



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: Milton Dohoney Jr., City Administrator
DATE: October 3, 2022
SUBJECT: Unarmed Response Community Engagement

On Friday, September 30th the city's Independent Community Police Oversight Commission (ICPOC) sent a communication to be included on the Council agenda this evening with several of their observations about the unarmed crisis response public engagement process that is currently underway. In this memo I will address some of those observations and explain the engagement process that is currently underway.

The Process for Community Engagement

Public Sector Consultants (PSC) was engaged to lead the city's public engagement on this project because of the magnitude of the task at hand and because of their long track record of engaging with hard-to-reach constituencies to aid in the development of social services and public health centric programs for local and state governments. In developing the engagement plan for Ann Arbor, both PSC and the city administration have prioritized engaging with the broad diaspora of communities within Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County who are more likely to interact with the police and who may also benefit from an unarmed crisis response that centers a public health approach. To do so, we have engaged a roster of social service agencies and leaders in our community and proactively sought their input. This engagement is ongoing and will continue throughout the fall, and so there are people who have not yet been contacted but who will be very important to the final effort.

Generally speaking, the engagement process has been broken into several different venues to encourage participation from a wider audience of individuals. Those venues include:

- 1) One-on-one interviews with social services and community leaders who can help orient and shape the direction of the engagement process. In these interviews participants are asked detailed questions about their thoughts on how the unarmed response program should be structured, and how engagement should be carried out. Each interviewee is asked who else we should be speaking with and what communities or organizations should be prioritized in our outreach (ICPOC was included in this stage of engagement).
- 2) A public survey has been launched, which can be found online here: https://www.opentownhall.com/portals/116/Issue_12145#pd_top

In addition to the online survey, a PDF copy has been distributed to the social services agencies who have participated in our outreach with the request that they provide paper copies to those who they serve. To aid in distribution, paper copies are available at the City Clerk's Office, at City Council Meetings, at the Housing Commission, and at the Ann Arbor District Library. Paper copies may be returned to the City Clerk's Office when they are completed so they can be hand tabulated.

- 3) Small Group Discussions will be held later this fall. Building on the feedback we are receiving from the one-on-one interviews, we are outreaching to social services providers in the area to help build small group discussions that are primarily populated with recipients of social services. Constituencies, and agencies, that we are specifically engaging to shape these small group discussions include those who are chronically unhoused or housing insecure, students, those in recovery from addiction, immigrants, individuals with disabilities, individuals who have struggled or are struggling with mental health, the elderly, individuals who are income restricted, faith communities, and downtown businesses, among many others.
- 4) We will also hold town hall style meetings toward the end of our engagement process, to capture thoughts from any person in the community who wishes to share their feedback and ambitions for this program. These will likely happen in the very late fall or winter, depending on the time it takes to run a quality engagement in the first three venues of this process.

At the end of this engagement, we will have directly interacted with hundreds of individuals to get feedback on this program. The vast majority of those individuals will be people who are recipients of social services or who, for various reasons, may be more likely to interact with law enforcement or are presumed to be more likely to engage with an unarmed crisis response program. This work will culminate in a final report to the City Administrator summarizing the feedback received, and that report will be the basis of a recommendation on the form and structure of an unarmed response program that will be communicated to the Council.

Addressing ICPOC's Concerns

With this in mind, it is important to reconsider ICPOC's communication to the Council. There are several assertions made in their communication that are objectively and clearly false, including the following:

- "They [The City and its consultant] do not intend to do outreach or have direct contact with those most in need of an unarmed response program."
- "They do not have people of color or other underrepresented people in their leadership or outreach teams."
- "Their sole instrument thus far is an online survey..."
- "...which is only accessible to those privileged enough to have computer and internet access."
- "They have expressly stated that they have no plans to interview unhoused people, for example, or to go into those communities that would most benefit from an unarmed response plan."

The City’s intention from the start of this project has been to conduct an outreach and engagement campaign that would set a very high bar for its inclusivity and completeness, and we are thus far achieving that objective. PSC is an extremely well qualified, highly competent, and accomplished firm that fairly and decisively won a competitive bidding process to conduct this work. We are pleased with the work product that we have received from them to date.

Further, at the very beginning of this process we asked ICPOC for their engagement to help facilitate some of these activities. They were specifically invited, for instance, to host and help recruit for discussion groups related to this project—an invitation that ICPOC’s leadership verbally declined. We did ask ICPOC for their suggestions on what constituencies we should prioritize in our engagement. To quote directly from their written communication back to city staff, they asked us to prioritize the following outreach and we note below how we have done so:

Recommendation from ICPOC	Action from City
<p>“Schedule listening sessions with many constituents, not just those perceived to assist low income or housing insecure individuals. I don't have to tell you that crisis response touches people at all levels of income in our community. For example, last summer, a considerable number of wealthy, white middle aged people talked to me about a crisis response to a child's drug overdose, for example.”</p>	<p>The purpose of the online survey and the town hall venues is to provide a general audience a venue for participation in the engagement process. However, we are not creating small group discussions specifically targeted at wealthy individuals, or at specifically white social groups.</p>
<p>“We hope that you will include religious groups, of course... synagogues, the Islamic Center of Ann Arbor and churches of a wide variety of denominations should be consulted as well.”</p>	<p>Entities that represent numerous faiths and faith-based social services agencies in the area are included in our engagement plan.</p>
<p>“I would imagine you'd also want to contact the NAACP.”</p>	<p>We have asked the NAACP to participate.</p>
<p>“I know there are so many other groups that have constituents impacted [by] this, such as those that serve undocumented people.”</p>	<p>Agencies that serve individuals who have a wide array of experiences from their immigration journey to our country are included in our engagement plan.</p>
<p>“The downtown Districts should definitely be a group that is included.”</p>	<p>The downtown districts have been included in our engagement plan.</p>
<p>“I can also tell you that the downtown churches are meeting on a variety of matters and this is one of them.”</p>	<p>Downtown churches have been included in our engagement plan.</p>

This should demonstrate that we have taken Council’s directive to include ICPOC seriously and have issued invitations for their serious engagement in this project. We respect ICPOC’s decisions on how and when they wish to participate and look forward to engaging with them further as this project develops. In the meantime, I meet monthly with ICPOC’s leadership to discuss any issue that they like, and this project has been

discussed numerous times at those meetings. Their direct feedback to me is always welcome and will always be engaged with and considered as we make program and policy decisions and recommendations.

It is imperative that we not lose sight of the big picture consensus that has been reached in our city. Though it is not to a person, there is broad support that this government create an alternative option for our residents. Segments of our population have been crystal clear that they want a non-police mechanism available to them in times of personal or familial crisis. That is the **end goal** we are working towards. The desired end is not now nor was it ever in dispute.

The next aspect to address is the means since the end is clear. How can we take steps along the way to ensure we arrive at the agreed upon destination? This process never established a standard that if you personally do not reside within the city limits you could play no role on this project. Nor was there a standard set that any organization that bids on a portion of the overall project must be based within the city. However, out of the sensitivity for local flavor the contractor, PSC, has suggested to our locally based social service entities that they be allowed to engage with aforementioned populations in meetings or venues the locals have already established. Furthermore, I have signed off on an amendment that is pending that would incentivize participation by members from some of our hard to reach populations.

A reminder – this is a precursor to our issuing an RFP that will seek a vendor to actually implement an unarmed response program. Those responding vendors will most certainly be asked how they plan to implement the program in an equitable and inclusive manner.

Our road remains long, and we are determined to get there in a collaborative way.