



Burlington Fire Department



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To: Board of Finance; City Council

From: Michael LaChance, Fire Chief

Date: BoF: October 10, 2023; City Council: October 10, 2023

Re: Burlington Fire Department Community Response Team (CRT)

The Fire Department is requesting your support in establishing a pilot program to provide a greater capacity for the Department to handle the increased volume of overdose and unresponsive patient calls for service, along with the associated impacts on the operational capacity of the Department. The idea for the proposed pilot program came from Fire Department personnel who are confident that this new resource will allow for a triage-style system of care that better fits this specific call type and provides opportunities for proactive engagement with repeat and potential patients in a non-emergency setting. The Fire Department has discussed this pilot program with community partners, including The Community Health Center, UVM Medical Center Emergency Department Physicians, State Medical Control, and Howard Street Outreach, and they support establishing this new capacity. We have planned outreach to The Turning Point Center, CHC Safe Harbor, and Spectrum Youth and Family Services.

Proposal:

- The Fire Department will staff a current department-owned vehicle with two overtime BFD employees that would act as a first response vehicle to calls of suspected overdoses and reports of unresponsive patients within the city. Overtime and staffing will be voluntary and has already been discussed with the BFFA, who have expressed support for this pilot program.
- This vehicle, when available, would be dispatched in place of an ambulance and fire truck to suspected overdoses and unresponsive patients.
- BFD employees staffing this vehicle would make patient contact, determine the level of medical emergency, provide immediate lifesaving interventions such as

Narcan, provide respiratory support via Bag Valve Mask if needed, and request additional resources, such as an ambulance for transport.

- If it's determined the patient does not need any medical interventions or refuses transport after Narcan is delivered, BFD employees would be able to provide additional resources such as overdose leave-behind kits, testing strips, information about additional health services in the city, and help to facilitate connecting the patient with BPD CSLs or Howard Street Outreach.
- When not responding to calls for service, BFD employees staffing this vehicle would spend time connecting with members of the community where the department sees a high call volume for overdose / unresponsive patients to establish a rapport and distribute resources such as those listed above and provide education about services which are available throughout the city.
- An operational goal of this pilot would be to decrease unit hour utilization of traditional front-line emergency response resources while at the same time keeping them available for other incidents. Frequently, units are running from call to call and leaving their districts to support simultaneous incidents. This leaves a void in some districts, delaying response times.
- Because this pilot uses primarily existing equipment and current employees, we believe we can launch the CRT within 1-week of approval, and expect that during the pilot period the BPD will be hiring, training, and deploying the BTV Cares team. The CRT is intended to respond to calls for service for overdoses and suspected overdoses in public areas and to provide outreach and follow-up primarily for community members experiencing opioid use disorder. BTV Cares is intended to respond to calls for service for primarily mental health conditions and substance use disorder, trauma-related conditions, and other emotional, medical, psychological, or behavioral needs. Recognizing that often community members experience these conditions or challenges co-currently, the initial parallel deployment of both CRT and BTV Cares will allow BFD and BPD leadership and the teams to evaluate how best these new resources can work together to best respond to various calls for service, and/or whether their services

are potentially duplicative and if the CRT should not continue once the BTV Cares team is established and operational.

Financials:

Estimated costs are detailed below.

Staffing Costs					
Avg OT cost/hr	\$ 42.00				
Staffing hours per week (goal)	168				
	\$ 7,056.00	Weekly			
	\$ 30,576.00	Monthly			
	\$ 366,912.00	Yearly			
Upfit equipment costs					
Tablet and service	\$ 850.00				
Phone and service	\$ 450.00				
Medical equipment	\$ 7,500.00				
Vehicle	Utilize existing equipment				
	Service is unavailable if vehicle is unavailable				

The Fire Department is seeking support from the Board of Finance and City Council to fund this initiative for an initial pilot period of six months, with a maximum cost of \$192,256, to be funded from the assigned Opioid Money fund, which is expected to receive another \$182,598 in FY24. This amount covers two FF/EMTs for 12 hours/day 7 days/week, and hardware and equipment costs for the team. If the accumulated staffing costs lead the pilot funding to exceed what is available in the Opioid Money Fund, we will seek a budget amendment with the recommendation of the CAO for the additional funds if needed.

During the pilot period, BFD will seek sustainable funding opportunities other than the General Fund or Opioid Money Fund, including potential grants from State Opioid Settlement Funds intended to support treatment and harm reduction outreach. At the end of the pilot period, the Fire Department will evaluate how well it is working and whether it should become a more permanent service of the BFD.

Board of Finance Motion:

Move to approve and recommend that the City Council authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to make any and all necessary budget amendments to allocate the use of the assigned Opioid Money Fund to support the formation and associated costs of a Community Response Team operated within the Burlington Fire Department for six months with a budget not to exceed \$182,598.00.

City Council Motion:

Move to approve and authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to make any and all necessary budget amendments to allocate the use of the assigned Opioid Money Fund to support the formation and associated costs of a Community Response Team operated within the Burlington Fire Department for six months with a budget not to exceed \$182,598.00.