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To: Town Council

Fr: Paul Bockelman  
Town Manager

Dt: November 12, 2021

Re: Reorganization Plan: Community Responders for Equity, Safety, and Service

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**Recommendation:**

Approve the reorganization plan creating the Community Responders for Equity, Safety, and Service.

**Reorganization Plan:**

The reorganization will create a new Town agency that will house the Community Responders for Equity, Safety, and Service (CRESS).

The reason for creating this agency is to provide community safety services in situations that don't involve violence or serious crime. It will create a civilian, unarmed alternative to calls that might otherwise require a response from the Police Department.

An implementation team that includes representatives from the Community Safety Working Group, Police Department (including Dispatch), Fire Department, and Town Manager's office has been meeting weekly to develop the details and protocols for the CRESS agency.

In its report, the Community Safety Working Group had recommended the following:

- 2-person teams of unarmed responders with expertise as mental health clinicians, social workers, medics, and/or conflict de-escalators;
- Accessed either by calling the CRESS phone number directly or by calling 911;
- Dispatched by 911 operators who are trained to determine which calls are most appropriately responded to by CRESS and which by armed police officers, and/or dispatched by CRESS operators;
- CRESS teams will be the first responders to all situations that don't involve violence or serious criminal activity, including mental health issues, homelessness, substance abuse, trespass, truancy, wellness checks, youth, and schools;
- Dedicated vehicles appropriately equipped and identified;
- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week;
- Multi-racial teams, with expertise in cultural awareness, respect, and responsiveness;

- Employees of the Town of Amherst, with benefits and salaries adequate to attract and retain highly skilled staff, with appropriate training, support, and supervision.
- Operating independently of the Police Department and housed in a facility separate from the Police Department;
- Developing a cooperative relationship with the Police Department such that police officers will routinely refer appropriate situations to CRESS and CRESS teams can call on the police for back-up if a situation turns out to be violent;
- Fully funded, resourced, staffed, and supported beginning as soon as possible, becoming operational in 2021-2022;
- Preference is given to qualified bi-lingual candidates;
- Able to initiate proactive interventions to serve those in need of services;
- The mission of the CRESS program will include contributing to dismantling systemic racism through racially aware safety and social services to persons of all races with a conscious anti-racism focus.

The Implementation Team has been grappling with the very serious details of creating a community responder program as an alternative to a police response. The details are important as many calls currently being handled by police are, or could lead to, difficult – even violent – interactions. The goal is to have the appropriate response for the call for service.

This work has been supported by consultation advice from the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). Significant work needs to be done to identify the parameters of the agency and response roles of the CRESS, Police, and Fire agencies. The Town will be advertising for a CRESS program director to provide additional support for implementation and a program administrator to manage the grant funding.

The CRESS program will be located under the Public Safety functional area and the CRESS Director will report to the Town Manager or their designee. It is expected that regular (at least weekly) meetings would take place with representation from CRESS, Police, Fire, and Dispatch. Significant monitoring and adjusting will be required in the early stages of the new public safety service.

- Summary of Reasons for Proposed Change: Our community – including elected officials, committee members, staff, and members of the public – have invested significant time and effort into making tangible change to our community and how the Town does business to bring its actions more into alignment with the values established by the Town Council. While this may be a slow process, progress can be made if the stated goals are given daily attention, purposeful conversations, and a shared commitment to do better.

Dedicating staff and an office to this work is important to ensuring progress is made.

- Existing Bylaw Changes: No existing bylaws will be changed.
- Proposed Bylaws: No new bylaws are proposed.

- Estimated Financial Impact:  
The proposal is to create a new public safety department requiring staff, benefits, retirement costs, liability insurance, office expenses, office space, hardware, software, and vehicles.

The Town plans to fund non-operating costs and other one-time costs from the ARPA grant. Additional funding to supplement the CRESS program will also be provided through a recently awarded Public Health Grant in the amount of \$450,000.

Operating costs will be phased in over several years. \$200,000 was added in FY22 (reallocation from police) to fund partial year positions. The remaining operating costs, except for pension expenses, will be added in FY23.

The Town may opt to use reserves to supplement the municipal operating budget over two or three years to minimize the impact on other departments. The amount of reserves and length of time needed will depend on the settlement of negotiations, health insurance premium changes, and other major cost increases.

The pension cost will be added in FY24 based on the way the Hampshire County Retirement System assesses member Towns.

