

LEWISTON CITY COUNCIL

WORKSHOP AGENDA

Tuesday, February 22, 2022

City Council Chambers

6:00 p.m. Workshop

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

WORK SESSION

Presentation by the Lewiston Auburn Transitional Resource Center representatives on a proposal for the establishment of a Homeless Shelter and Resource Center



February 22, 2022

To Members of the Lewiston City Council and City Administrators

The following memo summarizes the work and capital funding request of the proposed Lewiston Auburn Transitional Resource Center.

**History:**

In April 2020 the Lewiston Wellness Shelter was set up at the Lewiston Armory in response to the Covid 19 pandemic. This temporary 60 bed homeless shelter provided 24-hour low barrier services to the Lewiston Auburn community, including meals and laundry services, case management, mental health and substance use services, medical intervention, housing, employment, and educational resources, and more, all in-house. This was a first of its kind program for our community, utilizing a collaborative community-based problem solving approach.

In July 2020 the temporary program transitioned to the Ramada Hotel where resources and in-house services were increased and more firmly established. Data compiled through the State of Maine's Homeless Management Information Service (HMIS) supports the success of these program in connecting people with permanent sustainable housing via in-house wrap around services. (<https://mainehmis.org/about>)

Prior to and as a result of the pandemic, evictions and the poor housing stock in Lewiston Auburn have caused homelessness to continued to rise. Throughout the last 21 months it has become increasingly evident that the Lewiston Auburn community needs a permanent 24-hour low barrier shelter and resource center to assist unhoused and underhoused folks in accessing stable and supportive housing resources.

**Current Shelter System:**

Lewiston currently has four homeless shelters for adults, none of which provide 24-hour services. Each of these current programs sends guests out before 8am every day and does not allow them to return until dinnertime, leaving them outdoors all day during prime business hours despite extreme cold or heat. The current shelter system in our community also fails to provide connections to resources or services needed to break the cycles of homelessness. Providing a bed at night only, does nothing to actually address homelessness.

**Future:**

The proposed Lewiston Auburn Transitional Resource Center is modeled after other successful programs and designed to meet the needs of Lewiston Auburn's unhoused/underhoused residents as well as the service providers they need access to, the business community, and the greater community as a whole.

The LATR Center will be centrally located in an appropriately zoned area of downtown Lewiston, a short walk from Kennedy Park but away from Lisbon St and the downtown business district. The property is adjacent to small businesses that are supportive of the presence of this

program, and a single track of multi-unit apartment buildings that now house several of our former guests. The proposed property has sat vacant and dilapidated for nearly a decade and is a blight on our community in its current state. The LATR Center will transition this building into a state-of-the-art resource center that our community will be proud of, visually appealing and functionally effective.

The supportive network of community providers and resources will be accessible in-house to shelter guests as well as the greater community who may need supportive networks. This creates the opportunity for unhoused folks to be indoors during daytime hours which will draw them away from the business district, the library, and other downtown locations they currently congregate, while connecting them with much needed resources in a “one-stop-shop” model.

Shelter guests will work with staff on establishing a service plan during intake which will identify their individualized goals and accountability progress towards those goals will be monitored. Discharge will result when a guest either chooses to disengage from the service plan or has established stable housing with a supportive network to ensure sustainability.

Locally, this service model has a success rate of reducing homelessness by placing unhoused folks into permanent housing with a 42% placement rate from the Armory program and 57% placement rate from the Ramada program. Twenty-two months later, all but one of the folks who were assisted in obtaining housing through the armory or Ramada programs have remained housed and engaged in community-based services. The inconsistency and uncertainty of the temporary programs, with fluctuating end dates and funding restrictions, limited program staff and service providers effectiveness, but these success rates will no doubt continue to rise within the capacity of a permanent program.

