



CITY OF KIRKLAND
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MEMORANDUM

To: Kurt Triplett, City Manager

From: Tracey Dunlap, Deputy City Manager of Operations
Carly Joerger, Management Analyst
George Dugdale, Financial Planning Manager
Veronica Hill, Senior Financial Analyst

Date: August 26, 2021

Subject: COMMUNITY RESPONDERS PROGRAM EXECUTION PLAN, CONVERSION OF 6.0 COMMUNITY RESPONDER POSITIONS TO FTES, AND ADDITION OF 4.0 FTE EMTS FOR 24/7 COVERAGE IN THE MOBILE INTEGRATED HEALTH UNIT

RECOMMENDATION:

City Council approves by motion the conversion of 4.0 Limited Term Employee (LTE) Community Responder positions to Full Time Employee (FTE) status, the conversion of two ongoing contract Mental Health Professional positions into 1.0 FTE Community Responder positions, and the addition of 4.0 on-going FTE EMT positions for 24/7 coverage in the Mobile Integrated Health Unit. This action creates a total of 10.0 on-going FTEs to aid in recruiting these critical new positions. If Council approves this action staff will start the hiring process for these positions as regular FTE positions, and the formal action adjusting the budget will be included with the Mid-biennial budget adjustments. City Council will also receive a program execution plan update.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:

The 2021-2022 budget includes funding for four new "Community Responder" limited-term positions as part of the Community Safety Initiative. In total, these four positions represent the most significant funding priority within the Community Safety Initiative and Resolution R-5434. The Community Responder program will provide person-centered support to individual high utilizers of 911 and to the most vulnerable community members, thereby reducing the frequency of contacts with emergency personnel. Community Responders will help to stabilize community members experiencing quality of life stressors and/or behavioral and emotional crises. Responders will provide service in the least restrictive setting possible and prevent hospitalization and criminal legal involvement, whenever possible. The 2021-2022 budget also included funding for one new EMT/Firefighter FTE and a part-time contracted Mental Health Professional for a Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) Unit funded through the King County Medic One Levy. The City's goal is to ensure availability of crisis response through both the Community Responders Program and MIH Unit 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year. The Council had previously authorized a contract mental health professional (MHP) paired with a Neighborhood Resource Officer funded as part of the 2018 Police Proposition 1 Ballot Measure. Council action would also convert the MHP to a 1.0 FTE Community Responder using that contract funding.

To help move the Community Responder concept forward, the City engaged consultant Anura Shah, LICSW, MHA, of Beyond Force to work with staff to evaluate options and develop recommendations

on what type of Community Responders program would best meet Kirkland’s needs. City Council received this staff report at the May 18, 2021 Council meeting. The program recommendations resulting from that work included the following:

- Hire four Community Responders as full-time City employees;
- Designate one of the four Community Responder positions to be the Community Responder Supervisor;
- Convert the existing Neighborhood Resource Mental Health Professional from a 30 hour/week contracted service to a 40 hour/week, full-time City of Kirkland employee and reclassify the position as a Community Responder that works with the Neighborhood Resources unit;
- Convert the proposed part-time contracted MIH Community Responder to a 40 hour/week full-time City of Kirkland employee and reclassify the position as a Community Responder that works with the Mobile Integrated Health unit; and
- Hire and/or assign four EMTs or EMT-Firefighters to the MIH unit to ensure 24/7 response coverage (in addition to the 1.0 FTE EMT-Firefighter authorized in the 2021-2022 budget).

Council was in favor of these recommendations at the May 18 Study Session. Since then, staff have operationalized these recommendations into job descriptions, program execution plan, and recruitment strategies. With Council’s encouragement from the dais at the August 4 Council meeting, one recruitment strategy is the central recommendation of this staff report: convert the 4.0 LTE positions to FTE status and convert two ongoing contract positions into 1.0 FTE positions, for a total of 6.0 on-going FTE positions in the Community Responder Program, and add 4.0 FTE EMTs (or EMT-Firefighters) to supplement the 1.0 FTE already approved to provide 24/7 coverage to team with the Community Responders.

Conversion of Community Responder Positions

Table 1, below, shows the 6.0 FTE positions that are part of the Community Responder Program and potential funding sources. Converting these positions from on-going (OG) contracted services and one-time (OT) positions to on-going FTEs is expected to increase the City’s chances of recruiting a highly qualified and diverse applicant pool. These 6.0 positions are all currently funded through the end of 2022 and long-term funding sources for these positions will be added to the budget as part of the mid-biennial adjustments. Staff will bring specific funding options for Council discussion to the November 3rd Study Session.

