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TOP STORY

Madison City Council members seek to fund peer support to address to gun violence

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LOGAN WROGE, STATE JOURNAL

Madison police officers survey a North Side apartment on the 500 block of Northport Drive where a man was fatally shot Tuesday in a home invasion. City Council members are proposing to spend \$50,000 on contract with a nonprofits to provide peer support and response services to people and households impacted by violence.

Days after talks between Mayor Paul Soglin’s office and nonprofits collapsed, City Council members are proposing to spend \$50,000 to contract with those nonprofits to provide short-term peer support and crisis response services to families affected by

violence.

Under the proposal, the city would use funds from \$400,000 in this year's budget to fund initial pieces of a 15-point plan offered last year by the Focused Interruption Coalition of community and faith leaders to address racial disparities, violence and recidivism.

The city would contract with Nehemiah Community Development Corp., which would subcontract with Focused Interruption, with the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County serving as the coalition's fiscal agent. Coalition members have been responding to crises, including a homicide Tuesday, and attempting prevention as unpaid volunteers.

Violence, effects of violence, threats of violence and trauma in the city must be met with appropriate urgency as a critical public safety and public health concern, the resolution by Aids. Maurice Cheeks, Shiva Bidar-Sielaff, Matt Phair and Mark Clear says.

Those who are threatened by gun violence, witness gun violence or are affected by gun violence can benefit from immediate availability of peer support that helps to de-escalate conflict and stabilize victims and their families during or following a traumatic event, it says.

"We have worked together to get a resolution in place," Phair said. "We are confident it will pass, collaboration will continue, and most importantly, life saving work will happen this summer."

Boys and Girls Club president Michael Johnson, a spokesman for Focused Interruption, praised the council members and Community Development Division for moving a resolution forward.

"Our community can't afford for us not to be prepared, and I am happy to see we are making progress towards the implementation of the 15-point plan," Johnson said.

The nonprofits and partners "are committed to helping children and families facing hardships during difficult times, and together we will develop outcomes with the city of Madison and (Madison Police Department) so the public understands the role of the

response team during a community crisis,” Johnson said. “We also met with the district attorney and will coordinate with their Victim Services Unit to ensure we leverage resources.”

After talks collapsed

The proposed resolution comes days after talks fell apart between the mayor’s office and nonprofits to create a \$75,000 “rapid response” to gun violence, including peer support. Each side blamed the other.

After talks collapsed, Soglin proposed a pared-back program for the summer sponsored by Cheeks, Bidar-Sielaff and Phair that provides \$25,000 in direct emergency aid for short-term housing, food, clothing and other needs of people and families affected by violence.

The council members, however, continued negotiations with the nonprofits for the additional \$50,000 for peer support. The new resolution says no payments will be made to Nehemiah until a memorandum between Nehemiah and Focused Interruption, through its fiscal agent, is signed and accepted by the city.

Soglin said Friday afternoon that he will support the resolution because it’s close enough to what his office had previously negotiated. But he added, “We still have some conceptual differences of what’s involved,” and there are concerns about the process.

He also said he has issues with the volunteer response to the homicide on Tuesday, saying Dane County witness protection had gone into operation and that volunteers soon after were in contact with the family and publicly sharing photographs and information.

“No one working in collaboration with the city will be doing that,” Soglin said. “That is not the purpose of the program.”

Johnson responded that the family of Michael Meaderds asked coalition members Wednesday morning to release the photos on their behalf and set up a fundraising account.

The city's Finance Committee will consider the two resolutions on June 12 with a decision by the council on June 20.

The city is also continuing a process to spend the rest of the \$400,000 on two long-term peer support programs — one for those re-entering the community from incarceration and the other resembling rapid response, which is not a police initiative. The contract is likely to be awarded in the fall.

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