Projected Annual Budget\*:

Operating Costs:	
Personnel	\$640,000
Health/Life Insurance	\$125,000
Pension	\$142,000
Liability Insurance	\$ 16,000
Supplies	\$ 13,000
<b>Total Operating Costs</b>	<b>\$936,000</b>
Non-Operating Costs	
Vehicles	\$100,000
Office Equipment	\$ 22,500
<b>Total Non-Operating Costs</b>	<b>\$122,500</b>
Other Costs to Consider	
New Software	
Space Costs	
Initial Training and Legal Support	
*figures based on FY22 costs, full year	

<b>Other Resources</b>	
DPH Grant	\$ 450,000
ARPA Funds	\$ 250,000

Working assumptions are:

- Union: Staff will be members of the SEIU union, except for the Director who will be non-union;
- Space: One work station per position on shift.
- Software: The agency will require robust reporting software similar to Fire/EMS/Police.
- One vehicle per two employees per shift. If four employees are deployed, there would be the need for two vehicles.
- Non-operating costs:
  - Software purchase and implementation;
  - Vehicles (est. \$100,000 for two electric vehicles);
  - Desks, computers, phones, and other needed equipment (\$15,000);
  - Space improvements;
  - Uniforms;
  - Initial training and legal support to develop policies and procedures.
- Operating costs:
  - One director, one administrative assistant, eight community responders;
  - Health insurance, life insurance, pension, Medicare;
  - Liability insurance, unemployment, workers compensation;
  - Supplies, professional development, contracted services.

**Background:**

The Town Council established a goal for the Town Manager that stated:

*II. Community Health and Safety*

*Objective: To ensure the health and safety of the residents of Amherst by (1) continuing to take all steps necessary to ensure the health of the community in the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic and (2) in accordance with the Council’s vote on July 27, 2020, and in consultation with the Council and residents of Amherst, fully exploring alternative options of providing services to respond to issues of homelessness, mental health, and other non-criminal calls to emergency dispatch and present the results to the Council no later than May 15, 2021.*

On September 21, 2020, the Town Manager adopted the charge that created the Community Safety Working Group. Significantly, the charge included a requirement that six of the nine members appointed by the Town Manager would represent Black, Indigenous, People of Color, or other historically marginalized communities.

The Community Safety Working Group has completed its work and submitted its Report that included both a Part A and a Part B. In its report, the Community Safety Working Group made the following recommendation:

*Create Amherst “Community Responders for Equity, Safety, and Service” (CRESS) program. The Working Group recommended immediately creating a Community Responders for Equity, Safety, and Service (CRESS) program to be a civilian, unarmed alternative to the Amherst Police Department, providing community safety services in situations that don’t involve violence or serious crime.*

In the FY22 budget I presented on May 1, 2021, I included reallocating funding from the Police Department budget to create a new community responder program.

Work on this program has been underway with the formation of an Implementation Team that included representatives of the Community Safety Working Group, Police Department, Fire Department, and Town Manager’s office. Initially, the Team also included the Director of Senior Services who brought a broad range of knowledge and experience including legal, law enforcement, and social services.

**Considerations:**

The creation of a new, large department will require significant resources for FY23 and well into the future. The creation of this department was partially budgeted in FY22. A significant grant of \$450,000 has been obtained by the Town to support a portion of the work. Additional funds will need to be identified to fund the program in future fiscal years. Reserves may be required to provide transitional support.

**References:**

Section 6.1 of the Town Charter discusses the reorganization of Town agencies as follows:

**SECTION 6.1: REORGANIZATION OF TOWN AGENCIES**

(a) The Town Manager may prepare and submit to the Town Council a reorganization plan which may, subject to applicable law and this Charter, reorganize, consolidate, or abolish any Town agency, in whole or in part, or establish new Town agencies as the Town Manager considers necessary or expedient. The reorganization plan shall be accompanied by an explanatory memorandum which shall include: (i) a summary of the reasons or purposes for the proposed changes; (ii) reference to any bylaws to be repealed or modified; (iii) a summary of proposed bylaw changes to be put into effect should the plan be adopted; and (iv) a summary of the estimated financial impact of the proposed changes.

The term “reorganization plan” shall mean any plan which proposes the abolition, creation, or consolidation of 1 or more Town agencies, including the reassignment of functions from 1 agency to another or the establishment of 1 or more new Town agencies as deemed necessary to deliver Town services.

(b) Every reorganization plan shall, upon receipt by the Town Council, be referred to an appropriate committee of the Town Council which shall, not more than 30 days after receipt of the plan, hold a public forum on the matter and shall, not later than the second regular meeting of the Town Council following the public forum, report either that it approves or disapproves of the plan.

A reorganization plan shall become effective 60 days after the date it is received by the Town Council unless the Town Council has prior to that date voted to reject the reorganization plan or unless a later effective date is specified in the plan. A reorganization plan presented by the Town Manager to the Town Council under this Section shall not be amended by the Town Council but shall either be approved or rejected as submitted. Reorganization plans shall not be subject to the Right to Postpone as provided in Section 2.10(c).