

Mayoral Ad Hoc Shelter Committee

Minutes of April 27, 2022

Members: Craig Saddlemire, Amy Smith, Elizabeth Keene, Melissa Hue, Klara Tammany, Scott Harriman, Dave Bilodeau, Chris Bicknell, Fowsia Musse, Elise Johansen, Rilwan Osman, Dave St. Pierre, and Dave Hediger

Staff: Dottie Perham-Whittier

Guests: Kimber Sands, Megan Parks, and Tim Gallant

The meeting began with Craig reviewing the meeting's agenda and asking members with research updates to share what they have. He and Amy will also be working together to effectively organize all the info.

MINUTES: A motion was made by Dave Bilodeau; seconded by Amy Smith, to accept the 4/13/22 minutes as presented; unanimous vote.

Rilwan presented a chart that he's been working on regarding the history of shelters in Lewiston and what their current status is. Items #1 and #3 on the task listing dovetail.

It was noted that the Jubilee Center has a day shelter, and the Nutrition Center should be noted for food provisions. Rilwan said he was trying to focus on shelters. Elise said we need to decide what meets the definition of homeless. Elizabeth said if there is actual history, that would be interesting. Craig said we can do a deep dive on history but most importantly, it's what is available now.

Amy inquired whether any shelters have closed. Klara noted that 100 Pine Street had been a day shelter that closed. Dave B. said he felt the two emergency shelters should also be included. Years that shelters started would also be good to have, as well as regulations. Klara also said St. Catherine's should be included.

Elise said we need to know what the barriers are such as photo ID, background checks, required religious participation, etc. It was noted that #6 on the task listing mentions gaps which can be a barrier.

Craig said that all research should be sent to Amy, as she is maintaining the info folder.

Amy has started working on the number of unhoused individuals. She initially started with the former 10-year plan and has tried to plug in new data & looked at sources mentioned. We need to decide what we want gathered for data. She should have a draft at the next meeting.

Elise's #3 and #4 tasks included the 10-year plan and the Housing Committee. She said some work has been done; however, some *"bigger rocks could have been moved forward."* Elizabeth

said 200 affordable housing units had been included, and 168 of them have been opened. An overflow plan was mentioned, but that has not developed. Elise said individual organizations have such plans, but not the city. Elise said we need public messaging, public awareness, and education, and there has not been a concerted effort in that regard.

Chris B. referenced the Hub work that Jessica Chow will be doing and said the Statewide Homeless Council provides training for employees and looks to best practices.

Dave B. said on May 12th at 9 a.m., he, members of the CRO team, and Jessica Crow are visiting homeless encampments. They will visit the “*roughest*” ones, as well as the ones that are a little bit better set up. Dave St. Pierre said he recently visited an encampment on Libby Avenue, and trash is a concern. Dave St. has spoken to homeless individuals about taking out what they bring in. Craig said it’s important that people adhere to responsibility levels. It’s important to also show what an area looks like after an encampment has been abandoned. Dave B. agreed.

Chris B. talked about the coordinated entry system, which has been worked on for 7 years. It is regulated by HUD through Maine Housing, although it’s an unfunded mandate. Individuals are identified as homeless and then are assessed as to vulnerability and how each person aligns with resources. Folks of highest risk (mental health, chronically homeless, etc.) are considered first and then prioritization of choice. Individuals, per zip code, can go to places where they are from or where they want to be. The new Hub resource will hopefully push this effort over the finish line. The process is a collaborative approach/continuum care with Maine Housing as the final authority. Some shelters here don’t take HUD money.

Melissa gave an overview of the Learning Collaborative in Portland. Pre-COVID it was a place for homeless individuals to go for health care, food, clothing, dental & medical services, and case management. They also could access the Rest Center to do laundry, take naps, utilize storage space, and meet with local organizations. It was an effective coordinated community. It’s important for organizations to bring resources to the people who need them. Pre-COVID, people were enrolling in health care.

During COVID, a lot changed with individuals staying in hotels without trained staff to handle escalation, resulting in more calls to police and fire.

Melissa spoke to catered care, whereby individually a person’s needs are addressed. It’s important to understand the “*why*” of a person being homeless, such as trauma. A homeless person needs life skills, life supports. Often when homeless individuals are housed, they are entering a world where they don’t know how to get groceries or pay rent on time. They are isolated and often experience anxiety and depression. Challenges can be lack of transportation, work hours amidst methadone treatments, & need for proof of residence.

Melissa said things collapsed with COVID, but it is clear that a resource center with wrap-around services is imperative. Housing and life skills management are needed.

Dave B. said what Melissa described in Portland sounds very similar to the local resource center plan. He said if there is a place to interact with people, the difference is huge. He added that currently re: Maine Care, if people miss their face-to-face interactions, they can't continue to work with them; with a resource center, a person can walk back in.

Elise is not pleased with the billable hours/fee for service model and stated that 15-minute appointments do not effectively serve a person. Chris B. referenced Maine Care Section 13. He described how it comes down to about 1/8 of those who are eligible re: bill reimbursement.

