

Item 23-1012: Resolution #9-R-23 Mental Health Awareness & Services

Common Council

Wed, Oct 18, 2023 7:00PM

Mayor Jake Woodford 37:40

Next, move on to the item from the Board of Health. This is item 23-1012 resolution 9-R-23 Mental Health Awareness and Services. Have a motion and a second to approve. Open the floor for discussion. Alder Jones.

Aldersperson Vaya Jones (District 10) 38:06

Thank you, Chair. There was a very long discussion about this at the Board of Health meeting. I don't intend to bring that lengthy discussion here tonight. I just wanted to reiterate some of my main points from this discussion and some additional concerns.

Aldersperson Vaya Jones (District 10) 38:21

First, again, I need to thank Alder Wolff for the resolution and bringing awareness to a topic that is so important for many of us. Mental Health Awareness is a very important topic for me personally, and I'm honored to be able to work with those organizations in our community.

Aldersperson Vaya Jones (District 10) 38:36

In the meeting, I advised that we as a Board of Health needed to hear more from those doing the work every day so we can truly understand the work that needs to be done. There are so many organizations doing this good work, not just nonprofit organizations, but healthcare, employers, and even school districts. Supporting this resolution makes me feel like we at the city are puffing our chests out, patting our nonprofits on the head, and saying, "Good job sport."

Aldersperson Vaya Jones (District 10) 39:01

I asked the board to hold this resolution to allow us to bring in members and organizations of the mental health support community to spend 15 minutes per meeting to educate us on who they are, what work they do, and where the gaps are in the community. I want to hear from those doing the work so we can better understand those gaps so we can take this resolution and add real actionable steps that hold us accountable, not just saying "We support it." When I did express my concern on the lack of action, Alder Wolff advises that he has personal plans for moving this resolution forward in support of these issues. However, his plans haven't been shared, and I cannot put my reputation and the reputation of this Council on the line without having more information.

Aldersperson Vaya Jones (District 10) 39:44

Other comments in support of this resolution have mentioned that there isn't any costs associated which is correct. However, I don't feel we should be passing a resolution just because it doesn't have an associated cost.

Aldersperson Vaya Jones (District 10) 39:56

Another comment that we've done resolutions before just show our support and against other issues facing our community. I hear this, and I understand the sentiment behind it, but in my opinion, we're not truly committing to those we say we're supporting. We don't hold ourselves accountable to something. We need to make our words into actions. We are already supporting mental health in the community.

Alderson Vaya Jones (District 10) 40:18

I hate to put him on the spot, but I have some words for Dr. Sepers and on the following items. In my opinion, this resolution would not expand services. In fact, I reviewed an earlier draft of the resolution with Alder Wolff Wolff several weeks ago. The version indicated that the city of Appleton would "begin working with healthcare and other community partners collaboratively". Through some discussion, and by presenting the list of collaborations, I was able to convince him that changing the clause to indicate "continue to work collaboratively." I explained at length that this clause was the only clause I felt comfortable providing any feedback on as the rest of the resolution read as a position statement. I have no opinion on position statements, and this read to me of that type.

Alderson Vaya Jones (District 10) 41:05

Continuing on—through our discussion I had asked if there were specific activities he would like for the department to do that we are not currently doing, keeping in mind the other items listed. He indicated there were no specific activities only that we were working collaboratively as indicated in the resolution. We both agreed that the department was currently fulfilling the spirit of the resolution during our discussion. With that I am confident that this resolution would not change what the department is currently doing. The people of this community deserve us to put actions behind our words, and with that, I ask that you vote against this resolution.

Mayor Jake Woodford 41:45

Alder Hartzheim.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 41:47

Thank you, chair. Alder Jones has said what I've said all along about non-action resolutions in this body. And she said it brilliantly. I watched the Board of Health—the retake, the take two of the Board of Health and heard the author state that this resolution does quote, things that the city has been doing and will continue to do, that it is a reaffirmation of what our health department does and what we want the city to know that what we are doing. Those are all good things, but they don't prove action.

