



**TOWN OF LOS GATOS
COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT**

MEETING DATE: 08/03/2021

ITEM NO: 16

DATE: July 23, 2021
TO: Mayor and Town Council
FROM: Laurel Prevetti, Town Manager
SUBJECT: Direct the Further Implementation of Mental Health Response Options
Within the Police Department.

RECOMMENDATION:

Direct the further implementation of mental health response options within the Police Department.

BACKGROUND:

The issue of Police response to mental health calls has been a topic of much discussion at a national level. Almost all stakeholders agree that in most cases Police Officers are not the best solution for dealing with a person in mental health crisis. Unfortunately, the general lack of clinical resources has made law enforcement the only viable option to address situations when the community calls to report a mental health concern.

For the Los Gatos-Monte Sereno Police Department between January and June 2021, Officers responded to 51 calls for service that were specifically focused on mental health. During this same time frame, Police Officers responded to a total of 8,066 calls for service.

In March 2021, LGMSPD began collecting data related to calls that were not primarily mental health focused, but where mental health was an underlying or secondary issue. With this new definition, the total number of mental health and mental health-related calls from March to June 2021 was 67. During this same time frame, Police Officers responded to 3,715 calls for service.

During the September 2020 community conversation, one of the Police Reform recommendations was for the Town to hire its own social worker to respond to calls involving

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Reviewed by: Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, Town Attorney, and Finance Director

BACKGROUND (continued):

mental health issues. Logistic and financial feasibility made this option difficult to implement as discussed with the Town Council in March 2021 (Santa Clara County Behavioral Health Services estimates that the average annual salary and benefits for a Licensed Clinical Social Worker is \$182,000). While the Council opted not to pursue this specific recommendation, during the May Budget hearing the Council approved the Mayor's motion to challenge the Police Department to seek out and present innovative options that might accomplish the same goal.

DISCUSSION:

Existing Programs

Since 2018, the Santa Clara County Police Chiefs Association has partnered with Santa Clara County Behavioral Health Services (SCCBHS) in a working group to facilitate the development of viable mental health response options that included all facets of the existing system, including SCCBHS clinicians, law enforcement, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and community-based organizations. The resulting programs, including Mobile Crisis Response Teams (MCRT), Law Enforcement Liaisons, Psychiatric Emergency Response Teams (PERT), and Mobile Response and Stabilization Services (MRSS) were discussed at the March 16, 2021 Town Council meeting. Although the programs are still a work in progress, and hampered in large part by the difficulty in hiring clinicians with the skills and motivation to engage crisis work on a shift basis, it is staff's belief that this partnership has the best chance for success in the long term.

In addition to the programs provided by the County, LGMSPD has long maintained a commitment to addressing mental health concerns with a high level of compassion and innovation. Existing LGMSPD programs and trainings include:

- Vulnerable Communities Response Coordinator: formalized collateral duty assignment for a Sergeant to consolidate and coordinate efforts and resources for those with mental health issues and the homeless population in Town.
 - A key element in this effort is the longstanding collaboration with community-based organizations and faith-based organizations that are providing assistance to the homeless and mentally ill (e.g., St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Los Gatos United Methodist Church and West Valley Community Services)
- Crisis Intervention Training (CIT): over 90% of the sworn and Dispatch personnel have completed the 40-hour CIT course (16 hours for Dispatchers). The goal of the training is to give staff the tools, techniques, and resources to interact with persons in mental health crisis, minimizing the use of force, and providing the highest degree of safety for the individual and the responding Officer.
- Special Needs Awareness Program (SNAP): a voluntary and confidential program that allows families to register their loved ones with special needs in a database housed in the Police Department's Dispatch Center. If the Police are responding to a SNAP address or encounter a SNAP participant in the field (identified with a distinctive wristband),

DISCUSSION (continued):

Officers will be provided with information that will help them adapt their interaction to the SNAP participant's special needs.

- Crisis Text Line: provides free 24/7 confidential crisis intervention via SMS messaging.

Proposed Mental Health Response Options

In response to the Council's challenge, staff is proposing the following recommendations and seeks Council direction for the implementation of these options. As noted below, some of these ideas can be implemented within the Department's current budget. Other ideas would need to be analyzed further for cost implications should the Council wish to pursue them.

