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City Council agrees to fund Community Service Patrol

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Editorial

The Fairbanks City Council voted wisely Monday when it approved a standing city contribution of \$50,000 per year to the Community Service Patrol.

This investment, taken from bed tax income, should save the city money. The patrols pick up inebriated people in the core downtown area and take them in vans to an appropriate location. The patrol officers made more than 1,000 such trips in the 10 months ending June 30.

If the Community Service Patrol officers weren't there, the job often would fall to Fairbanks police officers, who are much more expensive. Even if police handled half the calls that the service patrols do, it would represent a huge cost to the city.

Of course, the city also could save the money by telling its police not to respond to public inebriation calls. That's not realistic, though. Often, the inebriated people are a danger to others in addition to themselves. Their presence and behavior also is highly upsetting to the sober folk trying to go about their business in the city. A response is necessary.

The city could also continue to leave the job to the private sector. The Community Service Patrol is operated by the Downtown Association of Fairbanks, a private nonprofit organization. It funds the patrols with government grants and private contributions. (The association has obtained some city bed tax money through the annual competitive process, but not much.)

The city should neither ignore the problem nor leave the entire effort to downtown businesses to handle, though. This is a public problem that reverberates far beyond the city core, and it deserves a public response.

The CSP organization has struggled in recent years and has had to cut back its services. The city's contribution for the next three years should help anchor the effort and prevent more back-sliding.

A contribution of city funds is an economical and effective choice.

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