



Jan 25 2022 4:13 pm

**City of Fitchburg
Massachusetts 01420**

CITY COUNCIL

Councillors at Large

**Sally H. Cragin
Marcus L. DiNatale
Amy Green
Samantha M. Squailia
Anthony M. Zarrella**

President

Anthony M. Zarrella

Vice President

Andrew J. Van Hazinga

Ward Councillors

**Ward 1 – Bernard J. Schultz III
Ward 2 – Paul R. Beauchemin
Ward 3 – Andrew J. Couture
Ward 4 – Andrew J. Van Hazinga
Ward 5 – Marisa R. Fleming
Ward 6 – Derrick J. Cruz**

The regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Fitchburg was held at the Legislative Building at 700 Main Street and over the Zoom meeting platform and live streamed at FATV Studios, Fitchburg, on January 18, 2022.

The meeting opened with a salute to the Flag led by Councilor Couture. The Clerk called the roll and 9 Councilors were present. Councilor Schultz was present remotely. Council President Zarrella and Vice President Van Hazinga were absent.

The Provisional City Clerk stated that per City Council Rule 2.2, a President Pro-tem would need to be nominated in the absence of the Council President and Vice President and declared nominations opened. The name of Councilor Amy Green was placed in nomination and seconded. The name of Councilor Marcus DiNatale was placed in nomination and seconded. Nominations were declared closed following a unanimous roll call vote 9/0. A roll call vote of 3 in favor of Councilor DiNatale (Couture, DiNatale, Fleming) and 6 in favor of Councilor Green (Beauchemin, Cragin, Cruz, Green, Schultz, Squailia). Councilor Green assumed the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

I. PUBLIC FORUM

This meeting will be open to the public. Persons who wish to participate remotely in the Public Forum portion of the meeting may request a remote attendance link by contacting the City Clerk at cityclerk@fitchburgma.gov.

II. REPORT OF THE APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Appointments Committee Oral Report
Meeting of January 18, 2022

The Appointments Committee recommended the following Appointments be confirmed:

New Appointments
Permanent Full Time Firefighters

Alessandro A. Ciccone
Jeremy J. Kimber

Report accepted. Appointments confirmed by unanimous consent. 9 members present. Board consists of 11 members. Upon confirmation, Appointees were sworn in by the Provisional City Clerk.

III. REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON RECORDS

The Committee on records reported the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 4, 2022 were correctly recorded. Report accepted and minutes adopted.

IV. PRESENTATION

Substance Abuse Coordinator, Sue Christensen and Board of Health Director, Steve Curry to introduce our new Street Outreach Workers, Keith Barnaby and Kim French, and discuss the Homeless Outreach Program.

Present at the meeting were Substance Abuse Coordinator, Sue Christensen, Board of Health Director, Steve Curry, and Street Outreach Workers, Keith Barnaby and Kim French.

Director Curry made the following presentation:

Good evening Councilors. It's a pleasure for me to be able to introduce to you Mr. Barnaby and Ms. French our new Outreach Coordinators. I would also like to introduce our Substance Abuse Coordinator, Sue Christensen, who has been with us for a couple of years now and has been doing an excellent job.

Tonight, I would like to talk about the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Overdose Data to Action Program (OD2A). The Massachusetts Department of Public Health Bureau of Substance Abuse Addiction Services (BSAS) awarded funding to the City of Fitchburg Health Department to build upon work of the Massachusetts Opioid Addiction Prevention Collaborative with a more specific scope. The City of Fitchburg, with guidance from the BSAS, developed a Logic Model intended to direct their strategy to specify individuals in Fitchburg experiencing homelessness and housing inability who are at a greater risk for experiencing fatal and nonfatal overdoses. The OD2A scope of work is very limited – reducing overdoses and reducing deaths from overdoses. While the promotion of harm reduction methods such as Naloxone distribution are a priority, the trust built with individuals has resulted in the ability to offer access to other services resulting in ancillary positive outcomes.

The city has contracted two Outreach Workers to provide services specific to fulfilling the goals of OD2A: Keith Barnaby who works on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursdays and Kim French who works Wednesdays. During periods of extreme weather or when the United Way activates the Emergency Shelter Program, we have authorized Keith and Kim to work to connect folks to shelter when they most need it.

