

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ALCOHOL, OTHER DRUGS & YOUTH SERVICES

August 1, 2023 at 5:00 PM

Chairman Barry called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Barry, Cavanaugh, Levasseur, Trisciani

Absent: Alderman George-Kelly

Messrs.: Aldermen Long and Kantor, T. Bender, R. Cashin

1. Update on the contract extension with GateHouse.
(Note: The contract extension, utilizing up to \$200,000 in opioid settlement funds, was unanimously approved by the BMA on July 11, 2023, with the exception of Alderman Fajardo who was absent.)

Chairman Barry stated we have GateHouse here and Chief Cashin.

Dr. Ted Bender, CEO of GateHouse, introduced himself and stated I am a clinical psychologist. Thank you for having me.

Chairman Barry stated I spoke with you on the phone last week in reference to this. Can you give us an update on where we stand as far as the contract goes? My understanding is that it has not been signed yet. If there are any holdups, are you guys working it them?

Dr. Bender answered yes. We have some language changes that we're asking for. We also wanted to create this as a new contract. Our understanding is that the first contract was completed. Other than that, I don't think there is too much that would be too difficult to overcome. Just some language changes, especially around things like compensation because there will not be any further compensation. We want some of that language changed. I sent a red-line draft to Chief Cashin today and he is taking a look at it with Emily I believe.

Alderman Cavanaugh asked so you guys are still negotiating now.

Dr. Bender replied yes.

Alderman Cavanaugh asked you are in the middle of negotiations with this.

Ryan Cashin, Fire Chief, responded currently what we have is the draft that Dr. Bender sent over today of a contract. I have not fully read it or compared it to the amendment that the Board of Mayor and Aldermen voted on at the last meeting. That amendment was for the current contract. I would not consider that contract done. I believe it was for

a year. We are going to look at the new contract and confer with Solicitor Rice and we'll go from there.

Alderman Cavanaugh stated my point is I don't know why we're here if they are still negotiating. Why would we get in the middle of that if there are active negotiations going on?

Chairman Barry stated the way it was proposed to the aldermen, my understanding is that the contract was already all set. That we're all set. That's why we voted for \$200,000 towards a new contract. But the new contract, we now know, was never signed. As far as your opinion that GateHouse still owes us a year, my understanding is when we first did it, it was we wanted to get 60 people off the street. What they did, and again this is my understanding, what GateHouse did and agreed to is that they thought it would take about a year to get 60 people off the street but it took them a lot less time than a year, which we commend them for doing. We appreciate that. Alderman Long and I have been on this from day one, and as far as a year goes, and I did speak with Dr. Bender in reference to it. I appreciate the fact that they are going to stay on and not charge any more money. They are just going to do it because they want to help the City of Manchester but to continue on with the year...they are going to keep tracking the 60 people that they have gotten into treatment, detox, etc., and follow them so they can report back to us so we know exactly what these people are doing. That's my understanding as far as the year; it wasn't that we could keep using and abusing them until the year is over no matter what we want to do with GateHouse. That's my understanding.

Chief Cashin stated GateHouse did an amazing job. They are an amazing company. The Fire Department has a long history with them. If it wasn't for them, Safe Station would have crumbled probably two years earlier. I was a lieutenant on the floor at that time, and making the calls for Safe Station. If it wasn't for GateHouse, we wouldn't have had people to call and it would have ended sooner. We worked with them a long time. I respect and appreciate everything that they do; they've done a phenomenal job getting people off the streets. I can't thank them enough. I can assure you that nobody wants to see people get into detox more than I do. I believe these are things that we can work out one way or the other. That's what you do with contracts. Sometimes there are disagreements on contracts. My understanding of it is the 60 people was based on the amount of money that the City appropriated for detox beds. We appropriated \$205,000 to Sunrise Detox, which we estimated to be about 60 people. That language was put in with the idea that if had the city not put more money into more detox beds, I don't think GateHouse should have been out doing what they're doing. I would agree with that one hundred percent. Whereas the City is willing to continue funding detox beds for Sunrise, I guess it is more of a legal question which I'm definitely not qualified to answer. I think we'll figure it out. We got the contract today. We'll figure it out because it is important to have GateHouse here.

Chairman Barry stated without GateHouse, we wouldn't have 60 people off the street. We're not getting it done without them. We have used non-profits and it's not getting done, Ryan. It's unfortunate because we have a lot of non-profits out there that have outreach workers, but to do what GateHouse did in the timeframe that they did it in to get 60 people into detox, whether it be a New Hampshire group or sending it over to

Sunrise in Massachusetts, I don't really care. Even with our shelters, I don't want to have a shelter just to have a shelter as a temporary fix. I want to have a shelter so the people that are working within our shelters, the outreach people, and the other people that we are paying for, can start working and working hard. I was hoping that Adrienne would be here tonight because I wanted to talk about what is going on over at 39 Beech Street from July 1 through August 1, and to see how many people they have gotten into treatment or that they've found housing for or they have put into detox or treatment. We want to know those numbers. Adrienne is a big data person. It is important that she reports to us. I honestly thought she was going to be here. We did say we were going to talk about GateHouse but she is part of GateHouse; she is part of this.