Alderson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 42:27

The things that that came out of the board of health that were of concern to me, in addition to that are the amendments that were offered. And the first amendment stated reaffirmation of the ARPA funds that were dedicated to mental health. But those ARPA funds were also dedicated to some other items besides mental health. So, I'm very concerned about that amendment as well as the change in verbiage about what the clerk would be directed to do should this this amended version of this resolution pass. I don't intend to do anything about those amendments because I intend to vote no in this regard to deny this resolution, not because the sentiment is not a good one, but because of the non-action clauses and for those other concerns. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 43:19

Alder Fenton.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 43:21

Thank you, Your Honor.

Mayor Jake Woodford 43:22

Alder Fenton, Alder, Fenton, if you'd please bring your microphone closer. Thank you.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 43:27

Thank you. Thank you, Your Honor. I had similar concerns about the language in in the first amendment as Alder Hartzheim because I also noticed that what we have the additional \$1 million allocated for is community wellness, mental health, and violence prevention. So, I would actually offer an amendment to the amended version to simply state that "we reaffirm the \$1 million ARPA allocation to community wellness, mental health and violence prevention." And leave out the "and we will divide this money amongst organizations in our community." And my reasoning there is to make, actually to make it factual in terms of what the money had been allocated for and to clarify that the Board of Health or the Council is not sitting here divvying up funds—that this is a grant funded process. So that's the amendment. Did I make that clear?

Mayor Jake Woodford 44:54

Yes.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 44:54

The amendment? Okay. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 44:57

We have a motion to amend. We have a motion and a second to amend. Is there discussion on the amendment? Alder van Zeeland, I know you're previously in the queue. Okay. Any discussion on the amendment? We have motion and a second to amend. Please cast your votes. Thank you, Alder Croatt. Motion passes eight to seven. Item has been amended. Right. We're back to the item as amended. Alder van Zeeland.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 45:43

Thank you, chair. As many of you are aware, I am currently finishing my degree in Health Science and biomedical science, and as a part of that, I am involved with community members who do health care work. And after this topic was brought up on the news, I started to hear from people in the medical area, wondering what this was, thinking maybe they missed a grant opportunity and also just really expressing some concerns. We talked about sending a message, and one of the things I was told was that this felt to them like they were being told they weren't doing enough by someone who was not educated on the things that they were doing. They further said, "Obviously, you can't vote against this, because it's for mental health." And that made me take a step back and really consider what I would be voting on and how people may feel that they must vote in favor of something like this because it's called Mental Health Awareness and services, when in fact, we are not dealing with any awareness beyond the resolution itself and no services beyond what we're already doing. So, I would ask my colleagues to not vote in favor of this because the message I'm receiving from professionals in the area are that this makes them feel less valued. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 47:29

Further discussion? We have motion and a second to—Alder Alfheim.

Alderson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 47:37

Sorry. A second. This is a very delicate topic, and I think it's been going on—I'm not sure when the resolution was initially submitted, but it feels like it's been months, and it's sensitive, because I don't think anyone in this room wants to lessen the imperative nature of our need for mental health. And yet, this piece truly doesn't do anything other than we continue to talk about it, and that in itself could be considered a victory by the author. If the intention is to make us aware that we here in Appleton have an issue with mental health the answer is abundantly clear we do.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 48:29

This resolution I do not believe has value other than the fact that we have discussed it now for a few months and that we need to continue to have the resources and the wonderful partners that we have. There is no action attached to it. There—we're not doing anything. And it's been confirmed by the Director of Health and Human Services that we're already doing everything that we can. So again, very, very respectfully, I say we have a large war to deal with in mental health. Unfortunately, this resolution does not do it. So, I humbly ask that we vote this down while still enjoying the fact that we are making progress in the discussion and our partners in our community continue to move us forward in that direction. And we should be asking the professionals, in my opinion, to be giving advice as to what we should be doing better or different in the city as opposed to Council members who are not professionals in the case. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 49:40

Alder Meltzer.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 49:42

Thank you. I'm not going to repeat my comments from Board of Health, but I do think that this resolution has value. And just to clarify, we just amended this resolution per Alder Fenton's amendment is that correct?

Mayor Jake Woodford 50:00

That's correct.

