

Program

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In the beginning, Eugene paid for roughly 80% of the program's cost, said Laurel Lisovskis, a long-time CAHOOTS van worker who still has that job in Springfield.

Historically, many funding sources pitched in. Contributors have included local insurance providers PacificSource and Trillium, and federal and local sources such as Medicaid, U.S. Congress, United Way and Eugene Buffalo Bills fans.

Eugene's reimbursement rate

According to a town hall presentation from Alese "Dandy" Colehour, a former CAHOOTS van worker and a Portland State University master of social work student studying CAHOOTS, Eugene's funding for the program remained steady while costs increased. At the end of their relationship, the city was reimbursing White Bird for just 40% of CAHOOTS' cost in Eugene.

Colehour contrasted this with Springfield, which has been paying a 100% reimbursement rate since agreeing to the current contract that reduced Springfield's coverage from 24 to 12 hours per day.

"If the City of Eugene could match the reimbursement rate in the Springfield contract, CAHOOTS could continue to operate 24/7 in Eugene. Currently, the CAHOOTS reimbursement rate only covers 40% of the program's operating costs," Colehour said in the report.

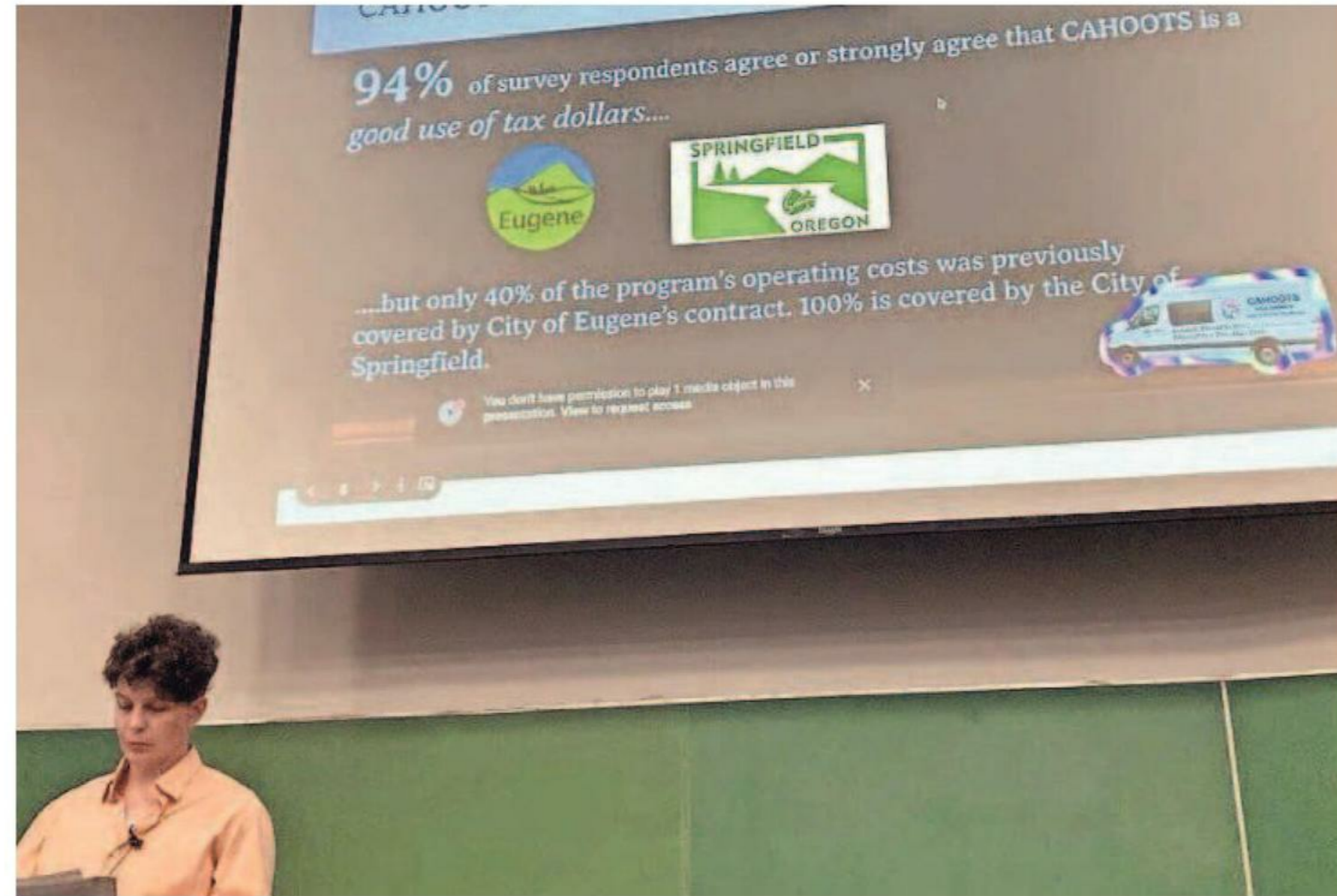
Eugene-Springfield Fire Chief Mike Caven, who was involved in negotiating the city's contract with White Bird, said the clinic never asked for more funding.

