to accrue additional charges.

Judge Garrison explained the prior Jail Diversion Program was available to Municipal Court until September of 2023 when the funding was discontinued. With this program, the court was able to refer individuals seen on the In Custody Docket to the program so that they could be evaluated for

program eligibility. Once they were accepted into the program, the court was able to release the individuals with a plan. The plan could consist of several parts depending on the needs of the individual; this could include housing, re-establishing Medicaid, establishing disability, appointments to see mental health providers, and appointments to address physical health issues.

As a part of this plan, a Community Health Advocate would accompany the individual to these appointments, so there was intense supervision at the beginning of the program. Previously, success included placing the individual on two years of supervised probation for continued oversight. The court could see the individuals had no new charges, and the individual was also able to maintain their independence or interdependence and would have continued engagement in community services.

Rinda Davis, Assistant Director of Public Health and Welfare, noted today's proposal was to reinstate the Jail Diversion Program in partnership with the Health Department Community Health Advocates. She explained it would be a great opportunity with the skilled staff to be able to step in and pick back up with what they had been doing before which was working with individuals and connecting them to the needed resources. She noted the linkage to care was one of the biggest benefits of the program; the advocates served as a link to health and community services.

Under the proposed program, a participant would have an introductory meeting with an advocate. Four main areas would be evaluated: healthcare services, employment, establish mental health and/or substance use treatment, and housing. A plan would be determined, and steps would be taken to help the participant become stabilized. This would include working with community partners such as Jordan Valley, CoxHealth, Mercy, Career Center, Excel Center, One Door, Victory Mission, Safe to Sleep, and others.

Judge Garrison explained if the program were to be revamped and re-established, they would be working with low-risk offenders. There would still be the continual partnership with Municipal Court; the participant would have the feedback and opportunities to receive praise from the judges as progress was made. The length of the program would be an average of 60 to 90 days compared to 70 to 365 days with the previous program.

Under the proposed program, once a referral was received from Municipal Court to the Health Department, there would be an in-person assessment meeting and care plan established. The care plan would go back to Municipal Court for review and approval. Once the proposed plan was approved, the success was up to the participant. The participant would be released under the supervision of the Community Health Advocate. Non-compliance would cause the participant to return to jail.

Ms. Davis explained the total funding being requested to re-establish the program was \$350,000. This included \$184,909.04 for personnel, \$136,146.93 for supplies and services, and \$28,944.03 for program operations, including software and materials.

Ms. Davis explained the benefits of the program included reduced time spent in jail and decreased recidivism. She noted the intervention addressed the City Council priority of public safety and

addressed the four topics of the marijuana tax initiative (mental health, substance abuse, housing, and public safety). She further noted the cost effectiveness of the proposal; every \$1 invested in substance use treatment saves about \$12 in crime and healthcare expense (cited from *Crime and Delinquency*, 2013). She noted the lasting effects of the program on the participants and their families was unknown.

She provided the cost to host a participant in the Jail Diversion Program for 60 days was about \$3,400 while the cost to house a person in the Greene County Jail for the same period was \$4,200 based on the State rate of \$70 per day. The proposed program would serve about 100 individuals per year, which would be a savings of about \$80,000 in total cost.

Ms. Davis explained the program would focus on connecting the participants to mental health and substance use treatment and healthcare services, and increase the connections to and utilization of social services. The proposed program would allow more participants than the previous program.

Judge Garrison reviewed the previous program, noting there had been 25 participants from January 1, 2023, through September 1, 2023; 19 of those participants were successful. She explained one component of the proposed program would be the recognition of individuals in open court for successful completion of the program, and the participants would be presented with a certificate of completion. This would recognize the number of positive life changes the participants had been able to make. She explained the Municipal Court Judges had the option of setting aside a guilty plea, and the Prosecutor could dismiss the case if the program were successfully completed so the participant could avoid a criminal record.

Jenny Deppe, Probation Officer, introduced Katie Cheavens, a participant in the previous Jail Diversion Program, to share her experience. Ms. Cheavens explained she had been homeless for three years and was a heroin addict. Her addiction made her lose her belongings and her children. Through her participation in the program, she was able to turn her life around. Councilwoman Hardinger thanked Ms. Cheavens for sharing her story.

Ms. Davis asked City Council to consider providing the funding to reinstate the program, noting it would holistically benefit the participants and work to break chronic cycles, along with providing needed resources for participants.

