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## **Community Service Patrol van gets city funding**

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**FAIRBANKS** — A van service that picks up inebriated people downtown scored financial support from the city for the next four years on Monday night.

“This is such a big step for us,” said Dave van den Berg, executive director of the Downtown Association, which manages the Community Service Patrol. “The city rose to the request and rose to a need.”

The Fairbanks City Council voted unanimously to give \$50,000 in bed tax revenue to the Community Service Patrol annually through 2014. The money will come from the portion of bed tax income that the city reserves for its own operations, set by ordinance at 22.5 cents of every dollar. Therefore, the funding dedicated to the Community Service Patrol should not affect money for any other program that receives bed tax money.

Mayor Jerry Cleworth opposed the council’s action. However, after years debating whether and how to fund the CSP, the council passed the ordinance with little debate.

“We all agreed it was needed and meaningful and saves the city money,” said Vivian Stiver, a councilwoman who has advocated funding for the patrols during the past three years. She introduced the ordinance along with John Eberhart.

The patrols cover downtown Fairbanks south of the Chena River. The vans take inebriated people to a home or treatment center.

The van service received \$50,000 from the city in March to stay afloat. But it has never received explicit support in the city budget, unlike the Fairbanks Economic Development Corp. and Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau. Instead, it has had to compete against other nonprofits for funding annually.

“Unless it’s a fixed amount of funding for X number of years, it gave them no security, and it didn’t look like support,” Stiver said.

This will encourage other businesses and community members to support the program, both Stiver and Van den Berg said.

The patrols deserve bed tax funding because visitors (who pay bed tax on their hotel stays) frequent downtown and see the benefits, Stiver said.

“It cuts down on hospital visits, provides a safe environment for us and for people who patronize businesses, cuts down on police,” Stiver said.

The patrols reported handling 2,484 events in 2009. Supporters say the work lightens the Fairbanks Police Department’s load.

“We’ve all heard Police Chief (Laren) Zager say this Community Service Patrol

probably does the work equivalent of at least three full-time police officers,” Eberhart said.

The CSP must provide \$140,000 in matching funds to procure city dollars each year. Its projected budget for 2011 is about \$150,000 (not counting city dollars), a mix of funding from the borough, Fairbanks Memorial Hospital and other corporations, said Van den Berg.

The council’s decision Monday takes \$50,000 directly out of the city’s general fund annually for three years.

Cleworth was not pleased that the funding will tap the city’s share of bed tax, he said. Instead, he said, the council should have taken the money from one of the current beneficiaries of dedicated bed tax funding or from the \$270,000 bed tax fund that is divided up through a competitive annual process.

“I think the council got a little gun-shy at the complaints they might get,” he said.

The CSP’s cost should be offset by an increase in business license and city service fees the council approved for next year, said Jim Soileau, city finance director. The city’s roughly \$4 million surplus also provides a cushion for such expenditures.

But that surplus will probably diminish in two years, Cleworth said.

“It becomes another city endowment,” he said of the patrol funding. “I don’t know if it’s totally affordable.”

The Fairbanks City Council also approved raising fees for DUI offenders on Monday. The resolution increases the impound fee, which an offender pays to retrieve a vehicle from the city lot, from \$420 to \$1,000. It also raises vehicle bail for repeat offenders by \$500, money defendants must pay to get their vehicle back while they await trial.

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