

Western MA Regional Shelter/Housing Group Meeting Minutes - 6/23/20

In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Jim Ayres, Community Foundation of Western MA, Jacob Chacon, Springfield Youth Action Board, Senator Jo Comerford, Steven Connor, Veterans Services, Rep. Mindy Domb, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, Pat Duffy, Rep. Aaron Vega's Office, Wayne Feiden, City of Northampton, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Rep. Farley-Bouvier's office, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Vanessa Ford, Senator Jim Welch's Office, Senator Adam Hinds, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Caitlyn Letourneau, Senator John Velis' office, Jay Levy, Eliot Services, Rep. Paul Mark, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield/Hampden CoC, Bill Miller, FOH-CSO, Brooke Murphy, Three County CoC, Keith Rhone, FOH-CSO, Tim Rivers, Franklin County YAB, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Jay Sacchetti, ServiceNet, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, David Ziomek, Town of Amherst, Alicia Zoeller, City of Holyoke

Shelter Reports:

Friends of the Homeless, Springfield (Bill Miller): capacity has always been an issue, prior to COVID-19. Currently at regular capacity at 133 and able to socially distance; in the winter months, that number can go up by 50 and additional space will be necessary to keep guests and staff safe. Application pending to DHCD for ESG funds. Stressed need for equitable funding relative to the rest of the state. Western MA is 13% of the state's population, also 13% of state's homeless population; shelter funding is at 6-7%. We need to make sure Western MA gets its equitable share of ESG funds and other shelter funding.

ServiceNet, Northampton, Greenfield, Pittsfield (Jay Sacchetti): Seeing increases in homelessness every winter, the last being the biggest yet; COVID-19 adds to an already growing problem. Expanded emergency shelter at Northampton High School closed end of May, returned to Grove Street and kept seasonal cot shelter open so a total of 25 people. In Greenfield, opened 2nd floor of Wells St shelter so able to maintain social distance for 20. In Pittsfield, St. Joe's High School has been used but discussing closing date and moving back to Barton's. Very concerned about coming winter and capacity to meet need in face of social distancing requirements.

Annual numbers served at shelters: Pittsfield: 275-300; Greenfield - approx. 130; Northampton - over 200. Right now, Northampton has a waitlist of 39 (19 calls in last 2 weeks); Greenfield has a waitlist of 20.

Craig's Doors, Amherst (Kevin Noon): Seasonal Shelter closed 5/3. Now operating a resource center in collaboration with Amherst Survival Center delivering meals. Roughly 8-10 people visit each day. Still get calls seeking shelter. Has applied for ESG funding to use motel rooms for shelter, awaiting word. If awarded funds, would still hope First Baptist Church would allow socially distanced shelter space for 10 people in order to maintain their previous capacity.

Louison House, Adams (Kathy Keeser) - Transitional housing but operating now as a shelter in view of demand. Also using a building in North Adams for overflow needs - never had so much

emergency demand, just this month 21 people coming in seeking shelter. The reality is that most people in Northern Berkshires do not go to Pittsfield for services - transportation cost and other factors are real barriers

Eliot CHS-Homeless Services (Jay Levy): noted a growing street population right now, particularly with increased discharges into homelessness from institutions - hospitals, post-incarceration, etc. Motel room capacity for this population would be immediately useful.

Community Foundation of Western MA Announcement (Jim Ayres) announced that a next round of funding for COVID-19 related support is available for Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin Counties. Go here for quick funding request link <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/B6HJGRS>

State-Level Action

Kelly Turley, Executive Director, MA Coalition for the Homeless reported on 4 areas of state action. Please [go here](#) for the summary.

National Picture

Gerry McCafferty, Director of Housing, City of Springfield and Hampden County CoC administrator, reported on advocacy happening on a national level to maximize the extraordinary amount of federal dollars coming into states and communities through ESG, CDBG and the CARES Act. The goal is to create a holistic strategy to plan for best use of these funds - not agency by agency - but with a system-wide lens, and one that is informed at the start by racial equity. There is a push for a mind-set shift to ask how can we house people quickly - what kind of staffing, landlord outreach, support services do we need. Can we think less in terms of setting up more shelter - except for true stop-gap, using hotels where necessary - and more on how we find the units we need to get people housed. This federal funding has a 2 year window, which could allow time for people to get "rapidly rehoused" as a temporary measure (instead of shelter) while permanent supportive housing options are pursued for those who need it. Other communities are using FEMA dollars for temporary "non-congregate shelter" (hotels) while applying ESG funds to rehouse people. Can we think in those terms here, too? Expanded FEMA authorization is an important piece of this puzzle.

Legislator feedback (summarized here):

- Continuing the push for expanded FEMA authorization is critical - Administration's initial response to legislative letter was not adequate
- Pushing on Western MA equitable funding for ESG and other shelter/housing funds
- Getting clear on budget and bill priorities now as the work on FY21 budget intensifies
- RAFT legislation is key, including provisions to make it more accessible
- Housing Stability legislation is also critical

Next steps:

- Group agreed that our group identity - legislators, mayors and other local officials, shelter/housing providers - would be useful in our advocacy for Western MA. We agreed to name ourselves - Western MA COVID-19 Regional Work Group for Housing First (?) - to be finalized
- Pamela will follow-up with the group around specific advocacy measures, likely starting with a letter in our name re: the 4 state-level action steps.
- Group agreed to continue meeting and will experiment with **every 3 weeks, Tuesdays, 9 am - 10 am. Next meeting date: Tues., July 21, 9 am - 10 am**