

4/2/24 Opioid Abatement Committee

Present:

Tim Fontneau – Rochester City Councilor

Chuck Creteau – Rochester City Councilor

David Herman – Rochester City Councilor

Nicole Rodler - Rochester PD Juvenile Diversion Coordinator

Nicole Dale-Hogan – Spaulding HS LADAC

Todd Marsh – Welfare Director

4:35 pm Meeting started

Fontneau called the meeting to order. Roll call done by Jenn Mutolo

Fontneau stated the agenda for this meeting was continued discussion on how the committee wants to appropriate the money. There are recommendations that went to City Council in January and haven't come out of Finance Committee. Marsh stated he met with the city manager and Mark Sullivan to share his thoughts on the recommendations. He stated the money is not to offset but enhance. He stated he mentioned the concerns he has with the transitional housing money as it sounds like a hotel and could offset what welfare does. If the goal is to offset the welfare budget that is fine, but that is not the goal. He can see dental as enhancing as there are not many agencies that have that.

Fontneau stated there was also a piece for transportation needs. Marsh stated that there are some existing services for that now. There might be extra steps to get it, but it does exist. Rodler stated that the students that can't get to treatment would be a separate category than the adults. Dale-Hogan stated the closest treatment center is Seabrook and if a parent can't transport them, it would be to contract an operator for the van to transport.

Fontneau stated there is also the idea to focus the money towards opioid effected unhoused people. If someone is coming out of treatment or a program and going to live in the woods the chances of success are reduced. He asked how they can take this money to help. Marsh stated current options are supportive transitional housing or someone getting their own apt with case management and if the money could help fund those. Fontneau stated there are a number of places in Rochester that are sober living houses, but he has heard some can be expensive. It is hard for someone to afford them coming right out of treatment. If they have a list of the ones in town and they have open beds that might be an option. Rodler stated they can get in under welfare. Marsh stated local welfare can provide first month's rent to get in, but the caveat is they have to show they can afford the rest. Rodler stated when they get in, they have to work on getting a job so the money isn't there for them to sustain. This money can be to fill in that gap.

Creteau asked a few clarifying questions to understand better the conversation going on. When he sees all this money, his first thought is how to use it for the greatest good. His dream would be a low barrier shelter as rough estimates are 60-95% people are in some way misusing substances. That is a great amount of people that are homeless. There are people crying for help and have no solution in this county. Prior to today's meeting, he talked to Amy Malone and asked what they could do. He pitched to her they need a low barrier shelter where they can get the unhoused the services they need. A prior plan was the elderly home in Dover, but that did not get approved. There are a lot of people that don't understand the homeless situation. However, they don't have enough money to buy a place and fund it. But knowing the top needs, how do they execute it. Do they get Mark Sullivan involved and see about a six month interest bearing account.

Rodler stated she gotten funding since 2013 so she gets it. It would be wonderful if they could find a shelter situation that could be open year-round. But it's not just our people. Rochester dollars need to be spent on just Rochester people and we need to make sure of that. The sustainability is going to cost and it's going to cost a lot for long term. They know the amount of money that they received, but they don't know the next amount. Dale-Hogan stated she would assume that a person running the shelter would be paid from the budget and would apply for grants.

Marsh stated it would be a start fund knowing the money ends with the hope that more is to come with state funding or grants. There is value in it, but knowing there is a risk.

Creteau stated Rochester residents make up 75% of all shelters right now.

Fontneau stated surrounding towns don't really have any services, so people come to Rochester to get those services and then they are a resident. Marsh stated that a new RSA now states that a shelter does not make you a resident.

Rodler stated when she is out in the field doing outreach, people state they are from Rochester. But when they have funding to put them in housing and are doing the paperwork, they find out they actually aren't from Rochester. So numbers are skewed.

Marsh stated they have a motivation in welfare to find out where someone is from because other towns can be billed. For example, My Friends Place in Dover does bill other municipalities. The challenge is how do you tell someone you are helping "I'm sorry but Milton didn't pay." There can be peer to peer pressure with these smaller municipalities. He thinks there is value in that seed money knowing there is a risk but knowing they will fund a grant writer.