Chris B. mentioned *Rachel* Jackson Hodsdon at Creative Energy LLC who is very knowledgeable about billing.

Melissa said she has asked for the Learning Collaborative's budget figures. She also mentioned Housing First and said that Logan Place and Florence House are not for families. Elise said there are a lot of unhoused couples.

Dave B. said that the local proposed resource center will no longer be asking the city for money which will alleviate the concern about payback in 10 years. There is a new building that is being looked at. The local effort now plans opening a transitional center minus the beds – for now; it will "*show intent.*"

Chris B. said it will give some "*hope,*" as there won't be the worry of paying back money in 10 years.

It was pointed out that there have been projects that failed or didn't live up to what was planned and HUD did not try to recapture funds; however, Federal funds can be recaptured if there is a significant misuse of funds. The City is being very cautious. A previous, local CDBG extreme misuse of funds was an "*egregious event,*" with an individual getting jail time.

Elise echoed that a project could end due to the problem being solved; however, HUD doesn't want funds used for something other than the purpose or selling for a profit.

Dave B. said that the local effort moving forward without request for city funds alleviates 80% - 90% of the City Council's concerns. It would be called The Resource Center, done in "*good faith*" and would give hope for housing.

Craig said that an overnight shelter is still needed and that The Resource Center will provide an analysis of the need. Dave B. said it will give us more information as to who is coming for assistance.

Klara talked about the outreach she's done with various cities as to what they are doing with shelters, to include licensing. She was particularly impressed with Waterville, and she had a lengthy conversation with a Katie Spencer White. Their transition from a high-barrier shelter to a low-barrier shelter was very positive, and police and fire were "*thrilled,*" as at one check, there were no homeless on the street! Elise said she'd also added info on Farmington to the info file.

Chris B. mentioned Daniella Cameron at Preble Street and Maine Housing for data.

Elise also mentioned Noelle Coyne who is the Safe Voices Director of Shelter & Housing Services who is excellent.

Dave B. said he would like to have the person from Waterville come make a presentation to the group; he would like her invited to the next meeting.

Klara is going to visit Waterville and welcomed anyone going with her.

As to comments from Council members, Scott said that he has heard from Councilor Stephanie Gelinis who said it's very important that we have wrap-around services. A meal and a warm bed are very good, but so much more is needed.

Having a workshop with the City Council was discussed, whereby they would know ahead of time that members of the Shelter Committee would be there for hopefully 30 minutes to receive comments from them so that their specific questions can be addressed. May 17th was mentioned as a date to do this.

Amy mentioned the Planning Board and can be a conduit for their questions.

Craig noted that terms are done/formatted.

Dave H. said that there is a need for the city to address the definition of lodging due to differences at the State. They no longer license boarding or lodging houses. It is tied to duration of stay.

Amy said the Planning Board wants to know what a low-barrier is. Amy is working on a glossary. Elise said it needs to be clear as to "*shelter under code.*"

Klara is working on an interview sheet. Compensation was discussed, perhaps with gift cards or via Venmo. Safe Voices, for instance, could provide \$100 towards those interviewed. Their lived experiences are valued. System work at \$15 per hour and a speaker fee were also mentioned. Klara is doing a couple one-on-ones at The Nutrition Center.

Fowsia talked about working with high school girls who have done interviews with homeless individuals using equipment from John T. Gorman. She talked about humanizing the matter of why individuals are homeless, whether mental health, bi-polar, schizophrenia.

Umbrellas are currently needed, as folks were spotted earlier outside and soaked.

Elise said it's important that people who are trained and serving individuals be paid better. She talked about making pay increases for her staff – no one making less than \$37,000 - \$38,000 and hopes it can be \$40,000 - \$45,000. She hopes this will occur across the state. Chris B. agreed and has increased pay; people need a living wage. Melissa said comps are needed, and Elise said we need to pay "*above the comps.*"

Dave B., who received a call during the meeting, said it was a local hospital who will be releasing 2 homeless individuals in wheelchairs today and need a place for them or they will be on the street tonight.

Craig said that today's meeting has been inspiring and appreciated all the research that people have done; report-outs will continue at the next meeting. Scott will check on the availability of a workshop.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Megan said it's important that what a low barrier "*is not*" is understood. A lot of people think there are "*no rules, no supervision, and things run amuck.*" Fowsia said she's been asked if they are "*shooting up drugs.*"

Melissa said examples of different formats of low-barrier shelters could be helpful. She said that Portland is going to have a non-rotating 40-bed shelter.

Tim Gallant said he works with veterans and trained in drug/alcohol addiction, as well as on the Planning Board; he offered himself as a resource. He also talked about his church, Pathway Vineyard, giving out lunches, to include 66 lunches to homeless people on a recent Friday. His church has also brought food to encampments.

Adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

Respectively summarized,

Dottie Perham-Whittier

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Community Relations Coordinator