



Council Worksession
January 24, 2023
5:00 pm

Present: Mayor Kari Niedfeldt-Thomas
Councilmember Abdullahi Abdulle
Councilmember Pam Axberg
Councilmember Emily Dunsworth

Absent: Councilmember Graeme Allen

Staff in Attendance: Devin Massopust, Tony Paetznick

Guests in Attendance: Scott Williams, Nancie Pass, Jenn Hamrick, Zekeria Nigatu

Ramsey County Appropriate Responses Initiative

Paetznick stated the Appropriate Responses Initiative (ARI), which began in 2022, is intended to enhance 911 responses in Ramsey County by focusing on resident wellbeing and community. The initiative will help build safer communities, prevent violence and reduce disparities by investing in a wider range of response options for people in need. Expanded response options may include additional social and health services and new community responders. He reported there were representatives from Ramsey County to speak further on this topic.

Scott Williams, Deputy County Manager for Ramsey County, introduced himself to the Council and thanked them for their time. He discussed his duties with the County and reported over the years he has believed it would be better to have more options for individuals that don't need fire, police or medical help. He explained this led his team to create the ARI in 2022. He then introduced the members of his team.

Nancie Pass, Emergency Communications Center Director, reported the strategic priority for the ARI was putting well-being and community at the center of justice system transportation. The key long term outcomes were to improve community well-being, having fewer people engaged with the public safety system, having fewer people incarcerated, and having fewer people financially obligated to the public safety system.

Mr. Williams commented on how the County engaged with the public over the past five years. He discussed how the County wanted to address the number of people that were incarcerated, along with reconsidering how the County structures its fines and fees.

Zekeria Nigatu, Planning Specialist, discussed the mission of the ARI which was to support 911 dispatch, the public wellness system and community institutions to more appropriately respond to people in need and by putting well-being and community at the center of justice system transformation. He stated the goals of the ARI was the development of new response types and enhancements to dispatch countywide resources. This would be done by expanding social services and public health responses, creating community based response capability and by enhancing 911 protocols so new response options can be fully and appropriately utilized.

Jenn Hamrick, Integrated Health and Justice Administrator, commented on the importance and need for co-designing this program with community members, Ramsey County staff, suburban police and fire, suburban City officials, and the City of St. Paul in order to share power, build capacity, and prioritize relationships. She noted the ARI team had 31 individuals working together to consider how this initiative should move forward.

Ms. Pass commented on the current 911 call structure and noted the traditional response for dispatchers was law enforcement, fire or EMT's. She reported through the co-design process a co-response model has been created that would allow dispatchers to have law enforcement, fire, EMT's, social services, public health and community responses available for dispatch. She commented further on how different types of calls would be dispatched through the new ARI system.

Councilmember Abdulle questioned if the new response model would assist in reducing the number of police officers each community has. Ms. Hamrick stated the new response model would lead to restructuring, but she was uncertain as to how this would impact police numbers. She explained the County would be evaluating where cost saving measures were occurring over time. Mr. Williams anticipated the cost savings would differ from one community to another depending on their call volume and the services their residents need.

Councilmember Abdulle stated he appreciated the cost savings each community could see through this new model.

Councilmember Axberg requested further information on the community responders. Mr. Nigatu described the training community responders would receive and discussed the types of calls they would respond to. Mr. Williams explained community responders would be great in assisting with neighbor disputes that do not require law enforcement.

Councilmember Dunsworth questioned how the ARI program would impact the court system. Mr. Williams discussed the numerous ways the County offers diversion programs. He stated it was his hope going forward that a growing percentage of calls can be resolved without needing law enforcement.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas requested further information on the training social workers would have. Ms. Hamrick described the various types of social workers the County had and noted the different types of training and licenses these social workers had. Mr. Nigatu commented further on the backgrounds that would be allowed for community responders noting each person would be reviewed on a case by case basis.

Ms. Pass commented on the conversations Ramsey County has had with New Brighton and the New Brighton Public Safety Advisory Committee. She noted community listening sessions would be held in New Brighton along with coffee/small group sessions. She discussed how the County would be evaluating the ARI program going forward to ensure it was as unbiased as possible.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas requested the Council be invited to provide comments on the ARI program.

Councilmember Dunsworth asked how long the County would be monitoring and evaluating the ARI program. Ms. Hamrick stated this work would continue through 2026.

Councilmember Dunsworth questioned if any other counties were pursuing this approach. Ms. Pass commented on the mental health approach Hennepin County was pursuing, noting the initiatives were kind of the same, but different.

Councilmember Dunsworth stated she appreciated the wholistic approach Ramsey County was pursuing.

Councilmember Abdulle indicated this was amazing work. He thanked the County for their vision and for working on this new initiative. He asked how feedback would be taken from the public going forward. Ms. Hamrick discussed how feedback would be taken from the community to learn how the ARI response model was serving individuals.

Councilmember Abdulle encouraged the County to find ways for individuals living in apartments to provide the County with feedback. He inquired how community responders would be responding to calls. Ms. Hamrick stated she did not believe the County would have enough funding to provide community responders with vehicles. She indicated the County was looking into utilizing American Rescue Plan funding in order to reimburse individuals for mileage.

Mayor Niedfeldt-Thomas stated at the City's most recent strategic planning session, the Council expressed interest in having an embedded social worker within the Public Safety Department. She asked how the City could go about making this happen. Ms. Hamrick noted she could connect with Director Paetznick to discuss this matter further.

Director Paetznick asked the County to speak further regarding the new staff members that would be brought on to assist with the ARI initiative. Ms. Hamrick reported the County would be hiring 32 new FTE's, two of which were for planning support. She indicated seven would be placed in the dispatch center. She stated five individuals would serve as supervisors and embedded social workers in the emergency communications center. She explained another seven individuals would be added to the mobile crisis center. She reported six positions would be added to public health and two remaining positions would remain open to meet future needs. She discussed how difficult it was to hire social workers at this time, but noted the County was working to increase upstream recruiting.

Worksession adjourned at 6:16 pm

Respectfully submitted,



Terri Spangrud
City Clerk