"(White Bird) chose not to raise their rate or increase their cost for delivering service. That was not a mandate from the fire department," Caven said. "I can't speak to why they didn't propose a rate to fully fund those 36 hours."

Thirty-six hours refers to the number of service hours CAHOOTS offered per day in Eugene: totaling the hours of the two vans.

By contrast, Springfield, which has 12-hours of CAHOOTS service from one van, has paid for the entirety of its CAHOOTS service since June 2024. Before then Lane County also paid a share. Springfield City Council unanimously renewed its contract for another year June 16.

"In light of CAHOOTS staffing constraints, the city worked with White Bird Clinic to focus services during the hours of



Portland State University researcher Alese "Dandy" Colehour tells attendees at a CAHOOTS town hall earlier this year that the city of Eugene was reimbursing White Bird Clinic for just 40% of the cost of running CAHOOTS.

ALAN TORRES/THE REGISTER-GUARD

greatest need," Springfield spokesperson Elyse Ditzel said. "To ensure the continuity and reliability of this critical service, the City fully funds the contracted hours for CAHOOTS support in Springfield. Each year, (Springfield) and White Bird Clinic review the scope of services and associated costs to ensure the partnership continues."

Eugene-Springfield Fire and Willamette Valley Crisis Care, a nonprofit founded by former CAHOOTS workers, both estimated restoring a 36-hour CAHOOTS service would cost \$2.2 million annually.

Springfield's new 12-

hour contract costs \$559,491 for the 2025-26 year. Eugene's prior contract with White Bird was for \$986,486.

The Community Safety Payroll Tax

Proponents of restoring a CAHOOTS-like service have pointed to the Community Safety Payroll Tax paid by those who work in Eugene as way to restore service.

CAHOOTS' supporters have argued one of the selling points of this tax, passed by City Council in 2019, was funding for the alternative response model.

"I think a lot of us feel that that's exactly what

the City did with the Community Safety Initiative," laid-off CAHOOTS worker Michelle Perin said at the April CAHOOTS Town Hall when asked if she would support a new tax to fund CAHOOTS.

"We worked really heavily with (the city)," she said. "They talked a lot about how important we were to the community's safety. ... We're already paying that tax. And I'd rather see the city divert that to what they said it was going to."

The Eugene budget committee did direct the city manager to explore that option. But one challenge is the language of the ordinance that creat-

ed the tax. CAHOOTS supporters have pointed to section "D," which mentions CAHOOTS as one of the ways Eugene has responded to public safety needs. But section "J" which says how the tax will be spent, does not mention CAHOOTS. Instead, it outlines approximately:

- 65% for police services.
- 15% for municipal court and prosecution services.
- 10% for fire and emergency medical services.
- 10% for homelessness prevention and services.

In the 2023-25 budget, CAHOOTS was included as a police service and received \$250,000 from the payroll tax. The tax raised a total of \$62.4 million in that biennium.

Most of the CAHOOTS contract (\$1.8 million in the 2023-25 biennium) has been paid through local property tax from the General Fund.

In 2021, City Council rejected the idea of shifting payroll tax revenue away from the police department, saying the city needs the officers the tax funds.

CAHOOTS act

In 2020, as communities around the country looked for examples of police alternatives after

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Impact

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Moore said about 10 years ago, a friend was grappling with the death of someone close to her who died in a car crash. The death caused "her to spiral emotionally and then mentally" and she climbed on a porch roof two stories off the ground.