Table 1 – Community Responder Program Staffing Summary

Position Title	Funding Source(s)	FTE Type		
		Current		Proposed
		OG	OT	OG
Community Responder Supervisor	GF		1.0	1.0
Community Responder	GF		3.0	3.0
Community Responder - MIH	KC MIH Revenue - EMS Levy	1.0		1.0
Community Responder Lead - Neighborhood Resource	PD Prop. 1 - Sales Tax Levy	1.0		1.0

Table 2 shows the current and proposed FTE count in the three relevant departments. With Council approval of this action staff will be able to post the positions as ongoing work. These positions will then be formally added to the budget as part of the mid-biennial adjustments, with specific on-going funding sources identified at that time. Those funding options are expected to include funds set aside from a portion of the additional penny added to Fire Proposition 1, potential additional funds generated from Police Proposition 1, other General Fund resources, and Ground Emergency Transport (GEMT) funds, which are Medicaid reimbursements of transport costs (for the 4 EMT or EMT-Firefighter positions), as described below.

Proposed Change in FTE			
Department	Current	Proposed	Total
CMO	16.0	6.0	22.0
Fire	122.5	4.0	126.5
Police	154.0	-	154.0

Table 2 – Proposed Change in FTE Count

Community Responders Program Execution Plan

The following section describes the steps staff have taken since the May 18 Council meeting and sets forth a schedule for the next program milestones. Ms. Shah’s counsel has informed much of this progress to date. Management intends to extend her contract for continued strategic programmatic advice, support to the new Community Responder Supervisor, and guidance on effective recruitment strategies over the next six months while the program becomes operational.

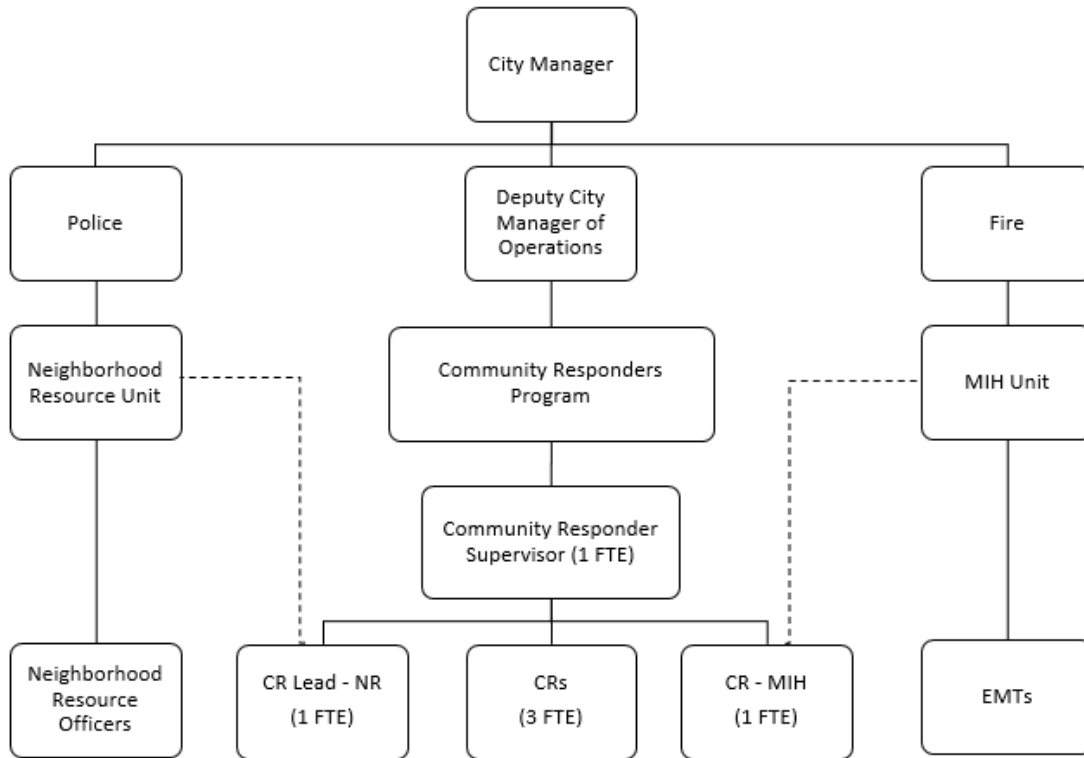
Job Descriptions and Program Structure

Staff have finalized job descriptions for the Community Responders program. These job descriptions thoughtfully reflect the core duties of a Community Responder. Core duties are supplemented with additional responsibilities in the Supervisory or Lead positions and additional programmatic information for the Community Responders who work in partnership with the Neighborhood Resource and Mobile Integrated Health Units. Staff engaged both the Police and Fire Departments in the review of the job descriptions and overall program structure. Acting on Council’s interest from the May 18 meeting to ensure 24/7 coverage, staff have adapted the Community Responder – Neighborhood Resource position to include “Lead” duties. In addition to a full Community Responder workload, a “Lead” may backfill the Supervisor when appropriate, and assist with planning, scheduling, organizing, and coordinating assignments with the other Community Responders.