Councilwoman Carroll noted she appreciated the partnerships with local non-profits and asked about the program's relationship with Springfield Police officers. Ms. Austin responded there was a great relationship with the Police Area Representative (PAR) officers. Councilwoman Hardinger asked for clarification that the proposal was to utilize funds provided by the marijuana sales tax. Ms. Towns responded affirmatively.

Councilman Hosmer asked about the funding for the previous program. Ms. Davis responded the previous program was funded by Greene County, and the funding stopped in September of 2023.

Councilman Hosmer asked if Greene County was considering partnering with the City to re-establish the program. Ms. Towns responded Greene County had a program they were utilizing

within Pre-Trial Services. Councilman Hosmer asked if it was similar to the proposed program. Ms. Towns responded there were some similarities.

Judge Garrison expressed her opinion the programs were like apples and oranges. She explained Pre-Trial Services monitored people who had pending felonies, so they were released from the jail through Pre-Trial Services. She explained Pre-Trial Services would help people get identification and get into New Beginnings or other treatment facilities, but it was for a limited time period until they were found guilty or plead guilty and they went on State Probation and Parole or they went to the Department of Corrections. The proposed City program would work with minor offenders who had mental health issues or substance abuse disorders who were not able to get any help. The goal of the proposed City program would be to provide an intensive program right up front to address all of the needs which are difficult for the participants to address. The Community Health Advocate would provide supervision and provide assistance to get through the difficult issues. Once the participant was placed on probation, they would have a Probation Officer to oversee and work with them for two years to keep them on track.

Councilman Hosmer recalled the previous program had 19 who were considered successful out of the 25 who participated. He asked for their definition of successful. Judge Garrison responded the definition of successful was the people were still on probation, still complying with all of the requirements of the probation, and still doing everything they were introduced to in the beginning of the program. Those persons continued to be supervised by Ms. Deppe. Judge Garrison confirmed there had been less than one percent of recidivism with those individuals.

Councilman Hosmer asked why the other six participants in the previous program were not successful. The response was two of them reoffended, one had other charges develop, two walked away, and one had to be sentenced.

Councilman Hosmer thanked Ms. Cheavens for attending and sharing her story.

Councilman Hosmer asked if there was anything that could be done to assist those who were not willing to make positive changes yet. Judge Garrison responded when people had been arrested and were before the court, it often took three to four days before any substance they were under the influence of to wear off and for them to become cognizant of their situation. She explained they were more receptive to being referred to the program at that point. The Community Health Advocate would visit right away, and the Community Health Advocate was received differently than someone from the Probation Office. The Community Health Advocate did not ask about criminal history; they would ask about personal physicians, medical issues, and other caring type questions. She expressed her opinion that would be more likely to make someone want to participate in the program.

Judge Garrison added there had been several individuals who just had minor needs, such as the need to obtain a birth certificate, who had been assisted by the Community Health Advocates in the previous program and were not included in the count of 25 participants. However, they would be included in the participant count going forward.

Ms. Austin explained what would be different about the proposed program is the Community Health Advocates would be able to get to participants quicker, before they had been imbedded into the criminal justice system.

Councilman Hosmer expressed his opinion this was the type of program the City needed more of. He referred to the cost savings and noted Springfield Police Officers report they spend about 40 percent of their time dealing with mental health issues. He expressed his opinion the anticipated amount of savings was probably low.

Councilman Lee expressed his support for the program. He noted he had spoken with County Commissioner Rusty MacLachlan on the difference between the previous program and the proposed program. He noted Mr. MacLachlan had explained staff members were previously working with between 200 and 300 individuals, where the proposed program would only serve about 100 individuals, and it appeared the proposed program would provide more intensive care to the participants compared to the previous program. Councilman Lee expressed his opinion there was a moral obligation to help people who were willing to change.

Councilman Hosmer expressed his opinion it was sad the biggest mental health facility in the county was the Greene County Jail. He expressed a desire to see more examples of success like Ms. Cheavens.

Councilwoman Hardinger asked Mr. Gage what the goal was to accomplish with today's presentation. She asked if a motion was needed.

Mr. Gage responded the proposal was to use \$350,000 from the marijuana tax proceeds. He noted City Council would be going through the budget process soon. If the Committee members would like to use those proceeds, there could be a recommendation to the full City Council to do so. He noted he had asked the Health Department and Municipal Court to submit corresponding budget requests for the proposed program.

Mr. Gage explained the Committee could bring an action item to City Council sooner if they did not want to wait until July when the new budget year would start. Councilwoman Hardinger responded her recommendation would be to start sooner. Councilwoman Carroll expressed her agreement.