Chief Cashin stated yes, she is part of it. The contract is signed by me and is through the Manchester Fire Department.

Chairman Barry stated if the only issue is language, we have all worked on a lot of contracts. I have done it as a representative of management as well as employees, and most of the time the hang-up is benefits and pay. Now, there are some hang-ups sometimes with language. That is something that should be able to be worked out. If GateHouse isn't comfortable with the language as written, then let's work on it to get it done so we can get GateHouse back. They're doing the outreach for free, which is awesome that they've volunteered to do that and if we can get them to do that and we have to change some language on the city part, let's do it. We need to get this done. We need to move forward. It would be shameful if we don't. If there is language in there that we don't want to change because we're just going to keep our foot down to the ground and say we're not going to budge on this...

Alderman Cavanaugh interjected I agree with a lot of what you said. I thought GateHouse had originally four outreach workers.

Dr. Bender stated that was in the original contract, yes.

Alderman Cavanaugh stated now it is two.

Dr. Bender responded we had two working the streets.

Alderman Cavanaugh stated us talking here is a mistake. It weakens the position of the city. We should let these negotiations go on and work in partnership, but I don't think using and abusing anyone is the correct terminology.

Alderman Levasseur asked are we talking about the contract that was in place or are we talking about a new contract.

Dr. Bender answered we are talking about negotiating a new contract.

Alderman Levasseur stated so the old contract is finished.

Dr. Bender replied that is our understanding.

Alderman Levasseur stated I sat here for a long time when we did this. It was \$300,000 for 60 people. There was no time-limit. The time-limit was get it done quickly. You get 60, the contract is up. That is what we were told. Whether there was different language in there, I don't believe we were privy to the actual contract. I would like to be privy to this contract when it is done so I can read it and we can understand it better so we don't have to come back here and fight about a contract and the terms, and everyone can agree with what is going on, and this Board knows what the contract says. From what I'm hearing about what is going on with the contract now, I have an opinion but I'm not going to give it because that is for you guys to decide. So if you want to enter into contracts hopefully you have good lawyers and you know what you are writing, and the city has good lawyers and they know what they want. That should end that whole matter.

Alderman Trisciani stated I am going to ask Solicitor Rice a question on this. This contract is similar to any other city contracts; it is between the department and the agency that we are working with, correct? I am, quite frankly, not sure why we're having this conversation right now. I think we should leave it up to Chief Cashin and GateHouse as the agency and the department head to negotiate the contract and move on from there. It sounds like there are some minor language changes and similar to anything else, I think we'd leave it in your hands. If there are any other challenges that come up, you know where to find us.

Chief Cashin stated I have every intention of keeping GateHouse working for the city.

Chairman Barry asked is everything with the Sunrise contract settled.

Chief Cashin answered Sunrise has an amendment to their initial contract that has been sent over to them. I believe I got an email today saying they are okay with it.

Chairman Barry stated but they haven't signed anything.

Chief Cashin stated we sent it over to them and they just got back to us. We sent it over on July 17. They got back to us today. I think that contract amendment is ready to sign.

Chairman Barry stated just to clarify with Dr. Bender, and you actually weren't here when the old contract was in place and I know we've heard from a few people about the \$95,000 and the fact that we were supposed to have four people from GateHouse working but we have had two and sometimes more than two people working on it. One thing people leave out is the fact that there is a lot of overtime they did not get paid for. Those two people worked 80 hours a week. They were just compensated for 40 hours. We don't want to cry over two people or four people; we got the job done.

Dr. Bender stated correct.

Chief Cashin stated I agree with that.

Alderman Long stated I call this aggressive outreach. Calling around the country, I don't see anybody doing any aggressive outreach. I think that is one of the arrows that we need in addressing the homelessness situation in the City of Manchester. My concern

as far as the new contract and the old contract is that it is up to people over my head. My urgency is getting this going again because the sooner we hit the streets and start pulling people out, if only ten percent stick to getting better, that is ten percent we don't have to worry about. Let's go after the next 60 and keep moving that way. To me, there is an urgency for getting this started and that starts with a signed contract however that can happen. It seems to me that it is not a high barrier that we're looking at. It is language. It is not compensation. I want to thank GateHouse for not looking for compensation for their administration. That is a favor they are doing for the City of Manchester and I certainly appreciate that. Getting this signed so they can hit the streets and start pulling again is my immediate emergency.

Dr. Bender stated I don't think there is anything insurmountable. I think Chief Cashin and I work well together and we can come to terms.

Chairman Barry stated that is good to hear.