### **Program Development:**

The Lewiston Auburn Transitional Resource Center team is made up of local lifelong Lewiston residents who grew up in this community and take pride in the work being done to improve our great city. It is important to acknowledge that we are not an outside agency or group looking for a money grab or to make a name here in Lewiston but that those types of agencies are eying Lewiston to set up shop for their corporate run homeless businesses. It is important to make that distinction. We are hardworking Lewiston professionals who live here, work here, and are raising our families here and are dedicated to the cause of improving conditions for our community’s most vulnerable residents. We saw a need and stepped up to figure out a plan to address that need. We have no plans for or desire to create a counter-culture community like what has occurred in Portland and other larger cities.

In 2008 leadership from the cities of Lewiston and Auburn came together to create the Lewiston-Auburn Homelessness Needs Assessment Report which resulted in the official document, 10-Year Plan to Eliminate Homelessness in Lewiston and Auburn which was voted on and adopted by both Lewiston and Auburn City Councils.

([https://www.auburnmaine.gov/CMSCContent/CDBG/10\\_Year\\_Plan\\_2009.pdf](https://www.auburnmaine.gov/CMSCContent/CDBG/10_Year_Plan_2009.pdf)) Fourteen years later Lewiston Auburn has the same services in place that were available then and we are no closer to the goal of eliminating homelessness, rather the problem is rapidly growing. Homelessness cannot be ignored away. We must try something different!

One of the biggest hurdles to addressing homelessness in our community has always been funding. Money is short, local tax-payers are taxed to their limit, state and federal funds for homeless services have been lacking for decades. We are in a pivotal time period right now. One of the silver linings of the pandemic is that homelessness is finally being recognized as the public health crisis that it is.

Lewiston and Auburn are receiving a combined 1.7 million dollars in HOME-ARPA funds to be divided between the two cities. These funds are designated specifically to address housing instability and homelessness. These limited use funds can be used for four eligible activities only:

- Production or preservation of affordable housing,
- Tenant-based rental assistance,
- Supportive services, homeless prevention services, and housing counseling,
- The purchase and development of non-congregate shelters

Our program falls into two of the eligible use categories.

Additionally, the State of Maine has received 15.6 million in non-entitlement supplemental ARPA allocations specifically targeting the creation of low barrier shelter programs throughout the state. As the second largest city in Maine in the 5<sup>th</sup> largest county, with one of the most significant transient populations, it is incomprehensible that we do not have a single 24-hour low barrier shelter option to serve these folks, and our resources are siloed. As such, the LATR team has advocated for top priority to target Androscoggin County with a portion of these funds.

All of this to say, the time to address homelessness in our community is NOW. This caliber of funding has never been so readily available and likely will never be available again. There is no denying this public health issue needs addressing and there is also no denying that the tax-paying residents and businesses of Lewiston Auburn cannot afford to fund this work locally. To pass on this once in a lifetime opportunity to finally implement the programming needed to effectively address homelessness in our cities without bearing the brunt of the expense locally, would be wasteful to say the least. It is no longer acceptable or excusable to allow this issue to remain insufficiently addressed.

Our ask of the city council and city administrators is to approve our request for \$350,000 of Lewiston's allocation of the 1.7 million HOME-ARPA funds to be used to complete the purchase and remodel of the proposed property and future home of the Lewiston Auburn Transitional Resource Center.

The remaining capital costs will be obtained through requests to the City of Auburn and Maine Housing Authority. Ongoing operational costs will be funded through private support, grants, and Maine Housing Authority ESHAP Funds. This will not become a local tax-payer burden to ensure sustainability.

Sincerely,  
The LATR Center Team

Megan Parks, Kevin Boilard, Tonya Sands, Kimber Sands, Jamie Caouette

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### **How will the LATR Center prevent an increase in unhoused folks from other communities coming to Lewiston?**

Lewiston is a service center city with many resources not available in other neighboring communities. Because of this, people seeking services, housed or unhoused, relocate to Lewiston for access to these services. This has always been true and will continue to be true, with or without the LATR Center.

