

## **Western MA Covid-19 Task Force for Housing First Meeting Notes - 7/21/20**

*In Attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Mayor Tom Bernard, City of North Adams, Jacob Chacon, Springfield Youth Action Board, Senator Jo Comerford, Justine Dodd, City of Pittsfield, Wayne Feiden, City of Northampton, Lisa Fletcher-Udell for Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Leslie Garcia, Springfield Youth Action Board, Clare Higgins, Community Action, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Michele LaFleur, Three County CoC, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield, Bill Miller, Friends of the Homeless/CSO, Brooke Murphy, Three County CoC, Mayor David Narkewicz, City of Northampton, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Mary Beth Ogulewicz, Town of Amherst, Katie O'Leary for Rep. Mindy Domb, Merridith O'Leary, Town of Amherst, Keleigh Pereira, Three County CoC, Keith Rhone, FOH/CSO, Jay Sacchetti, ServiceNet, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless, Rep. Aaron Vega, Senator John Velis, Lynne Marie Wanamaker, Safe Passage, Mayor Roxann Wedegartner, City of Greenfield, Liz Whynott, Tapestry*

### **Shelter/City Updates:**

**Springfield: Friends of the Homeless/CSO** (Bill Miller) - Friends of the Homeless will be down about 50 beds due to social distancing requirements (DHCD is anticipating a loss of about 500 beds statewide). Will apply for ESG funds to expand capacity but current challenge is finding an adequate space - it's currently challenging enough to sustain what they have right now. Bill welcomes leads on spaces, ideally in close proximity to current shelter on Worthington Street in Springfield with adequate facilities.

**City of Springfield** (Gerry McCafferty): Catholic Charities and Mercy Medical Center sought state funding to do enhanced street outreach and to rent hotel rooms for short-term placements; encouraging people who are unwilling to go into congregate shelter to try hotels. Also working towards launching a "housing surge" in September with use of ESG funds to house people staying in hotels or shelter. ESG will cover up to 2 years' worth of rent, providing the opportunity to use apartments as "temporary placements" while working towards permanent housing. Undertaking a big outreach campaign to identify landlords willing to partner, meeting their needs to participate, e.g., mitigation funds and other incentives.

**ServiceNet** (Jay Sacchetti):

**Greenfield:** working with MJ Adams of City of Greenfield to discuss sites for expanded shelter; will continue with expanded space at Wells St. Shelter and look for additional space.

**Northampton:** Both winter cot shelter and Grove Street are currently open. About 25 people at Grove Street. It is no longer open for day time use, the typical pre-Covid arrangement (must leave the shelter from 8 am - 4 pm, also the same for Wells Street in Greenfield). This is due to a combination of reasons: (1) the financial cost of staffing - in view of uncertainty for fall/winter, necessary to take cost saving measures now; and (2)

the staff difficulty in having people lay around the shelter unmotivated; concern that people get complacent and non-productive.

**Pittsfield:** closed emergency COVID-19 shelter at St. Joe's High School. Got some community pushback. Now back to Barton's Crossing with 10 beds (due to social distance requirements). Looking at other sites to expand, nothing clear yet. