



**Fidelity Committee
of the
Tri-City Joint Mayors' Task Force on Homelessness
Remote Meeting Via Microsoft Teams
November 19, 2020
6:00 PM**

MAYORS

Mayor Caroline McCarley
Mayor Robert Carrier
Mayor Dana Hilliard

Rochester Members

Jeremy Hutchinson
(Chairman)

Barbara Holstein

Dover Members

Charles Reynolds

Betsey Andrews Parker

Somersworth Members

Todd Marsh
(Vice Chairman)

Dina Gagnon

Others Present: Crystal Paradis, Somersworth Council. Dave Carpenter, Dover Planning. Lindsey Williams, Dover Council. Tory Jennison, IDN. Scott Schuler. Ashley Desrochers, Public Health Network. Dave Abbott, Knight of Columbus. Mike Joyal, Dover City Manager.

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Chairman Hutchinson called the meeting to order at 6:06 PM and read the following preamble:

Good Evening, as Chairperson of the Fidelity Committee, I am declaring that an emergency exists and I am invoking the provisions of RSA 91-A:2, III (b). Federal, state, and local officials have determined that gatherings of 10 or more people pose a substantial risk to our community in its continuing efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19. In concurring with their determination, I also find that this meeting is imperative to the continued operation of City government and services, which are vital to public safety and confidence during this emergency. As such, this meeting will be conducted without a quorum of this body physically present in the same location.

At this time, I also welcome members of the public accessing this meeting remotely. Even though this meeting is being conducted in a unique manner under unusual circumstances, the usual rules of conduct and decorum apply. Any person found to be disrupting this meeting will be asked to cease the disruption. Should the disruptive behavior continue thereafter, that person will be removed from this meeting.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by Roll Call vote.

Let's start the meeting by taking a Roll Call attendance. When each member states their name also please state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-to-Know law.

Cassie Givara, Deputy City Clerk of Rochester, took the roll. All members were present except for Dina Gagnon, who was absent. Additionally, Mayor Carrier and Mayor McCarley were present.

2. Public Input (3-minute maximum and/or submit a statement)

Scott Schuler, Public Health Network, spoke about the great increase in COVID cases in Strafford County over the course of the past two weeks, which has tripled over the previous reporting period. They lauded the Governor's mask mandate, but speculated that more targeted mitigation will be required to reduce the spread as the temperatures get colder. They also spoke about the potential vaccine and the challenges of distributing the vaccine amongst vulnerable populations such as the homeless, which are a "Tier II" population to receive vaccines after first responders, assisted living facilities, and long term care facilities.

Betsey Andrews Parker asked which tier childcare workers fell into within the vaccination schedule. She emphasized the importance of childcare workers in keeping the workforce actively employed; affecting the ability for people to go back to work and children to go back to school. Ms. Andrews Parker reported that one of the largest populations requesting assistance were single female heads of household who are greatly affected by the absence of childcare. She suggested that childcare workers and similar professions be considered first tier. Scott Schuler gave a brief overview of the tiers and how vaccines will need to be rationed during the beginning stages. They stated there is an ethical committee that reviews these decisions, and they could advocate for childcare workers, but also cautioned against the way society has been proceeding with life as usual and allowing the virus to spread and increase.

Crystal Paradis, Somersworth Council, asked Scott Schuler if their purview included contact tracing and if there would be an increase thereof. Scott Schuler stated that the contact tracing had reached a point in NH where it was completely overwhelmed to the point of being ineffective. They said that the contact tracing has continued in those populations under the age of 18, over the age of 65, and in congregate settings such as schools and care facilities.

Ashley Desrochers, Goodwin Community Health and Public Health Network, stated that just as the healthcare system can become overwhelmed, the public health infrastructure can also

become overwhelmed which is happening currently. Ms. Desrochers echoed the support of making childcare workers a higher tier to receive the vaccine when it becomes available.

3. Communications from the Mayors

Mayor McCarley reported to the committee that the Rochester Council had received an update on the recovery friendly workplace program from the director of recreation and arena and that Rochester would be moving forward with the program in other departments.

Mayor Carrier stated the City Managers of Dover, Somersworth and Rochester are working together on a \$1 million grant to be used for an emergency cold weather shelter. Mayor Carrier said that the details and recipient would likely be announced within the next week or so. Mayor McCarley stated that the approach is to make this a low barrier emergency cold weather shelter.

4. Communications from the Chairs

Vice Chair Marsh spoke about the opening of the wing in the Garrison Hotel for use as a shelter. He stated that the Monday following the opening, the welfare department had been much busier and they were seeing new individuals with whom they were not familiar. Vice Chair Marsh gave a brief overview of the numbers seen at the Rochester welfare department and the demographics seen as well as the reasons said individuals were in Rochester for services.

