

Tri-City Mayor's Joint Task Force on Homelessness
McConnell Center, Room 305, Dover, NH
May 10, 2018
6:33pm

MAYORS

Rick Michaud Mayor McCarley (excused)
Mayor Hilliard
Mayor Weston

DOVER MEMBERS

Betsey Andrews Parker
Dave Carpenter
Marcia Gasses (vice-chair)
Andrew Howard (not present)
Lena Nichols
Alternate: Lindsey Williams
Phyllis Woods

ROCHESTER MEMBERS

Elizabeth Atwood
Rev. Eliza Buchakjian- Tweedy
Jeremy Hutchinson (chair)
T.J. Jean (not present)

SOMERSWORTH MEMBERS

Dina Gagnon
Laura Hogan
Todd Marsh
Rick Michaud (not present)

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Chair Hutchinson called the meeting to order at 6:33pm. Attendance was recorded via sign in (documented above).

2. Minutes of April 12, 2018 Task Force meeting.

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

A member of the Dover community noted her enthusiasm that this work was getting underway and noted that she was looking forward to presenting a gift to the Mayors later in the meeting.

Martha Stone of Crossroads House noted that she came to listen. She noted that she appreciated everyone coming together and asked that the work not be done in a vacuum as there is a huge need to work together. Communities need to think about how to respond together. She noted that Crossroads is in Portsmouth, but 40% of their clients are from Strafford County.

A discussion of the next meeting location ensued and the Chair noted that Somersworth will host next, their Mayor offered.

At the Chair's request, Elizabeth Atwood provided an overview of the role that language plays in discussions and in treatment. She discussed a piece from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) that is available at <https://www.samhsa.gov/> on the topic on the use of the term "addict" versus "substance use disorder." She noted that the biggest take away from the SAMHSA guide is the use of "a person with/a person suffering from substance abuse disorder." She underscored the groups overall goal to use compassionate language such as a homeless individual or a member of the homeless community.

4. Data Review

At the Chair's request, Betsey Andrews Parker began a discussion of data that she had shared by email in response to the request at the previous meeting. She noted that housing, poverty, etc. is a multi-layered issue. There is only a 1% housing vacancy. This is a tri-city effort, but it is also very fluid north and south of us. There are challenges transitioning out of shelter. Average rent levels eat up a lot of funds. Significant number of renters who are overburdened (over 30% of income). She discussed hourly wage rates needed to be able to afford housing. Eviction statistics are key too, as it is very hard to get people back into housing if they have an eviction or an overdue bill.

Some discussion followed regarding the timing of the data and whether more recent numbers were available. Additional discussion on the challenges with housing vouchers since vacancy rates are so low a voucher doesn't actually get you an apartment and you might lose the voucher if you don't find a place in time.

Lena Nichols noted that statewide the waiting list for a voucher is 7 years, in Dover it's about 2 years. She noted that in Dover, the apartments are so expensive that you can't find an apartment for the amounts in the voucher.

Others noted that there are people in local shelters that have vouchers that they can't use because they can't find housing. Extensions are possible, but with little inventory it doesn't address the issue.

Laura Hogan noted that many people filling our shelters have vouchers, have jobs, etc. It's a race to find housing or lose the voucher. The length of stay numbers are creeping up.

Betsey Andrews Parker noted that they offer a lot of things to subsidize and split the costs. The goal is to help people stay in their housing. CAP has security deposit assistance, other resources. They want to try to prevent eviction.

Todd Marsh noted that local welfare is a source of rental assistance and that they'd much rather see people come up with only one month delinquency.

Betsey Andrews Parker noted that she also sent out a communities assessment report. It comes from the American Community Survey (US Census) data. It has charts and graphs. The biggest things that are impacting our areas are housing, substance use disorder, elderly. She encouraged people to look through the report carefully. Things like rent costs, home heating costs, commuting costs, lack of buses, percent of kids on free and reduced lunch. We have low unemployment, but those jobs are not as robust as they used to be. Challenges making ends meet, with low wages, childcare costs, etc.

The Chair asked if there was more recent data on evictions.

Dover Alternate Lindsey Williams noted that some data is available through the recently launched "Eviction Lab" run by Matthew Desmond which is studying national trends in eviction. Eviction Lab Data on Stafford County Eviction Rates is available here -

<https://evictionlab.org/map/#/2016?geography=counties&bounds=-101.247,12.73,-57.661,62.49&locations=33017,-71.028,43.327>.

Betsey Andrews Parker suggested reading the book "Evicted" also by Matthew Desmond.

Marcia Gasses noted that while college degrees are important, we also need to also underscore that there are trades jobs and there are apprenticeships and that college is not the only path to success.

Laura Hogan noted that they are seeing everything Betsey Andrews Parker noted earlier in their work at Lydia's House. There are multifaceted issues. 100% of their residents are generational homeless families. There are a lot of things that they never got exposed to, in order to learn – financial planning, training, etc. She screens at least eight calls a day for people who need temporary housing, etc. She noted that an improved communication system to link some of the help and support systems would be valuable. It is important to do this all together, work on breaking the cycle of homelessness and eviction. Others are under the radar and not even in our data.

Todd Marsh noted that there are community care team meetings with have 50+ organizations sitting around the table talking, sharing information, to try to make progress.