Alderman Kantor stated I have the contract in front of me. It says no more than 60 eligible persons for the original contract. No more sounds like no more than sixty. That's why I was really confused when we met four weeks ago about GateHouse working for free, which is messed up. I don't understand that, especially since you're a profitable business, correct? I know that Amanda and Shane have gone above and beyond. You have taken four positions and made it into two positions and they have surpassed the 60, and now you want them to work for free. I definitely know that she will not work for free because I spoke to her husband. Her husband said she will not work under these circumstances for free and she will not work with Ms. Beloin's unprofessional behavior. I want you to know that as well, because this is really messed up.

Dr. Bender stated I spoke with Amanda yesterday. She has decided to focus on other projects for GateHouse and will be removing herself from this project.

Alderman Kantor stated they are superstars. I still don't understand how you can work for free.

Dr. Bender stated we are still paying them a salary. Shane actually was responsible for two-thirds of those 60. If we are extending for a year with another 60 potential patients, I am incredibly confident that we will get that done much faster than one year with Shane heading up that project. Additionally, I will be hiring a half-time Care Coordinator to ensure that our data and care coordination is absolutely top notch. When we're going through audits and finding out where people are and how many people are off the streets at X point in time, it is going to be impeccable data. I am a data scientist by trade. These kinds of things are incredibly important to me, but I know I need some help with that and I have the perfect person in line to kind of pick up the slack on that piece. I think things will go even smoother as we move forward.

Alderman Kantor asked and you are going to work for free.

Dr. Bender stated again, I am a clinical psychologist by trade. I got into the business to be a therapist.

Alderman Kantor stated it just seems fishy.

Dr. Bender stated there's nothing nefarious about it.

Chairman Barry stated I spoke with Dr. Bender last week on the phone. Chief Cashin urged me to call him. One thing that really caught my attention is the fact that you said GateHouse was not looking for compensation from the city. Obviously, you will still pay your people and work. What really caught my attention and impressed me about you and GateHouse is the fact that you care about the City of Manchester and you want it to get into a better position and a better place.

Dr. Bender stated I know none of you know who I am. I most recently moved here from California. I've been in the addiction treatment industry for nearly twenty years. I have worked all over the country. I generally tend to go where I feel that I'm most needed. This area has a tremendous need and has tremendous potential to improve from the opioid epidemic. I have had tremendous success at all the companies that I have worked for, and I have worked at non-profits and for-profits. There is a lot that GateHouse can do for the City of Manchester, not just now but in the future. I am thinking two to three years down the line on how we can improve things for the City of Manchester. One of the main reasons I want to continue this and keep it going is to develop a good relationship with the City of Manchester, with the intention of potentially offering more services here in the future. Ma'am, to your point, like I've said I have lived my entire career to help and serve others. So, to insinuate that I would be doing anything in a nefarious manner is a little bit insulting but I want to ensure you that it is not the case. I am a therapist at heart. I got in this and spent nearly sixteen years in school to help people. I have dedicated my life and my career to helping people who are suffering from the disease of addiction. I assure you there is nothing fishy about any of this.

Alderman Kantor stated I appreciate what you had to say. I respect that. I come from a family of addiction. I respect that. No matter who you are working with, a contract is a contract. To disregard your employees when you come in half way is confusing to me as a business owner.

Dr. Bender stated I am not sure I understand. Could you clarify what you mean by that?

Alderman Kantor stated I am talking about Amanda being on the front lines. Did you let go of someone else that had to do with this project as well?

Dr. Bender answered no we didn't let go of Amanda. She just decided to focus on other areas.

Alderman Kantor stated no, I'm not talking about Amanda. I'm talking about the other woman that represented GateHouse.

Dr. Bender stated previously, Donna. Yes, we did.

Chairman Barry stated we can get past that. Dr. Bender, just a quick question. One of our goals is that we want to do whatever we can to get people not just off the street and

into a shelter, we want to get them into treatment. We were fortunate enough to meet one of the gentlemen that has been one of Shane's clients and he spoke highly of Shane and Amanda. He is the perfect example of the success story that we're looking for. Here is a guy that a couple of weeks ago was ninety-six days sober, now he is over one hundred, hopefully. God bless him, if he is still healthy and he continues. I know one of the things that he told us that he really enjoys is the fact that he goes out with Shane and walks the streets with him, and talks to the same people that were in the position that he was in over one hundred days ago.

Dr. Bender stated it is a really incredible story.

Chairman Barry stated it really is. Please, I hope you guys stay and work. We have a great relationship. We have a great Fire Chief here. If we can work together and continue the relationship that we hopefully will have in the future, I think we're going to do what we want to do which is get people off the street and into treatment.

Chief Cashin stated I think we are going to get there. I have no doubt.

*There being no further business, on motion of **Alderman Cavanaugh**, duly seconded by **Alderman Levasseur**, it was voted to adjourn.*

A True Record. Attest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Normand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

City Clerk