- Vulnerable Communities Response Team
 - Expansion of the VCRC concept to include a collateral duty team of four to six Officers who would undergo enhanced mental health response training. VCRT members could be utilized in a part-time PERT program, partnered with a SCCBHS clinician to respond to mental health calls and follow up with subjects who have previously been contacted or detained for mental health concerns. This option can be absorbed within the existing Police Department budget.
- Enhanced CIT training for Patrol Officers
 - CIT is currently a 40-hour California Commission on Peace Officers' Standards and Training (POST) certified class that provides basic skills and techniques to deal with persons in mental health crisis. The San Mateo County Sheriff's Office has developed an enhanced CIT course that provides a higher level of training for mental health response. Members of the SCCBHS Law Enforcement Liaison are participating in the curriculum development and POST certification process with the intent of providing a similar enhanced CIT course to Santa Clara County law enforcement agencies. LGMSPD will be focused on ensuring that as many of its sworn staff as possible will participate in the class when it is available. This option can be absorbed into to the Department's training budget.
- Mental health response training for the Victim Services Unit (VSU)
 - There are currently four community volunteers who have undergone the training curriculum to assist Patrol Officers as victim advocates. VSU has already been called to assist a family with a particularly difficult situation involving a family member with mental health issues. The VSU mental health response training would be similar to CIT for Officers and Dispatchers, but with a greater focus on resources available to assist the family with aftercare and long-term solutions. This option can be absorbed into to the Department's training budget.
- Virtual Reality training system
 - The Department has used its POST Innovations Grant funds to purchase a virtual reality (VR) training system. The VR system will be primarily used to train

DISCUSSION (continued):

Officers in de-escalation of force techniques; however, it has the capability to modify the mental status of the VR characters to simulate a mental health crisis. In addition, the SCCBHS Law Enforcement Liaison currently oversees mental health Interactive Video Simulation Training for law enforcement agencies. It is anticipated that with the widespread implementation of POST-funded VR training systems throughout the region, they will be developing VR training modules specifically designed for mental health response. This has already been purchased and has no further budgetary implication.

- Incorporate Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) into the defensive tactics training curriculum
 - ICAT is training program developed by the Police Executive Research Forum to provide Police Officers with the tools, skills, and options to successfully defuse a range of critical incidents, but particularly applicable to scenarios involving individuals in mental health crisis. Two members of the LGMSPD defensive tactics training cadre have already attended ICAT training. All members of the cadre will attend ICAT instructor certification preparatory to introducing ICAT into the Perishable Skills curriculum. This option can be absorbed into to the Department's training budget.
- Contract ambulance program to transport individuals detained under Welfare and Institutions Code 5150 (to Emergency Psychiatric Services)
 - Current practice for Police Officers to transport an individual detained for 5150 is to handcuff and seat them in the rear prisoner transport area of a police vehicle. This is done for safety reasons but can have the effect of further traumatizing an individual already in crisis. In cases where the detained individual has not exhibited violent or aggressive tendencies, the use of an ambulance to transport would be a compassionate option. County EMS will only transport subjects detained for 5150 if there is a coinciding medical or intoxication issue. The challenge is to identify a vendor that can guarantee a reasonable estimated time of arrival. SCCBHS is utilizing a private ambulance company for MCRT, however, wait times can be up to several hours. This is not a workable time frame for Patrol Officers, so additional research will need to be conducted to identify a vendor that can provide a timely response. This option has cost implications that would need to be explored with partner agencies.
- Therapy canine program
 - A number of jurisdictions, most notably Campbell Police Department, have implemented a therapy canine program. Therapy dogs have been shown to provide relief and comfort to individuals or situations that are anxiety-inducing. The training and certification of a therapy dog does not rise to the level of a police canine or even a service dog, and it would not require a specially outfitted vehicle or secure accommodations at the handler's home.

DISCUSSION (continued):

The LGMSPD model would be a collateral duty assignment for a Police Officer who would bring the therapy canine to pre-planned events or be on call for situations where a therapy canine is requested by Patrol Officers or VSU volunteers. The therapy canine would also be an integral component of the Department's Peer Support program to provide comfort to working members of the Department. Staff believe that the Police Foundation would support this investment if the Council wished to pursue it.

CONCLUSION:

Staff looks forward to Council direction on appropriate next steps. Depending on the direction provided, staff anticipates being able to return to Council within a reasonable time frame to provide updates or additional requested information.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Fiscal impact is contingent on direction from the Town Council. Most of the recommendations have been or can be absorbed within the Police Department budget. A couple of the other options will need to be researched to determine actual costs implications as noted above.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:

This is not a project defined under CEQA, and no further action is required.