BSAS and CDC have expressed their support for the outcomes generated by Sue's program created within the Health Department in implementing OD2A. BSAS has, in fact, been promoting the Fitchburg Interagency Team meetings as an example of best practices within the confines of the scope of work. Coordination of care between local providers with whom OD2A most closely interacts is an example of allowing for efficient and effective referrals when they are sought by individuals. The local providers are agencies who collaborate to increase the access for the homeless to obtain enhanced services and include CHC, Restoration Recovery, MOC Fitchburg Comprehensive Treatment Center, Salvation Army, GAAMHA and others.

The OD2A grant has two more years at \$100,000 per year. Billing is for services provided and supplies purchased and must only be within the scope of work and approved by BSAS. In December we received \$28,000 in CDBG funding which enabled us to contract with Kim French and also purchase supplies through the period ending June 30, 2022.

Some of the outreach data that has been compiled since July 1, 2021 to the end of 2021 include the following:

- 2,675 contacts with individuals on the street (this includes duplicates)
 - 1,588 male
 - 1,087 female
- 31 connected to permanent shelters
- 55 admitted to detox - 13 transported directly
- 137 connected to supportive services
- 1,256 received bus passes
- 231 received clothing vouchers in a program Sue developed with the Salvation Army
- 691 Naloxone kits have been distributed

At this time, I would like to introduce Mr. Barnaby and Ms. French and entertain any questions.

Councilor Green asked Mr. Barnaby to provide an overview of his experience and work in this program. Mr. Barnaby stated he has been in the field for the past eight years. He completed the Certified Drug and Alcohol Counselor Certification (CADC). He spent three years working in a local methadone program and worked with hundreds of folks. In 2018, he ended up working with an organization out in Worcester called AIDS Project Worcester (APW). During this time he held a few different roles including post-overdose follow-up with several police departments and Overdose Education Narcan Distribution (OEND) in which he performed over three hundred narcan training courses over a two year period. It was this past experience that helped form relationships and connections with many agencies and organizations. During this time, one of his other roles was street outreach where he noticed a lot of gaps in service in this area and he thought why not try and connect all of the agencies together to find a way to connect people in a better way. He has connections in every one of the local detox centers and they were able to get a grant from APW to provide transportation to detox centers anywhere in Massachusetts. They utilize this service on the streets and are able to transport someone in real time. Since October 2020, well over 100 people have been sent to detox in real time. He stated that gaining the trust of the population by practicing good boundaries and good ethics allows him to make this happen. His ultimate goal is to keep folks alive because that means they have a chance and he feels blessed to be part of this team and be able to do the work they do.

Councilor Green then asked Ms. French to provide an overview of her experience and work in this program. Ms. French stated that she has been in the field for 10 years. She started off working at Our Father's House for about 6 years and it was here that she fell in love with the population and she knew she wanted to do more. She went to school and received her CADC and learned everything she possible could. She's worked at other agencies such as SMOC and APW and she currently works at Catholic Charities which is a Leominster woman's program. She echoed Mr. Barnaby's goal of helping people to the best of her ability and meeting them where they were at, with the ultimate goal of keeping them alive and giving them a chance.

Councilors Squailia asked what happens when warming centers close during an emergency situation such as a cold snap. Mr. Barnaby explained that United Way puts out an urgent notification regarding weather emergencies. When this happens, it opens up funds and they would be able to place them in shelters if there is availability, and if not, then to hotel rooms for the period of time determined by the United Way. When it is lifted, they are back out on the streets.

Councilor Squailia asked who people should contact if they are in need of shelter. Mr. Barnaby explained that most go through Jennessa Mcquade who works with the Leominster Police Addiction Outreach program, but others include Salvation Army, Ginnys, Spanish American Center, and MOC. These are the ones that will take of the Twin Cities. Councilor Squailia asked Mr. Barnaby and Ms. French to share their contact information with the Councilors as they get a lot of requests for housing. She asked Mr. Curry to explain the funding and the sustainability of the program. Mr. Curry explained that part of the strategy is to develop sustainability. They hope there will be other grants through the Department of Health with the success of this program and it appears OD2A will be an ongoing grant for the coming years.

