



CITY OF CONCORD

REPORT TO MAYOR AND THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Daniel L. Andrus, Fire Chief

DATE: December 28, 2016

SUBJECT: Report from the Fire Chief on a Referral from the City Council on the Safe Stations Program

Recommendation

The Fire Department requests that the Council accept this report.

Background

The City Council made a referral to the Fire Department at its December 12, 2016 meeting asking that the Department provide information on a possible “safe stations” approach to the drug crisis.

The substance abuse crisis has had a significant impact on Concord and other fire and emergency medical services agencies throughout the country and New Hampshire. The Fire Department responded to 35 calls for overdoses in 2011. In 2015, that number was 151, a 331% increase. Administrations of narcan, a narcotic reversal agent, increased 128% in the same period. A recent report from the New Hampshire Bureau of Emergency Medical Services indicates that Concord had 2.18 narcan administrations per 1,000 residents in the twelve month period that ended on May 31, 2016. That number is 15% lower than the average for 14 cities and towns, and considerably behind the numbers for Manchester (5.94) and Nashua (3.84), but still represents a significant increase.

Several fire departments have developed innovative partnerships with community organizations to combat the drug crisis. Manchester initiated a Safe Stations program in May of 2016 and Nashua followed suit in November. Persons with an acute substance abuse problem can go to a city fire station and get immediate assistance when emergency units are in quarters. Both programs depend on the immediate response of agencies that provide around the clock services for people with addiction problems. Serenity House provides that service for Manchester while Harbor Homes supports Nashua Fire Rescue’s program. Both programs arrive at the stations within an average of 12 minutes to take the person to their facilities. The programs are

demonstrating a record of success. Manchester had 923 referrals from the time their program started in May until December 19th. Nashua has had 40 in person referrals and 35 phone referrals since their program began on November 17th. The City of Laconia, which does not have access to an around the clock treatment facility for substance abuse, has a firefighter paramedic who provides referrals to local resources. That program started on December 6th and no utilization statistics are yet available. The vast majority of Manchester's referrals take place at their Central Station, which features a secured lobby monitored by video cameras. Persons seeking referral are taken directly to an assessment area on the apparatus floor and have no access to living quarters, including restroom facilities. Nashua has made similar preparations, including secured doors for stations where administrative staff members work. Both programs were approved by the New Hampshire Bureau of Emergency Medical Services (NHBEMS) under its community paramedicine/mobile integrated health prerequisite protocol.

Since 2014, the Concord Fire Department has been working with Concord Hospital, Riverbend Community Mental Health, and the NHBEMS on a project to better serve persons with a range of mental health conditions. In addition to the 151 calls for overdose patients, Concord crews responded to 209 calls for alcohol abuse and 343 calls for psychiatric and behavioral emergencies in 2015. Those numbers do not represent unique patients. Patients frequently present with concurrent problems with substance use and mental health emergencies. Traditionally, patients were transported to a hospital emergency department. In many instances, this represented a higher level of care than the patient needed.

As the result of the settlement of a lawsuit with the State of New Hampshire over funding support for mental health services, Riverbend has been able to provide a mobile crisis unit and to provide an urgent care center for mental health emergencies. Effective January 1, 2017, Concord will begin a new partnership with Riverbend to provide an alternative clinical pathway for patients. Under this program, patients who meet certain criteria, including being 18 years of age or over, and having sufficient mental capacity for adequate judgment without communications barriers from language or disability, and who also have a normal physical examination are eligible for participation in the new program. If there is any question about the patient's mental or physical condition, or if the patient's judgment and decision making ability could be impaired by drugs or alcohol, the patient is transported to a hospital emergency department. For patients who meet the criteria, Fire Department responders contact the Riverbend Mobile Crisis hotline and the patient is assessed by hotline staff using a triage tool. Depending on the outcome of the assessment, the patient is categorized as either in a crisis or a non crisis condition. Patients categorized in a crisis condition are either transported to Riverbend's urgent care unit, or responders stay on scene with the patient until Riverbend personnel arrive. For non-crisis patients, Fire Department responders may leave them at the scene, with a follow up by Riverbend personnel within the hour or within 24 hours, depending on their condition.

The partnership with Riverbend represents the most appropriate approach to meet the needs of Concord residents, given existing community resources. The Manchester and Nashua programs rely upon the immediate response of organizations that have the facilities and staff for treating addiction patients. The Fire Department's emergency calls surged past the 8,000 mark for the first time in its history in 2015. Calls for 2016 are currently on track to surpass last year's number by about 200 emergencies. This trend, combined with a robust training program and

other activities, result in Concord's fire stations being unstaffed a significant portion of the time. Another trend involves the increasing use of methamphetamine and similar psychoactive substances which can cause users to be violent. The Fire Department recommends those persons under the influence of substances call 9-1-1 for their own and others safety and it actively discourages them from driving or walking to any destination due to safety concerns.

The Fire Department has participated in the Capital Area Public Health Network for several years. Since the network came under the direction of the Granite United Way in 2014, it has expanded its focus beyond the traditional regional emergency planning functions to encompass a broad range of public health concerns, and Fire Department members played a major role in the creation of the Community Health Improvement Plan which has identified substance abuse as the region's highest priority. The public health network continues to work with stakeholders for a collaborative approach to health problems, including addiction. A Fire Department member participated in a major community outreach event held at Concord Hospital in late 2015 which provided education to dozens of attendees on substance abuse. The network has also taken a lead role in distributing naran and educating persons in its use. The partnership with the public health network (which also includes Riverbend, Concord Hospital, and several other community stakeholders) will undoubtedly continue to offer opportunities for a cooperative effort to address addiction.

Discussion

The Fire Department will advise the City Council of any significant developments with regard to this new program and will provide a follow up report on this new partnership with Riverbend later in 2017.