

Allegheny County Council

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Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 20, 2017

4:30 PM

Conference Room 1

Committee on Public Safety

Jim Ellenbogen, Chair

Tom Baker, Patrick Catena, John DeFazio, Sam DeMarco, Nick Futules, Paul Klein, Ed Kress, Bob Macey, Denise Ranalli-Russell, DeWitt Walton, Members

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:32.

Invited Guests:

Hon. Stephen Zappala, Allegheny County District Attorney, or designee(s)

Hon. Jeffrey Manning, President Judge, Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, or designee(s)

William D. McKain, CPA, Allegheny County Manager, or designee(s)

Dr. Karen Hacker, Director, Allegheny County Health Department

Dr. Karl Williams, Allegheny County Medical Examiner

Coleman McDonough, Superintendent, Allegheny County Police

II. Roll Call

Members Present: 4 - Sam DeMarco, Ellenbogen, Denise Ranalli-Russell and DeWitt Walton

Members Absent: 5 - John DeFazio, Nick Futules, Paul Klein, Ed Kress and Bob Macey

Members Phone: 2 - Tom Baker and Patrick Catena

Members 1 - Sue Means

Non-Members:

III. Approval of Minutes

IV. Agenda Items

Ordinances

[9900-16](#)

An Ordinance of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Authorizing Acceptance of a 1982 Mack Pumper Truck for the Allegheny County Fire Academy.

Sponsors: Chief Executive

The Chair introduced Chief _____, who gave a brief overview of the transaction, noting that the truck has little cash value and that it would be used as a static training aid, and the truck would not even be licensed or registered.

Mr. DeMarco and Chief _____ discussed some of the issues surrounding newer regulations that apply to fire trucks.

In response to a question from Ms. Means, Chief _____ noted that replacement parts are available, and that the truck will be repaired to the extent that it retains value as a training aid.

A motion was made by DeMarco, seconded by Ranalli-Russell, that this matter be Affirmatively Recommended. The motion carried by the following vote:

Members Yes: 3 - DeMarco, Ellenbogen and Ranalli-Russell

Members Absent: 6 - DeFazio, Futules, Klein, Kress, Macey and Walton

Members Yes Phone: 2 - Baker and Catena

Members 1 - Means

Non-Member:

Discussion Topic - Opioids in Allegheny County

The Chair and Mr. McKain discussed the procedures to be followed during the course of the discussion, and the Chair described his reasons for inviting everyone to talk through at least some of the issues relating to opioid abuse in the County.

Dr. Williams noted that the pattern of opioid abuse and overdoses subsumes much of northern Appalachia, which is where the issue began to manifest itself about 20 years ago. Dr. Williams noted that there were about 200 overdoses up to 2013, but that this number rose to about 300 in 2014 and topped 600 in 2016.

In response to a question from the Chair, Dr. Williams noted that Narcam does prevent overdoses, and indicated that the number of times that had been done successfully is being tracked with increasing levels of precision, although he did not have the statistics at the moment.

In response to a question from Mr. DeMarco, Dr. Williams noted that other compounds that are being added to opioids definitely contribute to the life threatening nature of the injected opioids, and also indicated that more people are starting directly with the injected opioids without first using the pill versions of pain killers and the like. Dr. Williams noted that the toxicology of overdoses is becoming increasingly complex as people begin taking different combinations of injection drugs.

In response to a question from the Chair, Dr. Williams noted that even the dealers don't necessarily know what all of the contents of the drugs that they sell.

In response to a question from Ms. Means, Dr. Williams indicated that he believes that the solution to the problem is to treat addiction as a disease, with an emphasis on prevention, rehabilitation, and the like.

Ms. Means and Dr. Williams discussed the impact of a pattern of increased prescription of anti-pain medications, and Dr. Williams indicated that those prescription pain medications definitely do function as a gateway to other opioid use, and that at one point, the United States accounted for over 90% of the prescription opioid use in the world, as the domestic trend towards medicating pain increased. Dr. Williams noted that the biochemistry of a teenager's brain is very different than that of an adult's brain, and that the addictive quality of opioids manifests differently based on age, as well. Dr. Williams also indicated that prescription opioids became quite profitable to drug companies, and that they therefore tended to emphasize their virtues to doctors who might end up prescribing them.

