



# Allentown

435 Hamilton Street  
Allentown, Pa. 18101

## Minutes - Final

### City Council

---

Wednesday, January 13, 2021

7:15 PM

Council Chambers

---

#### Meeting 2

#### Roll Call

**Present:** 7 - Candida Affa, Cynthia Mota, Daryl Hendricks, Julio Guridy, Ed Zucal, Ce-Ce Gerlach, and Joshua Siegel

[15-3995](#)

R5

RFP Authorization

**Sponsors:** Gerlach and Mr. Siegel

**Attachments:** [R5 RFP Authorization](#)

[Alternative 911 Council handout](#)

[RFP Manual](#)

[Lehigh County Da Says Intelligence and Investigation Center Will Pitch In](#)

[A Long-Planned Program To Remove Police From Some 911 Calls Launches As Denver's Streets](#)

[Cahoots & The Police Departments](#)

[How Social Workers and Police Share Responsibilities in Eugene, Oregon](#)

[In Cahoots - How the Unlikely Pairing Of Cops and Hippies Became A National Model](#)

[In Denver, Unarmed Mental Health Workers Respond To Hundreds of 911 Calls Instead of Police](#)

[Portland Aims To Dispatch Better First Responders For Some Homelessness Calls](#)

[Support Cahoots - Serving the Vulnerable](#)

[The Wake Forest Law Review - In Cahoots with the Police](#)

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach stated that the county definitely has to be involved. As they have seen in Bucks County, it has to be a municipal to step up and step forward. It seems reasonable that the largest municipality with the largest police force should be it. It seems like in Bucks County that was Bensalem. It has a way to compare. Obviously, the county has to participate because they run the 911 System. It is pretty clear that something needs to be done and there is a desire to do it. The question is on how to proceed. She echoed Mr. Guridy's comments that we can do both. We can have these meetings between the Mayor and the county officials, the hospital officials, Julie Thomases and bring in someone who

knows how to guide those conversations so that something productive comes from them and we are not at the same place a year from now still having conversations. She stated that's her only comments to wrap up.

Mr. Joshua Siegel stated that he thinks there is a lot of consensus tonight. Everybody seems to agree there are a lot of merits to these programs. He echoed the comments of Mr. Guridy. He stated that they can walk and chew gum at the same time. There is a lot of merit behind the Cedar Crest Study. They all unanimously supported it. There is a lot of value in taking an evidence-driven approach both to the call volume that the city has and look at how we can reorganize the department as need be based on feedback from the community and the demands that are met. He would argue as they looked at this instance and all looked these programs tonight. The evidence is quite clear that these models has been tested. It is not something that we have to study. He stated that he thinks that they have to evaluate when they look at public policy is first, the principle and the priority. If this is something that we believe should be a priority and believe have merit, the responsible thing to do is continue the discussion that they had at the county which absolutely has to be a partner. Not only they operate the 911 center, but the Bucks County and the Dauphin County model prove that the county can play a huge role in providing that initial financing. Not that he thinks that the city does not have a role to play. Ms. Affa asked a great questions about Eugene Oregon and the cost. Both Eugene Oregon and Springfield is the sister city to Eugene. They are right next to each other. They actually financial the Cahoots Model and it costs about \$1.7 million a year which is on the White Bird Clinic site and most of it comes from the Police department. Most of it actually comes from the Police Department. This is a holistic and comprehensive way of reimagining Public Safety. What keeps us safe ultimately? We are ultimately trying to solve the issue of substance abuse or mental health issues upfront front and for good and not have recidivism and repeat visits. That's where those savings are starting to materialize. The question was asked how can it be \$8.5 million annually for Public Safety. It is because when we address the root cause of the problem, it is the officers do not have to go back and respond to the same situation over and over again. Who is experiencing a prolonged mental crisis or chronic substance abuse issues. When he thinks about Public Safety and keeping the community safe, he thinks making sure they do not have those repeat instances. If somebody recidivates and dealing with the same substance abuse order over and over again, how does that make any of us safe. How does that actually keeps our community safe when a person is constantly in crisis. If we address the crisis head on and resolve it for good by putting them in contact with therapeutic or psychological treatment or substance abuse treatment, we have not put that person on a path to stability. If we instead continue the path of incarcerating or punishing them, their are going to end

