

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
JOINT COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC SAFETY & TRANSPORTATION
AND EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES
SPECIAL MEETING
OCTOBER 23, 2024**

ATTENDANCE: Michelle Lyons, Co-chair; Dasha Spell, Co-chair; Jorge Cruz Sr., Maria Valle; Eneida Martinez; Mary McBride-Lee; Maria Pereira; Denese Taylor-Moye.

OTHERS: Council Member(s): Aidee Nieves, Council President; Scott Burns, Richard Ortiz, Alfredo Castillo & Ernest Newton; Ashley Aguilera, Legislative Services Director; David Reyes, Deputy CAO; Tyisha Toms, City Attorney (6:11); Meghan McCloat, Labor Relations Deputy Director; Errol Skyers, Labor Relations Director; Linda Cronin, Labor Relations Consultant; Luis Burgos, Public Facilities Director; Dr. Elizabeth Rivera-Rodriguez, Director of Health & Social Services; Vivian Hernandez, Health Dept.; Nadine Douglas, Health Dept.; Tatiana Urena, President of East Side NRZ; Courtney Dollar, Liberations Program; Liz Evans, Liberations Program, Lance Edwards, Fire Chief; Robert Novak, Assistant Fire Chief; Roderick Porter, Police Chief; John Cueto, Assistant Police Chief; James Baraja, Deputy Police Chief; Paul Grech, Police Captain; Angelo Collazo, Police Lieutenant

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chair Lyons called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

- 1) Informational Session re: Presentation with Liz Evans from the Liberations Program regarding the needle exchange program.

****Atty. Tyisha Toms joined the meeting at 6:11 pm****

Ms. Liz Evans and Ms. Courtney Dollar went over a presentation explaining their mission, the different programs they have that address transit, housing, and intervention.

****Council member Ernest Newton joined the meeting at 6:15 pm****

Ms. Dollar shared the clear project is a collaborative effort with the city police department to reduce overdosing, harm, and referring the patient to the services needed. The program would be led by the department of health and social services, and first line responders to complete the intake information on a digital application with verbal consent. The liberations program is able to respond within one hour to clean up a site or provide other services.

Council member Cruz commended them for the work that has been done. He followed up by asking a question about overnight care.

Ms. Dollar replied they are operating until 10:30 p.m.

Council member Martinez asked if they have that statistical information broken down by time of engagement, district, gender, etc. She also asked how the council could help the organization.

Ms. Evans replied there is a digital application with data that can be shared with the council and she encouraged the council to check out the application as it shows in real time where the van is going.

Council member Martinez added as someone with experience in this line of work, she believes the staff must be more active as she sees them just sitting inside the van. She stated she has seen no engagement and asked the driver to leave before.

Ms. Evans replied they can work on that but the staff does engage with the community by having conversations, providing tools, and resources.

Council member Newton shared he had been clean for 28 years and believes the police department should focus on real crime as they are short staffed. They put this issue in the hands of the department of health and social services.

Council member Spell asked how much they were rewarded.

Ms. Evans replied they received \$3 million dollars which paid for training seven staff and support.

Council member Spell shared having the police involved is a great idea as some officers know the individuals and rather than making the arrest they can consult the individual. She believes everyone must work as a village.

Co-chair Lyons added she has seen the police department collaborating with the department of health and social services to help the residents of the city.

Council member Pereira shared she grew up near Washington Park and recently saw 6 men sitting at the children's area at 9:30 a.m. She asked who is in charge of cleaning up.

Mr. Burgos replied (inaudible).

Council member Pereira added in her district there is homelessness growing in the mill hill area. She has reported someone sleeping in a tent at the Granfield park to the police as everyone deserves safe clean housing, the police officer did find them a location to stay. She asked if homelessness could lead to addiction.

Ms. Evans replied it is a compounding situation, as a user can attribute to not getting housing.

Ms. Dollar added there is FEMA funding that helped with housing for the homeless but it ran out.

Council member Castillo said this is a crisis, possibly worse than the 90's. He shared that the council representatives know of the hot spots and they can't put the burden on the police or the departments.

Ms. Evans shared people do recover but they need the help and resources to be available. The goal is collaboration and they are looking for the city of Bridgeport to become a partner.

Council member Taylor-Moye shared homelessness can stem from many factors. They need a place for recovery, they can't cluster people because it is harder for them to leave the environment. They need to look at the real issue which is the quality of life. They need food, shelter, a primary care time, and the resources they need.

Council member Valle asked the organization to move out east Main Street as they are in front of a grocery store which families shop at. It is the wrong placement and they can move to a side street. She shared in regards to the needles found at the park, there was no party going on as it was exaggerated to seem like but it is disrespectful to families. She thanked Aidee Nieves for putting this together and wants to know why isn't the police department utilizing the social workers if they were granted the funds.

Ms. Evans replied she can have the vans be relocated and willing to take any recommendations from the city council on placement. She explained the vans go where the people need them. They also go to the church every morning for clean-up and parks within the area.

Council President Nieves shared that she called the meeting because many generations of department heads have addressed the issue of addiction and commends the organization for

doing a lot of work in this regard. From the police department 2024 medical overdose call heat map, she shared there is drug use all over. She went on to say many business owners do not like the truck in front of their businesses. They cannot depend on social media or news outlets; they need a task force to solve this issue.

Council member Valle added only two officers attended the meeting after the church incident.

Council President Nieves said they should meet biweekly or monthly.