Mr. Gage recommended a motion directing staff to make sure there were sufficient resources from the recreational marijuana tax which would allow fully funding the requested \$350,000 and move forward with drafting the necessary documents to begin the program.

Councilman Hosmer moved to request staff to make sure there were sufficient resources from the recreational marijuana tax which would allow fully funding the requested \$350,000 and move forward with drafting the necessary documents to begin the program. Councilwoman Carroll seconded the motion, and it was approved by the following vote: Ayes: Lee, Hosmer, Carroll, and Hardinger. Nays: None. Absent: None. Abstain: None.

Councilman Hosmer asked how this would interface with the co-responder program currently in place with Burrell. Ms. Austin responded there was one person who worked with the co-responder program, and she worked through the PAR officer. Municipal Court staff members coordinate with the co-responder on the same type of client. When charges were brought, then the individual would be considered for the Jail Diversion Program. If the situation could be resolved without charges, such as through hospitalization, stabilization, or the Burrell Crisis Center, the individual would be diverted that way.

Councilman Lee asked if the same staff members who were part of the successful program would staff the proposed program. Ms. Towns responded affirmatively.

Councilwoman Hardinger moved to item number four on the agenda, the continued discussion of Resolution 10722 (Nuisance Properties). Mr. Gage explained the Committee members had each been provided with a copy of the document entitled “Final City Staff Report and Recommendations to the Community Involvement Committee Per City Council Resolution No. 10722.” He noted an estimated cost on staffing impacts had been added since the prior meeting. Mr. Gage reviewed the document listing the recommendations. He noted staff did not expect the recommendations to be costly with the exception of the implementation of a rental inspection program. He further noted the document included changes needed to the City Code which had been discussed. He explained this was being provided as a resource for the Committee members.

Councilwoman Hardinger asked for clarification regarding the Committee members having the potential of approving the document and taking the recommendation to the full City Council. Mr. Gage responded affirmatively, noting the Committee members could add to or modify the document.

Councilwoman Hardinger noted the Committee had discussed getting recommendations before City Council to review and discuss with the possibility of referring some individual items back to the Committee to work through specifics. Mr. Gage responded the Committee would want to spend time investigating other communities which had rental inspection programs to see how effective they had been.

Councilman Hosmer asked how the Committee would make a recommendation to City Council without a bill. Councilwoman Hardinger responded part of the Committee’s task was to create a recommendation to the full City Council for discussion. Councilman Lee suggested reviewing the information with the full City Council at a lunch meeting.

Councilwoman Hardinger asked if the recommendations for each of the individual items would then come forward in a bill. Mr. Gage responded many would have their own path of action, so those would be brought as a recommendation. He explained they could make a recommendation based on a motion from the Committee. Staff members could draft a memorandum and then provide it and the recommendation report to City Council members; it could be done as a Council Lunch report or staff could draft a resolution accepting the report.

Councilwoman Hardinger moved to send the report containing the Committee’s recommendations to a City Council presentation. Councilman Hosmer seconded the motion, and it was approved by

the following vote: Ayes: Lee, Hosmer, Carroll, and Hardinger. Nays: None. Absent: None. Abstain: None.

Councilwoman Hardinger noted the next steps would be determined once feedback was obtained from the City Council members.

Councilwoman Hardinger noted she appreciated the chart provided in the report showing time, cost, and staffing. She expressed her opinion it might be helpful to other Councilmembers if there were a way to prioritize the projects based on need; she noted some of the items would be ongoing.

Councilman Hosmer asked Brock Rowe, Director of Building Development Services, about low hanging fruit, such as uniforms for employees. Mr. Rowe responded almost all of the vehicles were already marked and most employees wore a shirt or jacket with the Building Development Services (BDS) logo.

Councilman Hosmer noted the St. Louis County employees almost looked like police officers in their uniforms and asked if they would get better compliance because of their official appearance. Mr. Rowe responded the BDS vehicles all had the BDS branding and said “BDS Inspector” so people knew who they were. He noted pants could be provided for the employees, but he expressed his opinion they were already close to uniforms as it was mandatory to wear the polo or jacket with the logo.

Councilmember Lee moved to adjourn. Councilwoman Carroll seconded the motion, and it was approved by the following vote: Ayes: Lee, Carroll, and Hardinger. Nays: Hosmer. Absent: None. Abstain: None.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:55 p.m.

Prepared by Julie Greer

*Clerk’s Note: The March 20, 2024, Community Involvement Committee meeting was rescheduled to March 18, 2024.