Moore and her sister tried to calm her friend down from inside the house, but she was describing an alternate reality.

"My sister and I both felt out of our depth,"

Moore said. "I felt afraid, but I was trying to remain calm for my friend. I felt like I didn't know how to talk her down, support her, make sure she didn't harm herself."

They called CAHOOTS.

"It was really relieving," Moore said. "They immediately were really calm, really knew how to relate to her in that state, and in a way that I didn't have the experience doing, were able to talk her down."

Moore said that was the last time CAHOOTS workers had to arrive in-person for this friend, but workers established a relationship with her and encouraged future calls.

Moore and her friends called a few more times for consultation, and her friend has now recovered and is studying for her master's degree.

Working alongside CAHOOTS

Stacy Bierma Welch worked in the White Bird Front Rooms for eight years. Every day, Eugene residents, primarily those experiencing homelessness, accessed services, including personal storage, a changing station, hygiene products, food, water, snacks and information and referrals. The service closed in December.

As a Front Rooms em-

ployee and a warming shelter volunteer, Bierma Welch often interacted with CAHOOTS. Sometimes it was because she called them on behalf of a client; other times CAHOOTS workers brought people there. The experience was "always super positive," she said.

"They're just so calm and professional at walking people through stuff and making sure they're getting what they need. It's a huge loss," she said. "They were just so good at building relationships and trust and I feel like people on the street just got the carpet pulled out from underneath them."

Bierma Welch said she

saw CAHOOTS help people who had "fallen through all the rest of the cracks," whether they needed medical or mental health attention.

Since the Front Rooms program closed, Bierma Welch and her colleagues have stood up their own nonprofit, RAVEN (Radical Assistance for Vulnerable Eugene Neighbors), to provide the services they used to provide in the Front Rooms.

She shared a recent story of a client who "wasn't tracking" and was standing in place in the street and wouldn't move. Historically, Bierma Welch or someone else with RAVEN would've called CAHOOTS, but it was before 2 p.m. on a Monday and they weren't aware Lane County mobile crisis service had recently expanded to cover those hours.

"I don't want to throw the county under the bus," Bierma Welch said. "The city, White Bird, could have done better with the transition. ... They left a void. ... They left this big gap in service during the transition."

Lane County mobile crisis service currently operates 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. on weekdays and 2 p.m. to 11 p.m. on weekends and is looking to expand hours. For most of its existence it operated 2 p.m. to 11 p.m. CAHOOTS operated 24/7 before its contract ended.

CAHOOTS improves safety, saves costs, researchers say

Jonathan Davis, a University of Oregon researcher, is one of five economists who jointly studied CAHOOTS. They published their findings in May. Davis said it was coincidence the timing lined up with the end of the Eugene CAHOOTS contract.

Davis said the team aimed to provide an analysis of "What happens when a city partners with CAHOOTS?" by comparing the before-

and-after of five times CAHOOTS expanded service hours in Eugene and Springfield between 2014 and 2021.

They found:
● CAHOOTS responded to about 8% of emergency 911 calls.

● On about 60% of those calls, CAHOOTS responded alongside police, and 40% of the time they responded to a call instead of police. CAHOOTS rarely took on a 911 call that wouldn't have been responded to without CAHOOTS.

● When CAHOOTS became available at a time or hour it wasn't before, the probability a call resulted in an arrest fell by 76%. This was primarily driven by the reduction in mental health holds, which CAHOOTS workers don't make.

"Economists are skeptical people," Davis said, so when his team saw the arrest data, their follow-up question was whether these people should have been arrested. They measured this by seeing if 911 was called again for the same address, finding a CAHOOTS response was less likely to result in a repeat call than a police one.

"When CAHOOTS is sent, we actually find that [for] the next few weeks, it delays the time until the next call," Davis said. "So if anything, it's improving public safety, not negatively affecting it, even though it's cutting arrest by so much."

Davis also concluded CAHOOTS saves the city money. The researchers found CAHOOTS is less expensive than a police response. He acknowledged this was based on only the city's share of the CAHOOTS contract, which another researcher said was 40% of the services' cost, but even if the city took on 100% of the services' cost, this would still be true.

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