up back on the streets with the exact same problem and comment either another crime to facilitate that addiction. That means they are going to put another resident's life in danger or disrupt or potentially harm someone. This is actually going to keep us safer. Even if it is as it is in Eugene, dollar for dollar replacement, if we are meeting the needs of the community at hand and if it is a mental health professional responding as opposed to an officer, they are even safer than before and in addition to that, we are saving our taxpayers money. That is what we are supposed to do on Council. we supposed to be good stewards of not just our tax dollars, but be sensible in the policies that we implement. He stated that he knows that some may be weary or apprehensive about that notion of shifting of resources, but he asked them to consider, if the shift itself is going to cause a problem, if the need is still met and if the need is going to be met in a more effective or more holistic or more compassionate way then why not do that. He stated that he does not think that these programs have to be studied anymore. They need to do as Ms. Gerlach indicated is to bring an expert to the table. None of them are experts in the policies and procedures. Chief Granitz is absolutely right to bring up the aspect of transferability. That should not be an inhibitor to action. He added that what they should try to do is not transfer a program, but adapt it. A city like Allentown has certain linguistic barriers means that we are going to make sure that mental health professionals are both bilingual and trained to deal with different cultural differences. We are not looking to transfer programs wholesale and apply it in a cookie-cutter fashion. We are looking to see does the principles of the program work and does the practice work. He would argue that all four of these programs demonstrate that they do. We simply need to make sure that there is someone at the table, a consultant. For an example Cahoots is the consultant that ensured that Denver had its Star Program. Cahoots went to Denver and consulted with Denver and they didn't even end up with a Cahoots Program. They ended up with a Co-Response Model which is evidence that a trained professional who comes here and guides us may lead us to a different path or project different from Cahoots or even their own city that they are coming here to consult. What we need to focus in on now is making sure when we bring those stakeholders to the table that there is a clear strategic direction that someone at the table to make sure we come to a consensus and begin getting this implemented in a reasonable period of time. He stated that he doesn't think they need to wait anymore. There is a Cedar Crest Study is very long-term. This is something that we can achieve in the short-term because we know it works. We should feel that sense of urgency. He stated as he indicated last week, there are really lives on the line. It is about changing people lives and caring for our community, being compassionate and sensible public servants and making our system of policing more effective and more responsive to the needs of our residents which in turn will improve the relationship between the police, the city and

our residents. Keep our citizens safer and save our city money. If a program can do all those things at once, that is a good day for City Council and a good day for all of us as elected representatives. It is good for the county. It is good for our hospital network which is going to save money. He stated that they may not do the RFP, but he thinks that it is a lot of merit in bringing in a consultant or expert who can provide that subject material expertise that we simply lack here. A great deal of respect from Cedar Crest from a statistical standpoint, but obviously they are not policy experts when it comes from this particular type of model. It would behoove us to bring in somebody like the Cahoots Program and the Star Program. We would never cookie-cutting strategy this. People are the same no matter where they are. At the end of the day, substance abuse is substance abuse. Addiction is addiction. We just simply have to adapt. He urged his colleague to keep the open mind. Public Safety is the key priority for cities. We have to have a more expansion definition of what Public Safety means. It is no longer simply law enforcement. It is compassionate care and service that extends well beyond what law enforcement capable of responding to or really should be responding to.

Mr. Michael Hanlon stated that Council received an email from Ms. Thomases stating that the Lehigh Valley Justice Institute is coordinating a stakeholders meeting. She stated that they can pay for Cahoots. She has a follow up email of what she plans for them to do.

Mr. Julio Guridy stated good. We certainly need to follow up with the stakeholders. We all want safety. Our Police Department is doing a wonderful job. he is happy to hear and see that Chief Granitz is working through this and attending these meetings. He worked on some of these programs. The issue is to what extent, what program, what model to look into and all those things needs to be studied. They need to be thought out carefully by everybody. We are not experts on this. We should get some support. He stated that he does not think that it has to be expensive for our city. He would not get into any program unless the county is a big stakeholder and also some hospitals as well as the city together. Their will be some Private, Public Partnership for their benefit. The most important thing is to have safety in our city. It is a reasonable question to ask ourselves. Do we want safety or do we not. The Chief is on board and wants to make some decisive decisions.

Ms. Cynthia Mota stated that she really would like to see our citizen that have mental health issues to be taken care of in times of crisis instead of going to prison. She stated that she would really like getting the county involved with different stakeholders. She is not opposed to a consultant. They really have to look at different programs. Cahoots is the one that is getting more results. We need to bring more people to collaborate. It is

not just a city issue, it is a county issue. She would love to see the mental health citizens get the help that they need with respect, compassion and care.

Ms. Candida stated that Mr. Siegel brought stuff up that was interested. She doesn't remember what city it was that took funding from the Police Department. Out of all these cities that you have mentioned, how many took money from the budget of the Police Department which we used the word Defunding which we don't use that word anymore. How many of these cities used the Police Department's funding for funding of it. That is the point in here in Allentown. That is why she won't go for it. She does not believe they should have anything to do. All these programs are wonderful, but when you start taking money from our Police Department to fund these programs that is as bad as taking money. The citizens of Allentown won't stand for that. She is anxious. How many cities took out of the Police Department's budget to fund the program.