In response to a question from Ms. Ranalli-Russell, Dr. Williams expressed his opinion that rehabilitation services are simply not available on a scale that is adequate to address the problem, and that death rates among certain segments of the population due to overdoses has risen dramatically. Mr. McKain noted that the Department of Human Services provides rehabilitation services. Ms. Wilson provided some additional detail regarding drug-based rehabilitation strategies and their effectiveness, and suggested that Director Cherna might be a good resource for a discussion of the mechanics of the treatment strategy that DHS follows.

In response to a question from the Chair, Dr. Williams discussed the interactions between anti-depressants, anti-psychotics, and anti-anxiety drugs and opioids, some of which are particularly dangerous.

In response to a question from Mr. DeMarco, Dr. Williams described how complex rehabilitation can be, and noted that success rates are often fairly limited in terms of success rates.

Mr. Walton noted that, in his view, the issue of addiction is both complex and variable, depending on a variety of circumstances.

Superintendent McDonough noted that the problem is of such a dimension that it is likely impossible for society to arrest its way out of it, and described how the County Police approach their work in the context of drug overdoses, noting that over 60 of 65 cases recently investigated by the Department were opioid-related. Superintendent McDonough indicated that the Department focuses its attention on drug dealers, rather than drug users, discussed training efforts that the Department has undertaken in order to educate municipal officers throughout the County with regard to how to handle overdose investigations, and noted the importance of attempting to use the evidence that is available through things like cell phone records to track down suppliers in a coordinated fashion. Superintendent McDonough also noted that County Police officers are equipped with Narcam.

In response to a question from the Chair, Superintendent McDonough gave a general overview of the cooperative efforts between the County and Pittsburgh City Police.

The Chair and Mr. Walton discussed the goals of the discussion that was taking place.

In response to questions from Mr. Walton, Dr. Williams discussed the prevalence of replacing things like heroin with Fentanil as production of the latter becomes cheaper and its price drops below the price of heroin, and noted that this has had some other effects, like Fentanil replacing heroin in mixes with cocaine. Dr. Williams also briefly described the tendency for other criminal activities to accompany drug use and addiction, and stressed that this contributes to the complexity of the societal issue.

In response to a question from the Chair, Superintendent McDonough noted that national crime statistics appear not to show a growth in violent crimes related to drug use, but that this can vary from locality to locality.

In response to a question from the Chair, Dr. Williams noted that the County is increasingly reliant upon other laboratory facilities for some of the more esoteric drug testing, but also indicated that the County's laboratory testing capability is largely among the best.

In response to a question from Mr. Walton, Dr. Williams emphasized the importance of resources to rehabilitation and treatment. Mr. Walton noted that there may be a trend towards certain resources declining, and Mr. McKain indicated that the problem cannot be adequately addressed in pieces and stressed the importance of approaching the issue from law enforcement, public health, an human services perspectives simultaneously. Mr. McKain gave a brief overview of the strategy employed by the County to bring all of those entities together in order to derive a more comprehensive approach to the problem, and to secure additional funding wherever possible.

Mr. Walton noted the importance of things like providing environments that make rehabilitation success as sustainable as possible, and noted that he has a desire to become as effective of an advocate as possible for whatever solutions are available.

The Chair suggested that in his view there is wisdom in engaging the Council as much as possible as a means of working within the various districts.

Mr. McKain discussed methodologies that might be effective in engaging the Council's assistance and keeping the Council informed regarding the County's activities in this context.

Ms. Wilson noted that there is in her opinion wisdom in engaging Council in community events, and reinforced what had already been said. Ms. Wilson distributed a pair of brochures that the Health Department has helped create that describe some of the rehabilitation services that are available.

Ms. Wilson noted that the County Health Department has worked with the Commonwealth's Health Department in crafting prescription guidelines in order to keep physicians aware of the dangers of overprescription.

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at