

COUNCIL PRE-MEETING
Tuesday, November 2, 2021 5:30 p.m.
Casper City Hall - Council Chambers

AGENDA

1. Employee Mental Health Services
2. Agenda Review

Mayor Freel began the pre-meeting session at 5:35 p.m. with Councilmembers Cathey, Engebretsen, Gamroth, Knell, Pacheco, Pollock, Quest and Mayor Freel in attendance. Councilman Johnson participated by GoTo Meeting.

City Manager Napier introduced the topic of employee mental health services and indicated that staff would present further information regarding Police, Fire-EMS, and general employees.

Deputy Police Chief Chaney provided a brief overview of the work the Police department has done to support the well-being of staff and that Captain Brown would provide further details.

Captain Brown shared information about the holistic approach of the Police department to help officers with mental health issues and provided specific examples of health statistics for officers. He stated that Dr. Post had been brought for trauma counseling when the department lost an officer, and that she had been also doing follow-up counseling with officers as well. He also said that Sergeant Winters has been holding weekly group counseling. He described the many aspects that are being explored to help officers including: a cardiologist to evaluate blood pressure and fitness levels; a physician to improve officer diet fitness; sleep studies; and the use of yoga for rehabilitating after surgery or to prevent injuries. He spoke of the efforts of the career services department to prepare officers by teaching classes for officer survival, post-traumatic stress disorder, and officer involved shootings. He said that the next focus for the department is to involve the family of new officers so they have a better understanding of the difficulties officers face as well as ways to assist them during difficult times. He also suggested that psychological screenings as well as an in-house counselor may be beneficial.

Councilmember Cathey asked about the timing of training for new recruits. Captain Brown said that the family inclusion portion is in the trial phase currently and is for those starting with the City. He said that the other courses are part of the post academy classes.

Vice Mayor Pacheco thanked Captain Brown and staff for their efforts and said that Council will help support this program.

Councilmember Knell suggested that entities such as the hospital, the Natrona County Sheriff's Department, Evansville and Mills could share the cost for mental health services which would help keep the costs affordable.

Councilmember Engebretsen asked if officers would participate in counseling and offered that self-care is an important component of well-being. Captain Brown said that accessibility to counseling is difficult for officers because of their work schedules, but still very important.

Councilmember Gamroth spoke in support of the program and shared his concern that the current usage of the Three Trails counseling services by City staff is lower than expected.

Mayor Freel commended the staff involved in developing this program. He shared that he feels the best solutions will come from staff and that as needs are identified Council will do what they can to make it happen. Captain Brown acknowledged the efforts of veteran officers and indicated that a wall of honor would be a good way to recognize them.

Next, Fire Chief Solberg described the two main ways Fire-EMS staff receive mental health support, through a peer support team and when there is a debriefing for a specific incident. He shared that the Fire-EMS staff have the advantage of being able to debrief after an incident together at the station, whereas police often go back to work, alone after an incident. He indicated that the peer support team is often a gateway for staff to receive further, professional help and that he would like to see the program continue.

Councilmember Pollock asked if the peer support program is well attended or if there are any barriers to attendance. Chief Solberg said there is still a stigma associated with the program, but there probably is more informal discussion occurring.

Tracey Belser, Support Services Director, spoke about the overall usage of the Three Trails counseling program, indicating she felt the usage is low. She said that the health care offering for City employees is through Cigna, and that they have indicated telehealth may remove the stigma of being seen or going to an office for mental health care. She then described a new in-house program led by the human resources and risk management specialists to facilitate discussions and to equip supervisors with tools to help employees who made need additional support.

Councilmember Knell spoke in support of telehealth care rather than having professional counseling on-site because it could be a deterrent if there is a stigma affiliated with mental health care.

Councilmember Pollock asked if there is a limit to free counseling for City employees. Ms. Belser said she believed the care provided by Three Trails is unlimited. She did say that care through the Cigna health benefits does have limits.

Vice Mayor Pacheco spoke in support of continuing to offer the current offerings for City employee mental health care and spoke to the ongoing need to educate employees of these programs.

Ms. Belser added that staff continually educates staff on their options, but that when someone is in crisis, that is where the support is lacking.

Mayor Freel moved on to agenda review. City Manager Napier spoke about the water tank painting project and explained how an out of state bidder may still qualify as the lowest bidder. Councilmember Gamroth thanked him for the clarification.

Councilmember Knell asked if the need for a golf cart at the cemetery could be fulfilled using equipment from the golf course. City Manager Napier explained that the need at the cemetery was for more of a utility vehicle with a dump bed rather than a traditional golf cart.

Mayor Freel adjourned the pre-meeting at 6:09 p.m.

ATTEST:

CITY OF CASPER, WYOMING
A Municipal Corporation

Fleur Tremel
City Clerk

Steven K. Freel
Mayor