Aldersperson Vered Meltzer (District 2) 50:01

So, I just—I'm at a loss for words as to any reason why we would vote against this. I think that this is a great statement and I would like to see us all vote in favor of it. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 50:19

Alder Wolff.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 50:20

Thank you, Chair. Bear with me. In the conversation that I had with—my quarterly with the mayor, and in comments here in Council, tonight, people have been asking me about the agenda or the intent of this resolution is. The intent of this resolution is simply in the more to help people in a dark corner somewhere thinking that they have no reason to live. In my past, I've had moments where I've questioned whether or not I should continue to go forward, and in those darkest moments, I've always told myself that I'm going to make the world a better place for someone else in my position. That's always kept me motivated. It's always kept me going. And here on Common Council, although we have a limited scope of what we can do as alderspersons, we still need to push those who can do more to do more, and to learn from them, and to build off of that.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 51:35

This resolution is my attempt to bring a conversation forward, and it's done that. This resolution, hopefully will continue that conversation. Because I intend to continue that conversation, and I will not stop until I've helped more people than what I've already had. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 52:02

Alder Schultz.

Alderman Alex Schultz (District 9) 52:05

Thank you, Chair. I'm not sure how I will vote on this because there are valid points on both sides of the argument for approval or denial. So, I guess I sort of reflect on the state of mental health in our city and nation, and I know that veteran suicides continued to rise, non-veteran suicides continuing to rise, substance abuse is on the rise. There are lots of things that are beyond our control that seem to be accelerating, and one of the action items that further resolve this is to try to identify other gaps that that may, may or may not, be addressed.

Alderman Alex Schultz (District 9) 52:46

And I understand that there's lots of action in the community and many institutions, including the city, working on this problem, but I think I would echo some of my colleagues in asking the question, what's the harm to say we recognize this and we should try maybe a fuzz harder to see if there's something we're missing, continue working and sort of asserting that we as a city value, understand this problem and want to keep our focus on it. And so, I would encourage us to vote for it. I don't necessarily see any harm in voting for it. So please, vote for the resolution.

Mayor Jake Woodford 53:36

Alder Hayden.

Alderman Patrick Hayden (District 7) 53:38

Thank you, Chair. I'm kind of right there with Alder Schultz. There's a lot of really good points being made on both sides, and I thank Alder Fenton for offering an amendment to it to kind of give it a little bit more teeth than it had initially. I thank Alder Wolff for putting this forward. There's a lot of people out there struggling, and since 2020, we've kind of seen those numbers turning up. And I really appreciate the work that people like Chief Olson are doing. The statistics that she been sharing around the work that our embedded mental health professionals are doing are encouraging, and we need to do more to support those efforts because I think there's a lot more work to be done in that area.

Alderman Patrick Hayden (District 7) 54:27

I think—I'm still not sure how I'm gonna vote on this, but I appreciate the intent that's being put forward here. And to anybody out there struggling, I think the entire Council is trying to say, like, regardless of how people vote, that we hear you and we see you and we'd like to help. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 54:51

Alder van Zeeland.

Alderman Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 54:53

Thank you, chair. Nothing is stopping any one of us from helping people in our community with mental health struggles. Just because we're not all putting out a resolution doesn't mean we can't help every single day. I think something that's really important when I take a step back and I look at the debate, what I see is some people saying, "We're speaking for medical professionals and people in this area," and the other is talking about what I want to do. And I just think that the medical professionals that do this work to me are the most important when we're talking about this topic. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 55:40

Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 55:42

Thank you, chair. When the statement is made that nothing—there's no harm in approving this resolution, I have a real problem with the last "be it resolved" clause. There is harm the clerk of our city would have to take a lot of time to send a lot of copies of this particular resolution, and I don't feel that that's negligible. So, if we're thinking about approving this, I think that that last "be it further resolved" needs to be removed, amended to be removed. I will not offer that amendment because I intend to deny this resolution. But I think we should think about that as well. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 56:31

Any further discussion? All right, we have a motion and a second to approve. Please cast your votes. Thank you. Alder Croatt. Motion passes eight to seven. Item has been approved.