Chairman Hutchinson spoke briefly about the dedication of the veteran's park in Somersworth and pledge made by the Tri-City Mayors towards ending veteran homelessness. He stated that by signing this pledge and starting the initiative, the Tri cities would be partnering with multiple other communities throughout NH with the goal to end homelessness in NH's veterans.

Mayor McCarley said that the mayors of all 13 of NH's cities had addressed a letter to Governor Sununu requesting an attack on homeless and an update on a 2006 plan on homelessness. The Governor had responded favorably with several ideas moving forward including reinvigorating a past commission on homelessness with some new members. Mayor McCarley suggested if any of the members or contributors of the Fidelity Committee would like to participate, they get in contact with her for further details.

5. Update on Seasonal Shelter/Warming Center

Betsey Andrews Parker reported that the 20 rooms available at the Garrison Hotel are currently full. CAP is providing the meals during the week and there is a sign up to provide meals on the weekends. She stated that they are working together with a coalition in Dover to provide Thanksgiving meals as well. Ms. Andrews Parker said that prior to the opening of the Garrison, there had been a list of people actively waiting for shelter. She said that approximately 1/3 of those coming into the shelter on Monday were on this list and were not actively seeking shelter for the long term; many of them just want to warm up, bathe, eat, and go back out. She clarified that the focus of the Garrison Hotel shelter is on life and safety, not a long term stay and gave some details on the operations, the clientele being assisted, and how everything has been working thus far. Ms.

Andrews Parker said that the program has been able to identify more appropriate long-term shelter options for certain individuals upon intake; such as 18-year olds and mothers with babies.

Ms. Andrews Parker directed those interested in helping to the sign up genius to provide meals for those at the Garrison Hotel. The “to go” contains will be provided. She gave suggestions on types of foods which can provided. She also spoke briefly about the concerns with the growing amount of COVID as well as hepatitis. She stated that they are working with Goodwin to work on testing and the medical needs of individuals.

There was a discussion on donations of personal hygiene supplies due to the shower program run by welfare not being utilized. Susan Gaston, Dover Welfare, acknowledged that the program had not been utilized during the summer but stated that over the past couple months they have started seeing homeless residents weekly. Ms. Andrews Parker said that the Garrison is in need of personal hygiene products, feminine hygiene products as well as condoms.

Ashley Desrochers, Public Health Network, said that they may be able to assist with some of the personal hygiene and family planning items due to their community health improvement assessment identifying the need for decreasing spread of STDs as a public health priority.

Tory Jennison, IDN, reported that they have a team with Connections for Health who are ready to open emergency cold weather shelters. It is much like how the shelters have run in the past, but more self-contained due to COVID. There was budgeting directed towards paid staffing due to the lack of volunteers caused by the pandemic. Ms. Jennison said they are currently budgeted for 60 nights being able to staff overnight emergency warming centers. She stated that they would be working with municipalities to open these warming centers, likely starting after December 1st when the infrastructure would be in place.

6. Mayors’ Challenge to End veteran homelessness

It was determined that this item had been adequately discussed earlier in the agenda.

7. Continued Review of Master Plan

7.1 Recovery Friendly Workplace recommendation for Tri-City Councils

Chairman Hutchinson said he felt that this item had been successful. It has been initiated in Rochester at the Recreation and Arena department, and as stated by Mayor McCarley, it is moving forward in other departments in the future. Chairman Hutchinson said it has been moving forward with no resistance and it appears that both Dover and Somersworth have similar experiences and plans in place to introduce this initiative.

Chairman Hutchinson directed the committee toward the Master Plan document in order to identify another task on which to focus. He referred to strategy 3 “Increase Homelessness prevention, rapid rehousing, and supportive housing programs” and speculated that evictions may increase in the near future. He asked Vice Chair Marsh if there had been any increase in requests for assistance in the Rochester welfare department and suggested elevating action item #1 in

strategy 3 (“Prevent evictions by expanding short term rental assistance for person(s) on a fixed income”). Vice Chair Marsh said although they have been experiencing an increase in requests for assistance recently, it has still not reached pre-COVID levels. He stated this is the same throughout the state. He said that initially in the spring, they anticipated a great increase which did not materialize. Vice Chair Marsh acknowledged that they have dealt with clients who have not paid rent/mortgage since spring or have not been able to pay utilities. Ms. Andrews Parkers said that in Strafford County, there have been 1,477 applications have been sent to clients; 950 were received back by CAP. She said that \$1.2 million have been paid out to 390 households since July, averaging \$3,154 per household. She clarified that the huge majority of these applicants are working. The program could only pay for COVID-related expenses, which include loss of income/employment due to remote or homeschooling.