Councilor Beauchemin asked Mr. Curry whether every community received the \$100,000 grant from OD2A. Mr. Curry responded no, that this was a grant application process. Councilor Beauchemin asked if that meant that were going to start the program here. Mr. Curry responded that they started the program several years ago through the Opioid Collaboration and the Substance Abuse Prevention Collaboration. This is more of a specific scope geared at homelessness, overdose and fatalities. Councilor Beauchemin asked Mr. Barnaby to explain why filing of Section 35 were not utilized more often in extreme cases. Mr. Barnaby explained that filing for this is difficult and usually requires a qualified petitioner to initiate the process through the courts. Councilor Beauchemin expressed his concern that these programs are drawing folks to Fitchburg. Mr. Barnaby stated that doesn't believe that a creation of a program like this would be a draw to folks. Most of them are already here and those that come here are drawn for different reasons, a primary reason being that we have the only shelter in North Worcester County, but other reasons include prostitution and the amount of drugs on the street.

Councilor Fleming asked why they were seeing an increase in homelessness in general and whether there was data to support why this is happening. Mr. Barnaby stated that he believes a lot of it is related to COVID and the expiration of the eviction moratorium. Most of the folks he helps have already been evicted and it creates a more challenging situation to get them the help they need. Councilor Fleming asked Mr. Barnaby if there was a particular area where most of the people he has been helping came from. Mr. Barnaby stated that some of them are in fact from out of state. He has found that typically it's a family member living here that had good intentions to try and help them out, but ultimately, they end up on the streets.

Councilor Cragin asked Mr. Barnaby about the age level and demographic of the folks they are helping. Mr. Barnaby stated that the 18-24 year group has been shrinking and although the majority are within the 25-55 group, what is alarming to him is the population is getting older. Councilor Cragin asked about the resources and programs available to someone once they are released from rehab. Director Christensen stated that Restoration Recovery, which is operating out of Cleghorn, is open daily and are there to help with job applications and to assist with access to services and connect them to the resources they need once they get out of treatment or when they are thinking about going in.

Councilor DiNatale expressed concern that the statements Mr. Barnaby made were not reflective of the crime statistics they receive from the police each year. He stated our crime overall is down record lows in the last decade. The problem as he sees is that the surrounding communities don't shoulder any weight of this regional problem. He stated that Fitchburg has come a long way in the past years and we don't do enough to promote the city. He recognizes that we have issues, but these are not unique to just us and he is concerned that the statements made will be interpreted in the wrong way and he felt he need to provide some context to them. He stated he felt part of the reason we have a homelessness problem in the city is because other communities are not providing any services or assisting this population.

Chief Martineau stated that he had not planned to speak this evening, but he felt that it was appropriate. Tonight was about highlighting the efforts put forth by Sue and Steve and bringing this outreach team to the City of Fitchburg. He is excited to have this outreach team here as it is another tool in the tool box. He believes that what got taken out of context was the bigger issue whether it is homelessness or crime. Homelessness is a regional issue and what's happening here in Fitchburg is happening everywhere. He noted that our crime statistics are the lowest they have been in many years. He acknowledged they still have a lot of work to do, but tonight was to outline this effort that we put forth in the city and that he looks forward to collaborating with Sue and her team. His officers are the boots on the ground and are the ones that are responding to homelessness issues and are the first on scene during any crisis. Working together with the outreach workers will create a better process for the city. What is important to note about the presentation tonight, is that this is not a Fitchburg issue, this is happening everywhere and they are addressing it head on and have made some significant strides in the city. He thinks the outlook is bright and they have tools to address issues. He applauded Mr. Curry for bringing this program to the city as our residents can only benefit from it.

Councilor Green stated that if we are going to do a program like this that we become the gold standard to set these programs in motion so that other communities have the proper means and resources to take care of themselves and their community. If someone has to be the pilot program for this, she is happy that it is us. We have many organizations who are partnering together to address the issue. She stated she appreciated the openness and honesty of her colleagues because it is important they continue to have these conversations so that we are enlightened by the information and can lend their support when needed.