Mr. Joshua Siegel stated that Ms. Affa referenced the presentation Ms. Thomases prepared. Denver for example states specifically in there that they had used an increase in the sales tax which was done as a ballot initiative. That is not an option for Allentown. We are constitutionally prohibited from implementing our own sales tax. We would need special permission from the state in order to implement something in that nature. Houston is the fourth largest or sixth largest city in the country. It was financed in the budget without the diversion of resources. Bucks County is a pilot program and the \$400,000 is new money. Obviously the county does not operate its own Police Department. It came out of county funds. The Cahoots Model was actually quite unique within the country in terms of the Police Budget sort of being a part of it.

Mr. Julio Guridy stated that the Police Department initiated that.

Mr. Joshua Siegel stated that the Cahoots Model clinic has been around since the 1970s. They initially started responding to calls that police did not have time to reach. Over time they built a relationship with the Police Department. Today, they are taking over 17 percent of the Police call volume which is why he said earlier they should be less weary because the need is still being met. Now, mental health professionals are responding to the calls. The need is still being met. The individuals that are still in need of services are still being met. Rather than being met with punishment, they are being invested in through mental health services. That is the way we have to look at it. Obviously, the model is quite successful. As you saw in a single year, there is only 250 requests for Police for backup out of 24,000 calls for service. He would consider that a remarkable success. The need is being met in Eugene Oregon. The community is still functioning. It is not

rampant with crime, violence and/or danger. As long as the need is met, it is a matter of how we should as a city meet the need. He believes that trained mental health professionals should be addressing substance abuse and mental health disorders and performing welfare checks. As long as the need is met, it is a matter of how we believe as a city we should meet that need. He stated that he believes that trained mental health professionals should be addressing substance abuse and mental health disorders and performing welfare checks. As long as the need is met, the community is not kept safe. As we have seen, there is a cost savings associated with and the community is made better off. It is not going to make us worst off. In fact, it is going to make us better off in terms of our public health tax dollars and in terms of the public's receptiveness to the program itself. It is a high demand for something like that as evidence by the fact that nationally there has been a lot of attention paid to Cahoots.

Mr. Julio Guridy stated that they don't have to get into difference, but one thing is if they can support Public Safety regardless if it comes from the police or a citizens or a Drug and Alcohol professional or an MHR professional. That is the goal. The goal is to keep our city safe and our citizens safe. Personally, he doesn't think they are there yet. We can do better. The rate of drug and alcohol is very high in our county. When you look at the county jails you are going to see that differentials and transferability of programs. He stated that he wishes that they will go to the county jail see who is actually in the jails. He did not go to this county, but Northampton County and he was perplexed. He taught a class at Northampton Community College and he took his class over there and these were nontraditional students which was older than 18 or 19 year old students and it was eye opening for them as well.

Ms. Ce-Ce Geralch stated that she has a question about next steps. Where do they go from here because she is hearing different lanes they can go down?

Mr. Julio Guridy stated that his vision will be to continue the conversations with the county and the hospitals and with a stakeholders including the Chief of Police. The Mayor said there is a meeting on Tuesday.

Mayor Ray O'Connell stated that Julie is coming, Chief Granitz, himself, Phillips Armstrong, Mike Schlossberg and will try to get Frank Ford there. He stated as president of City Council he was going to send Mr. Guridy a note and say 11:00 AM on Tuesday as representative of City Council. What information that they gather at the meeting, they will come back and share with everybody on Council.

Mr. Julio Guridy stated that it is moving and is moving in the right direction.

He stated personally they won't see this done in a week or a month. They will gather a lot information and come back with something more comprehensive. This week is the first time he heard about these programs.

Mayor Ray O'Connell stated that there is an old saying go slow to go fast. Step by step, procedural. if you want to do it. You have to do it right.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach stated that a concern she has is a lot of functionality of whatever is implemented will be at the county level. In terms of buy-in and commitment in each of these areas there was a municipality that demonstrated their buy-in and commitment at a legislative level. We have wonderful nonprofits that are out there and holding these meetings, but nothing happens. There is not that buy-in from the municipal government. She urged Council to step up and lead this. Not attend, but lead this and say this is what we want to do in the City of Allentown with the county.

Mr. Julio Guridy stated that everybody is in agreement that this would be beneficial. The issue is which of the models are better for the city. We have the opportunity to lead, but we have the stakeholders as well. We cannot fund everything. We are still at the beginning stage.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach stated that if it was more of the desire of Council and the community to go towards one specific consultant. What would that look like for us? Who would initiate that request that a specific consultant will be brought in to facilitate a stakeholders meeting.

Mr. Julio Guridy stated that it would be us as Council. We make that decision. This was not brought up at the county level or the hospital level. It was brought up right here. It is a good thing for our city and our residents will be blessed to have a safer city. His biggest worry would have been that the Chief of Police would say he did not want, but he is actually embedded in this much faster than he is. We are in a good position.

Ms. Ce-Ce Gerlach stated that she looks forward to the next couple of steps.

**ADJOURNED: 7:40 PM**