****COUNCIL MEMBER SPELL MOTIONED TO EXHIBIT “BRIDGEPORT POLICE DEPARTMENT 2024 MEDICAL OVERDOSE CALLS HEAT MAP” AS 10-23-24-A.**

****COUNCIL MEMBER TAYLOR-MOYE SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Council member Martinez said the council representatives and state should be held accountable as the state removed the needle exchange program. She remembers the police department having days and night social workers but not anymore. She does work with David Reyes and specific people in the police department to help address

Council member Newton asked how they know there are residents of Bridgeport.

Ms. Evans replied from the statistics people who are case managed share their contact information. From the outreach statistics, those are connections that were made in the city.

Council member Martinez said the city should be ashamed as they depleted the department of health and social services and gave the work to other agencies. She is in favor of giving the department whatever they need.

Council member Castillo thanked Ms. Evans and her work.

Council member Cruz thanks Ms. Evans and he believes the program is working but the police cannot handle this matter, the need to get more nonprofits involved.

Ms. Evans added the van is just a band aid.

Council member Pereria asked from the percentage of deaths in the state, how many came from Bridgeport.

Ms. Evans replied last year, Bridgeport was not on the list. The top three cities were Waterbury, New Haven, and New London.

****CO CHAIR LYONS CALLED FOR A 5 MINUTE BREAK AT 7:52 PM. ****

****CO CHAIR LYONS RECONVENED THE MEETING AT 8:04 PM. ****

Co-chair Lyons commended Ms. Evans for joining the meeting and the work that they have done in the city.

- 2) Discussion with Dr. Elizabeth Rivera-Rodriguez, Health Director, Lance Edwards, Fire Chief, and Roderick Porter Police Chief re: coordinate efforts to address public health and safety concerns related to drug use, while providing harm reduction services.

Mr. Reyes shared that there is a crisis intervention team between the departments. The social worker will go with police on call to consult the individual, along with working with the public facilities to board properties up from squatters. He admits they do need an evening team for intervention but they do have about 55 officers who are certified to continue the work after hours. This issue needs the collaboration of all the departments of the city including the city council. Everyone needs to note that if people do not want help, then they cannot push the help.

Police Chief Porter added to say that Bridgeport is an anchor city, people come in for services leaving the residents without resources. The police department is not looking to overly incarnate or focus on the users, they are prioritizing the drug dealers. He shared the city does not have a homeless program and they need a task force to focus on the drug problem. He continued to say the social worker program must get better but they only have two people in that department. He noted the department does have graduating classes but soon many officers will be retiring and they need to keep up.

Fire Chief Edwards added on to say that his department gets called after an overdose occurs, and unfortunately his team is very comfortable with administering the Narcan. There are no overtime costs occurring and have been awarded reimbursements for using the drug.

Dr. Rivera-Rodriguez shared she is dedicated to creating services for the community. All the social workers are Narcan certified and there are community partners looking to help. She stated there are only 3 social workers in her department, she needs more staff to address the issues within the community as many outsiders come into the city for resources.

Ms. Douglas shared she is a licensed social worker and to work with anyone requires informed consent. Many issues that arise are people in the community need housing, employment, and food scarcity.

Dr. Rivera-Rodriguez added that people sometimes have their establishment care team, for example the veterans having the veteran Affairs office in West Haven, so they cannot help until they are assigned the case but they are willing to help the community.

Capt. Grech shared there is grant funding for reimbursement in regards to this line of work which have been granted to them.

Dr. Rivera-Rodriguez said there is a board looking to put a program together regarding intervention but until then the fire and police departments are getting that funding.

Council member Spell said her first suggestion would be to create a task force that would include city departments, the council, and state representatives. Secondly, they should create a safe haven in each district to collect drugs and any supplies. Lastly, she suggested build community engagement and host town meetings.

Captain Grech added these calls in particular take away the officers from real crime going on.

Council member Martinez added there needs to be a turnaround in the department of health and social services. She commended David Reyes as he has helped a lot. She shared many immigrants have reached out looking for resources and the department of health and social services always helps them.

Chief Porter shared he is committed to the mission. He is looking for grants to develop the program. He reminded everyone that their program is focused on mental health and not drug addiction.

Ms. Evans shared they are willing to help and take referrals.

Ms. McCloat said there may be an issue with HIPAA protections as someone on drugs cannot give verbal consent.

Ms. Evans replied the model is in 27 states.

Co-chair Lyons asked Ms. Evans and Ms. McCloat to continue their conversation at another time as the legal aspect of the conversation can prolong the meeting.

****COUNCIL MEMBER TAYLOR-MOYE LEFT THE MEETING AT 8:58 PM****

Council member Newton thanked the health director and her team and considered they look at this matter from the perspective of budget.

****COUNCIL MEMBER NEWTON LEFT THE MEETING AT 9:02 PM****

Council member Valle shared this was a great meeting. She hopes her passion doesn't get interrupted as disrespect.

Council member Castillo shared that the officials have the power, Dr. Rodriguez should not be begging for money to fill positions.

Council member Nieves said they added funding for a position this year but the issue is recruiting as no one wants to work. She reminded everyone this is an issue regarding quality of life, harm reduction, and public safety so they need to do social service work. The goal isn't to arrest anyone.

Co-chair Lyons asked all the departments to discuss who they would like on the task force to represent their department.

Council member McBride-Lee asked about the funds for Narcan.

Chief Edwards replied the money is coming from the pharmaceutical (inaudible) but it is budgeted.

Council member Cruz shared they hit it in the nail. They need to get with the program as they are behind in years with the intervention.

Co-chair Lyons said they should be following up within two weeks.

ADJOURNMENT

****COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ MOTIONED TO ADJOURN AT 9:14 PM.**

****COUNCIL MEMBER SPELL SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:14 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Vianca Rivera
Telesco Secretarial Service

City of Bridgeport
Joint committee on Public Safety & Transportation
and Education and & Social Services
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October 23, 2024