Throughout the period the temporary programs were operating in Lewiston, program leadership utilized collaborative relationships with local agencies, service providers, and hospitals to prioritize placement for established Lewiston Auburn residents. Requests and referrals from outside Lewiston Auburn were referred to their local general assistance office and connected to resources and shelter options in their home community. The Help and Hope program was utilized to provide bus tickets to relocate people who had come to Lewiston back to their home communities.

The completion of the HMIS intake is required with all individuals accessing the program at intake. This system documents each client's last permanent residence by zip code. This allows for program staff to connect guests to resources in their home community and assist them in returning to their home community whenever possible.

LATR Center intends to continue these practices to ensure the needs of the Lewiston Auburn community are prioritized. Additionally, the LATR Center intends to market their program as a resource for the Lewiston Auburn community, deterring referrals from outside our area. The LATR Center team understands that in order to have a positive impact on our community we need to focus our efforts in our immediate neighborhoods.

### **How will the LATR Center keep the immediate area safe from increased crime?**

LATR Center staff will be fully trained professionals with experience in de-escalation, crisis resolution, and behavior management; skilled in working with folks who may have untreated mental illness or substance use issues. The program will be staffed 24 hours a day and will operate with an overnight curfew, as did the temporary programs. This will ensure shelter guests are indoors during overnight hours. This practice resulted in a greatly reduced need for police response at the Ramada program, and no reports of increased crime in the area as a result. Peer support staff will be available to support guests through difficult situations. An established partnership with Lewiston PD will be utilized when necessary.

### **What does low-barrier mean?**

Low barrier shelters do not place restrictions on or require any of the following for a client to stay at the shelter:

- Religious affiliation or participation in religious activities

## Frequently Asked Questions:

- Traditional sexual/gender identity
- Criminal background checks
- Being ambulatory
- Credit checks or income verification
- Withholding income earned
- Not accommodating work schedules
- Untreated mental illness and/or substance use
- Medication compliance
- Sobriety
- Valid identification

Low barrier shelters may, however, enforce safety requirements for self, staff, place, and others. Low barrier shelters serve the purpose of sheltering and engaging individuals who are often excluded from temporary/overnight shelters because of sobriety, identification, time limit, or other requirements. These barriers are often implemented with good intentions based on safety and service provision, but other ways of maintaining safety and engagement can be utilized. Evidence based practices utilized will include: Housing First practices, Low Barrier Shelter Coordinated Entry Systems, progressive engagement, client centered motivational interviewing, and other strength based practices.

### **Will substance use be permitted? Needle exchange? Safe injections? (all encompassing line of questions)**

LATR Center will be a low-barrier program that supports harm reduction, but will not allow the use or possession of substances on property. Guests will be permitted to access the facility and resources under the influence so long as they can maintain safe behaviors. All staff will be trained in the use of Narcan and Narcan will be readily available on site. LATR Center will not provide needle exchange services or safe injection space, but will facilitate connections to these services elsewhere when needed.

### **How will the LATR Center be funded? Will Lewiston shoulder the financial burden for the region?**

The LATR Center will utilize Maine Housing ESHAP funds, private donations, and grant funds for ongoing operational costs. Leadership will include a full-time grant writer skilled in non-profit grant writing. Services and resources will be provided via partnerships with community-based agencies, allowing LATR Center to maintain a small staffing model and reduced operational costs. Partnerships with local small businesses will continue which keeps laundry, food, and other operational costs lower.