Creteau asked what is their charge. Is it to fund to the best of their ability. Rodler stated yes. It is all based around the impact of opioid use around Rochester. Rochester was able to get funding specifically because they were ground zero.

Dale-Hogan stated they need a process for their ideas. They have come up with low hanging fruit but have no process.

Creteau stated what if they took the remainder of the money after the requests to council and talked to Mark Sullivan about putting it into an interest bearing account knowing that it will be used to start something. Rodler stated they need to talk to Terence O'Rourke and see if they can bank they money to increase it.

Fontneau stated they should be able to pick off the chunks that they know they can do and can do right away. Like the \$50k for the oral care.

Rodler stated that the requests are all sitting at finance and the only thing that has been released is the Choose Love program.

Fontneau stated realistically they would get 5% in interest so it won't change their position drastically. His thought is to pick the top three things they can implement right away. Rodler stated the school curriculum they can purchase right away and be done. Transportation they can pay for it and it's done. As for the oral care, she asked if they can create an account and individuals can come to welfare to get it. Rodler stated you can have your teeth taken out and Medicare will pay for it, but they won't pay to put any in. Marsh stated his team would want some guidelines to be able to point to. And they would need to know for sure the oral care needed is opioid related. Dale-Hogan stated a case manager might be able to say that is the cause.

Fontneau stated he might pull back on the oral care request because they aren't ready. They don't have providers lined up and a program would need to be created first. But the other two they are ready to go forward with. Marsh suggested going to finance and stating it isn't ready yet.

Fontneau stated as they go through this process with the transitional housing idea, there are going to be questions on how it works. Dale-Hogan asked if the process is to go through their ideas and see what is ready to go. Fontneau stated yes.

Herman stated they should fund somebody who can get grants for transitional housing. Fontneau stated that taking a small amount of money and turning into a bigger amount is great idea.

Fontneau stated to start out with, he would like to see them move forward today on the \$6K for transportation and the \$3500 for the restorative justice online curriculum.

Herman stated he moves that they spend \$9500 towards the curriculum and transportation. Creteau seconded it.

Rodler stated she is willing to go in front of City Council again and state that based on their prior recommendations they feel these two are ready to go and can be implemented immediately. Dale-Hogan stated the council would like that it's not all lumped together and they can do each request individually.

Creteau asked how long it would take to get the oral care up and running. Rodler stated they could pull from other communities that have it. Creteau stated his guess is more or less six months. Rodler stated three to six months. Creteau stated he's asking because he wants to put the remaining money away in an account. He's all about maximizing the amount.

Creteau said they need two to three things. One is the money for the transportation and curriculum. Two is to involve Mark Sullivan and see if they can maximize the remaining amount of money. Third is to investigate and come back to City Council with what the oral care would look like. Creteau stated he would also like to know if they use the funding for a shelter, can they use it towards people that aren't Rochester residents.

Dale-Hogan stated they can ask Terence O'Rourke about any projected money to come in.

Fontneau would also like to know more about how they might help people that are coming out of treatment and keep them from going into the woods. Marsh stated that he knows he's being vague, but that there are conversations being held that he's a participant in but they are in the early stages.

Rodler stated that they are seeing people that aren't involved in the opioid situation that won't go to a shelter because of the drug use. The money for housing would help people like them. Rodler also stated they need a plan for the money to be used long term sustained. And to take the request away from the finance committee to make a solid plan.

Fontneau stated he will ask what the best procedure is to pull the request back to committee level and just ask for the \$9500 to be released.

Fontneau stated to Herman to revisit his motion to pull back the package that has been presented to council and only appropriate \$9500. Herman made motion, Creteau seconded, with all in favor.

5:41 Meeting adjourned

Respectfully submitted,
Jenn Mutolo
Administrative Assistant Paralegal