

City, downtown association ink deal for larger Fairbanks inebriate patrol

By Sam Friedman / sfriedman@newsminer.com | Posted: Friday, April 11, 2014 9:00 pm

Correction: This article has been changed to reflect the following correction.

Saturday's article "City, downtown association ink deal for larger Fairbanks inebriate patrol" incorrectly listed the time the patrol will start. The patrol will start at 8 a.m. all week.

FAIRBANKS—The Fairbanks Community Service Patrol went citywide and expanded from three to 4 1/2 staff positions last week under an agreement with the city government.

Under an April 1 memorandum of understanding between the city and the Downtown Association of Fairbanks, the van patrol began taking inebriated people into protective custody from anywhere within the city limits instead of just the downtown core. The patrol also has expanded hours and put a second van on the road.

The expansion comes with a new funding infusion from the Fairbanks city government where Mayor John Eberhart has advocated a larger patrol to keep city police officers and firefighters from getting tied up with non-emergency inebriate calls. In his 2014 budget, Eberhart expanded the city's contribution from \$50,000 to \$125,000 under the condition that another government also contribute. The Fairbanks North Star Borough government added \$25,000.

The non-profit downtown association operates the Community Service Patrol. The patrol now gets about half of its roughly \$300,000 annual budget from private donors and half from the Fairbanks city and borough governments.

"This administration (Eberhart) is trying to come up with a rational approach of how to exercise its grant of authority (to place people in protective custody). And that is to say we need a less-expensive way of dealing with a fairly constant and at times overwhelming body of work," said Downtown Association Executive Director David van den Berg this week, describing the agreement. "It's a body of work that doesn't require the skill sets that the police have. It's a body of work that's better suited to the skill sets the (Community Service Patrol) ambassadors have."

The first few days of the expanded patrol have gone smoothly, he said.

The patrol now operates 8 a.m. to 2 a.m., seven days a week. Security company Securitas staffs the patrol through a contract with the downtown association and still needs to fill one of the new ambassador jobs.

The patrol can now respond to non-emergency, non-criminal calls related to incapacitated people anywhere in the city limits. It can take people to "a home, Gateway to Recovery Detox, Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, Fairbanks Correctional Center, Housing First, The Door, or any other appropriate

location" under the terms of the memorandum of understanding.

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