## Success Stories

Jim is an elderly man who found himself homeless in Lewiston Auburn after his wife, a travelling nurse, passed away. Originally from the south, him and his wife relocated to Maine in the 1990s and made their retirement home here in downtown Lewiston. Having never had children, when his wife passed away he found himself alone and unable to care for himself, eventually losing his apartment and becoming homeless. For several years he stayed with friends and acquaintances but never was able to secure consistent connection to resources and services to break out of homelessness. "Friends" frequently took advantage of him and his social security money made him an easy target. Jim entered the Lewiston Wellness Shelter program at the Armory in April 2020. While Jim was enrolled in the program, he began meeting with his case manager weekly, addressing untreated medical needs, and was set up with a rep payee to help manage his funds. With consistent engagement Jim and his case manager were able to make good progress on his goals and in September 2020 he moved into a new apartment in Auburn. He had his own space for the first time in nearly a decade and was finally safe. Jim is now 75 years old and remains in his apartment, doing well and going strong, and is still engaging with his case manager and other service providers weekly.

Amanda is a 26 year old young lady who has lived homeless with her parents in Lewiston Auburn since she was a pre-teen, mostly couch surfing but often sleeping outdoors. When she was in high school her mother passed away unexpectedly, and she moved in with her aunt in the Livermore area briefly. That was her longest period of stability, as she returned to her father's custody not long after and was back on the streets of L/A. Amanda enrolled in the temporary program at the Ramada in November 2020. At that time she began actively working with a case manager to obtain copies of her birth certificate and ID so she could access resources that require these docs. Under the stability of a consistent place to sleep she was able to enroll in Lewiston Adult Ed and began taking classes to complete her high school diploma with a goal of one day going to college and becoming a chef. She was connected with MaineCare and was able to get untreated medical needs addressed and get an eye exam and new glasses, which helped her complete her schoolwork. She glowed with pride the day she shared with staff that she had completed her first term of classes and was passing them all. She was ultimately able to obtain a housing voucher through Lewiston Housing Authority and began searching for an apartment. In September 2021 Amanda transitioned out of the temporary program as it closed and returned to live with her aunt temporarily while still hunting for an apartment. In October she moved into her first apartment ever in Lewiston! She is still engaging in services with her case manager and other service providers and is making good progress on completing her education.

David is an elderly man who lived on and operated his families tree farm in the greater L/A area his entire life. Following an accident that left him partially immobile, he lost everything and found himself homeless on Lewiston's streets. He survived on the streets, getting around with a walker, for several years. In November 2020 he was connected with the temporary program staff through Trinity Jubilee Center after one of their staff members found him sitting on the sidewalk on a freezing night, injured, unable to move or get up, with one of his feet bleeding and exposed

## Success Stories

to the cold. Through the temporary program at the Ramada he was provided access to medical care, and once recovered he began working with case management and other providers. He was able to obtain valid identification and his social security, attend medical appointments, get a new walker, and quickly made progress from there. In June 2021 he moved into his own apartment in a supported living 55+ apartment complex in Biddeford and is now thriving! He has maintained his connection with all service providers, is attending medical appointments, and is healthier than ever. Due to his extensive health issues, he very likely would have died on the streets had intervention not happened.

Melissa is a young woman who aged out of the foster care system and became homeless shortly before enrolling in the temporary program at the armory in April 2020. Left without a family or any supports. Not long after enrolling in the program she learned she was also pregnant. Young, scared, alone and pregnant, she was easily overwhelmed. Shelter staff quickly connected her with resources including case management and began assisting her in obtaining needed documents, health insurance and prenatal care. She worked hard and by the time the program ended she had obtained a housing voucher and was seeking an apartment for her and her yet to be born baby. In September 2020 her case manager got her into a program for teen parents in Dexter and enrolled in parenting classes to prepare for the birth of her son. She was still there when the baby was born in January 2021. Finding a place locally was difficult so she has since relocated to her place in Ellsworth, is still engaged in services, and her and her baby who is now 1 year old are doing great! She works for the local YMCA and is raising her son in a safe environment. Anyone familiar with children who age out of the foster care system without supports knows how hard it is for these young adults to find stability, and the fact that she has done it while making good choices for her baby and maintaining custody of him makes this even more worth acknowledging.