Once the individual job descriptions took shape, staff evaluated where the program should be placed in the organization. Staff determined the most strategic location to be the City Manager’s Office, due to evolving nature of the program and the need for strong interdepartmental coordination. The Community Responders will report the Deputy City Manager of Operations. The unit will work closely with the Fire Department and the Mobile Integrated Health Unit, Police Department and the Neighborhood Resource Unit, Parks and Community Services and the Human Services Division and Park Rangers, and Public Works and Code Enforcement. See Table 3 for an updated personnel organizational chart.

As requested on May 18, staff has also briefed the City’s Human Services Commission on the program progress and the Commission expressed its support and interest in further program details.

Table 3 – Community Responder Program Personnel Org Chart



Additional Insurance

The job descriptions seek a rigorous level of education and experience and include minimum qualifications of a master’s degree and social work or mental health counseling license in good standing. Requiring this level of education and experience ensures the program can provide the full range of intended services including risk assessments, diagnostics, and case management. Since these are rather uncommon services provided directly at the local level of government, staff engaged the City’s insurance provider, the Washington Cities Insurance Authority (WCIA) Pool, to discuss adding this new group of employees and services to the City’s insurance policy. WCIA was unable to guarantee coverage in the event of a claim for medical malpractice and recommended the City pursue additional coverage through a provider that specializes in mental health professional liability insurance, CPH & Associates. Community Responder positions will be filled contingent upon the incumbent’s ability to receive supplemental insurance, which will be paid for by the City. Once the program needs are assessed by the Supervisor with support from the Community Responder Lead – NR, the remaining Community Responder positions may be filled at a lower level of education and experience to increase the size and diversity of the applicant pool. If that is the recommendation to best meet the program needs, supplemental insurance may not be part of those qualifications.

Mobile Integrated Health and EMT Staffing

Management is working with IAFF to evaluate options for how to staff the first responder position within the MIH Unit. Due to the nature of the duties of the MIH unit, there is ongoing discussion about whether MIH should be staffed by EMT-only personnel, rather than EMT-Firefighters. Pursuing this option would require a Memorandum of Understanding between the City and IAFF as it is adding an additional class of personnel not currently employed by the City or represented by this bargaining unit. The 2021-2022 budget assumes one EMT-Firefighter position would be assigned to this unit. However, to ensure 24/7 coverage that is paired with the Community Responders, the MIH unit will require four additional personnel. Council is asked to authorize an additional 4.0 FTEs to the

2021-2022 budget to meet this need. It is anticipated the additional funding could be provided through the Ground Emergency Medical Transport (GEMT) funds, which are Medicaid reimbursements of transport costs. Staff will update City Council on the EMT or EMT-Firefighter decision that results from negotiation with the IAFF and provide a funding proposal during the Mid Biennial budget discussions.

Hiring and Onboarding Schedule

To set the program up for success, staff have developed a phased approach to hiring and onboarding. Staff will prioritize its first recruitment efforts on the Community Responder Supervisor, Community Responder Lead-Neighborhood Resource, and Community Responder-MIH in September 2021. Shortly after the Supervisor begins, the Community Responder-MIH and MIH-EMT or EMT-Firefighter will be onboarded to work together to develop the new MIH unit. Factoring in recruitment, hiring, and background checks, these positions would likely start in early December 2021. The Community Responder Lead-Neighborhood Resource function is currently filled by a contracted service but will also be prioritized as an early hire so they can provide the "Lead" support duties to the Supervisor to develop the program. After a few months of responding, the Supervisor, Community Responder Lead-Neighborhood Resource, and Community Responder-MIH and MIH-EMT or EMT-Firefighter will have the best understanding to date of the service gaps and needs. The hiring schedule builds in time for any necessary adjustments to the Community Responder job description or recruitment strategy to meet the community needs. Staff anticipate the three additional Community Responders would likely be hired in early 2022.

It is important to note that staff is currently providing mental health provider support via the Police Proposition 1 MHP position and the RADAR program. The initial hires will also begin engaging with the community immediately as part of assessing the needs of the program moving forward. This engagement will include contacting individuals in need that have already been identified through the data maintained by Fire and Police.

Council Action Requested

If the Council concurs with the staff recommendation, the Council should authorize the FTEs by approving the following motion:

"I move we authorize the City Manager to add six additional on-going FTEs to the City Manager's Office and four additional on-going FTEs to the Fire Department to implement the Community Responder program and to include these FTEs and on-going funding options for these positions in the mid-biennial budget update."