Ms. Andrews Parker expressed concern about the CDC’s moratorium on evictions ending January 1st and those service industry individuals who do not necessarily meet the income thresholds to qualify for assistance. A small \$25,000 donation for rental assistance has come in to be used for these individuals after January 1st, but they are looking for other sources of funding which will be greatly needed. Ms. Andrews Parker speculated that there could be a trickle-down effect which could affect local budgets and revenues. With the CARES acts fund not being able to be carried over, there may also be large gaps in the state budget particularly in health and human services. Ms. Andrews Parker cautioned that this strategy involved more long term data and is a much bigger issue than can be handled easily by the committee. She suggested that the region should focus on doing the winter sheltering well and long term strategizing.

Chairman Hutchinson asked for consensus on whether the committee should simply continue on with their current work during COVID or if they should identify another strategy on which to work. Ms. Andrews Parker expressed that many of those contributors to the committee are already spread thin and overtaxed and could not take on any additional work during this time. Vice Chair Marsh said that if there were a strategy which could be handled in the same way as the recovery friendly workplace; where it could be proposed and sent to councils as opposed to requiring a great deal of effort from members who cannot expend that effort currently, that may be a strategy for the committee to take.

Barbara Holstein agreed with Ms. Andrews Parker that the focus should be on winter sheltering. She spoke about the Dover Council’s recent support of the Dover Mental Health Alliance and suggested that something similar could be done in other communities. Ms. Holstein acknowledged that mental health is often an underlying cause of homelessness. She also referenced Home for All’s landlord incentive programs as well as law enforcement assisted diversion happening in some communities. Ms. Holstein stated that the committee can look at these works already being done and determine what the needs are, then use the platform to bring proposals to the councils and bring more attention to these needs.

Chairman Hutchinson emphasized that although the shelter was the focus of the original Task Force, it had been taken up by the mayors and the committee took a back seat role. Many of the members of the Fidelity Committee are involved, but those other members and contributors may want to feel like that have contributed more directly in the Master Plan as opposed to showing up just to receive updates monthly.

Ms. Jennison reflected on the committee being a learning collaborative, a collective of experts informing each other's work and progress. For those wanting to contribute or look to get involved, she suggested taking another look at cities being more friendly to housing insecurity initiatives in the same way they embrace being business friendly; how governance models become more open to issues surrounding housing insecurity. She referenced the disconnect in Rochester between how it was thought the opening of a seasonal shelter would go and how it actually transpired and ultimately didn't happen; with a disconnect in communication, in code enforcement, timelines and expectations. Ms. Jennison suggested those in the group with ties in the municipalities take a look at ways to have internal governance discussions on ways to become more friendly towards housing insecurity issues.

Vice Chair Marsh suggested reviewing the Master Plan and the potential of sending more broad tasks from within the strategies, involving changes in zoning or planning, to the cities for review. These could be submitted as a recommendation from the committee and could be sent concurrently to all three cities.

Chairman Hutchinson suggested that he would be looking at Strategy 3, Item #6 "Promote Criminal Record Clearing Clinic." He stated that between the cities' attorneys and other lawyers offering pro bono services, they may be able to develop a plan. There will be an update on the agenda for the December Fidelity meeting.

8. Other

No discussion.

9. Closing Public Input

Dave Abbott, Knights of Columbus, asked about the possibility of 38 Hanson Street in Rochester being purchased for use as a permanent shelter. He expressed frustration at the lack of a location for a permanent shelter. Chairman Hutchinson addressed Mr. Abbott and gave him a brief update on the progress that the committee has made. He acknowledged that 38 Hanson Street would be used this winter as a warming center as needed.

Mike Joyal, Dover City Manager, addressed Mr. Abbott and reported that there are a number of things that the Tri-City mayors, staff and councils are working on currently including the earlier

mentioned grant program to fund a shelter. He gave a brief overview of the work being done to fill the gaps until a permanent shelter is in place.

Crystal Paradis inquired about the Master Plan and where it can be sourced. City Manager Joyal shared the link for the Master Plan on the Dover website. Councilor Paradis referenced the attorney general's office breaking up homeless tent encampments in Manchester and the possibility of something similar happening closer to the seacoast. She suggested a general resolution including language reinforcing housing being a right. Chairman Hutchinson suggested working together to form a joint resolution between the tri-cities.

10. Adjournment

The next Fidelity Committee meeting will be Thursday, December 10 at 6:00 PM via Microsoft Teams. Chairman Hutchinson requested an update on statistics from the welfare departments, CAP and IDN for the next meeting. There will be an update on the ending veteran's homelessness proposal, Strategy 6 item #3, as well as updates on the joint resolution discussed between the three cities.

Chairman Hutchinson **ADJOURNED** the meeting at 7:44 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cassie Givara
Deputy City Clerk, Rochester