Lena Nichols noted that we need something that captures all the services. We can't waste money on doing things that others are doing. Something that captures what the assets are, what they can do. I know money comes and money goes too, so we ask around. If we could come up with something, that helps us triage decisions, help us not duplicate resources and try to get info out.

Elizabeth Atwood noted that CAP has some work on this, NHhomeless.org has some steps towards this, more in the works.

Betsy Andrews Parker noted that CAP has 16,000 unduplicated individuals in their tracking database. Important to think about ways to divvy up efforts.

Seeing no further data to be presented the Chair moved to the next item.

5. Scope of Agencies Review

The Chair noted the action item for all agencies to submit a scope of agencies report.

Betsey Andrews Parker inquired about the request letter that was discussed at the last meeting. Chair Hutchinson will confer with T.J. Jean on the status. The Chair asked that for anyone on the Task Force and anyone present representing an agency or organization that supports homeless individuals, please send around a 1-2 page summary.

6. Sub-Task Groups to be Assigned

The Chair raised the need for members to volunteer for two subcommittees. A discussion on the terminology around the cold weather committee ensued with the conclusion that the subcommittee should explore the terminology as part of their discussions.

With input from the Mayors, the group also agreed that non-Task Force members could sit on the subcommittees, but ultimately the Task Force members are the ones who vote and they need to bring something back from the work of the committees and the Task Force to take to the three City Councils. Experts can also be brought in for individual meetings or to seek other expertise.

- a. Cold Weather Shelter/Station:** Todd Marsh, Marcia Gasses, Elizabeth Atwood, Bob O'Connell – homeless outreach coordinator at CAP (contact available from Betsy), Cheryl and John Huckins (Straight Street Outreach).

b. Foundation of the Tri-City Task Force Master Plan on Homelessness: Dave Carpenter, Betsy Andrews Parker, Laura Hogan, Eliza Tweedy, Todd Marsh, FX Brutom (My Friends Place), Benjamin Springer (Core Partnerships), Elizabeth Atwood (observer capacity).

The Chair noted that he'll need a point person for each committee, please reach out. Please keep the Chair informed on each as well.

7. Lessons Learned

At the request of the Chair, Tory Jennison provided an overview of the response to the winter 2018/2019 extreme cold weather event (slides provided). In late December 2017, started getting calls as the weather turned. How cold is too cold? We don't know. There is not a clear standard across the country. Many saw that it would be below 0 for extended period and efforts to open a space to prevent loss of life began. There were 9 people when they opened the doors and the first night had about 20 people. The operation went on for over two weeks and cost \$50k (not funded with City money), the effort was staffed with volunteers. They staffed in 4 hour shifts, these were all volunteers that hadn't done this before so we didn't have long shifts. CAP facilitated donations. As you talk about who is forming the plan, you need to think about who it is that is going to execute the plan, many supporting agencies that need to be part of this. We met the immediate mission – no one dies, but this is not a sustainable model. Cleaning challenges, security and safety challenges, EMT/police. Police and mobile health team checked in on us. Approximately 90% of people had substance abuse disorder, mental health issues. How do you occupy people, keep busy over this length of time? How do you set community rules? Examples of good things underway – region 5 integrated delivery network, cultural competence building, housing efforts, municipal emergency management planning, media. Thinking about what triggers an emergency declaration. There is a set of people who are always at the table. Power of being able to see all services in one room and screen individuals to align with services. We need to talk about what we're not doing well as a service provider community. Discussion of 211 challenges, policy change to allow them to talk to whoever calls. Sometimes we need to get out of our own way. With the talent and expertise in this room, we can effect change in the system to make ourselves more helpful.

8. Complete Calendar for the Joint Tri-City Task Force on Homelessness

The Chair sought input in time and date for next meeting. Consensus for June 7, Marcia will step in as co-chair because the Chair will be away. Location is Somersworth, exact location will be provided later. July 12 will be in Rochester, August date will be determined at a future meeting. Consensus to move to 6pm as well. Discussion on notetaking/agenda development – tentative commitment that the host City will provide a note-taker. Mayors need to converse.

9. New Business

10. Appointments: Member of the Homeless community to serve/advise

The Chair initiate a discussion of adding another member to the task force to provide voice to the homeless community. The Mayors noted that the process would be the Task Force recommending members and the Mayor's would make the final appointment. There was consensus with the idea but also acknowledgment that there are differing views and perspectives among those how are homeless. It was noted that it is important to give at least one member of that community a voice and a vote on the Task Force. It was also recognized that serving on the committee might be a burden to someone already stretched dealing with homelessness. It was also noted that if named, the Task Force needs to ensure that the new members have a way to get to the meetings. Betsey Andrews Parker (CAP) volunteered to

ensure that any named member had transportation support to attend. It was noted that someone who was recently homeless might also be able to serve to provide input. Several suggestions were briefly discussed followed by consensus that each community would put forward names to their Mayor for a possible nomination of 1-3 new members. Task Force members from each community should send recommendations to their Mayor by May 24, Mayors will deliberate and name prior to June meeting.

11. Other

A framed poem was given to each Mayor to display in their community (“If you hear my voice”).

The Chair sought feedback on the public comment. Consensus was to have two public comment periods one at the beginning and one at the end. The Chair also reserved the right to provide opportunities during the meeting as well if needed.

12. Adjournment