Councilor Cruz commended Sue and the outreach team for the work they are doing and not losing sight of the human element. He is incredibly proud that Fitchburg does take on this issue. He asked the team to provide an overview of what they are doing to assist with employment and housing resources. Mr. Barnaby stated that one of the resources they utilize is Restoration Recovery but their best effort is a program called the Continuum of Care Reentry Program (COC). The only qualification of COC is to be chronically homeless. So far, there have been a half a dozen that have been approved, but the challenge is to find housing that fits within parameters they were approved for and the stigma that the program represents to landlords. Many are not willing to give someone a second chance especially with a prior eviction on their record. Unfortunately, the rooming houses such as SMOC are completely full right now and they have several people on the waiting list.

Councilor Schultz asked if there was another emergency fund besides United Way that can be utilized to help find folks shelter. Mr. Barnaby stated that he was not aware of any other funding for emergency shelter, but the funds United Way distributes is accessible to many local agencies. The problem is that the funding ultimately runs out.

Councilor Squailia asked how the city plans to handle funding and the cleanup of encampment sites now that the DPW does not have the capacity to do so. Mr. Curry stated that they are working with the purchasing department to explore agencies that provide these hazardous waste cleanups. They are very close to the bidding process to get these companies onboard. He noted that the cleanups would only take place on City property. On private property, the owner would be directed and ordered to clean up the encampment. Currently, they plan to utilize our clean and lean fund which the City has dedicated \$40,000 to the program each year.

Councilor Beauchemin requested a report, either quarterly or bi-annually from the Board of Health to keep them informed of the progress of the program.

Councilor Green thanked the presenters for taking the time to inform and educate the Council on this matter and that she does believe keeping them informed on a regular basis would be helpful to determine if they are making progress. Mr. Curry noted that a quarterly report is a great idea and they will take it under advisement.

V. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Finance Committee Oral Report **Meeting of January 18, 2022**

The Finance Committee Meeting was cancelled.

VI. ORDERS-FINANCE

The following Orders were referred to the Finance Committee:

- 004-22. ORDERED THAT: That the City of Fitchburg hereby approves the expenditure of funds from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Planning Assistance Grant Program grant in the approximate amount of \$32,500.00 (THIRTY-TWO THOUSAND, FIVE HUNDRED AND 00/100 DOLLARS) for the purpose of said grant, which is to update the city's Open Space and Recreation Plan.
- 005-22. ORDERED THAT: The City of Fitchburg hereby approves the expenditure of funds from the MassDevelopment, Brownfields Redevelopment Fund grant in the approximate amount of \$65,000.00 (SIXTY-FIVE THOUSAND AND 00/100 DOLLARS) for the purpose of said grant, which is to assess and plan for remediation at 173 Bemis Road.
- 006-22. ORDERED THAT: The City of Fitchburg hereby approves the expenditure of funds from the MassDevelopment, Real Estate Technical Assistance Program grant in the approximate amount \$45,000 (FORTY-FIVE THOUSAND AND 00/100 DOLLARS) for the purpose of said grant, which is to help prepare the city for the sale of 44 Wanoosnoc Road.
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VII. PETITIONS

The following Petition was referred to a Public Hearing February 15, 2022:

- 007-22. The Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority along with consultants from the BSC Group, to present the 2040 Downtown Fitchburg Urban Revitalization and Development Plan as outlined in the enclosed Petition.
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The following Petition was referred to the City Property Committee:

- 008-22. Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Community Development & Planning Department, to declare the following parcels as surplus property:
0 Taft Street, Assessor's Map 20/4/3
0 Taft Street, Assessor's Map 20/4/2
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The following Petition was referred to Community Development & Planning, Economic Development Committee, Legislative Affairs Committee:

- 009-22. The Fitchburg Planning Board, to amend the Fitchburg Zoning Ordinance by making several corrections & clarifications, as described in the enclosed Petition.
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VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councilor Green made the following announcement: Ward 1 City Councilor Bernie Schultz is hosting a Ward 1 Meeting on Wednesday, February 16, 2022 at 6:30 p.m. right here in the Fitchburg Legislative Building, 700 Main Street. Fire Chief Dante Suarez and Director of Facilities Russell Karlstad will make presentations, and then answer questions following their presentations.

Councilor Cragin announced that the Stratton Players with Putnam St. Lanes are hosting a Bowlarama Drama on Saturday, March 5th starting at 7:00 p.m. to help support the Stratton Players Community Arts Center.

IX. OTHER BUSINESS

The meeting adjourned at 8:13 P.M.

Amanda K. Alford, Provisional City Clerk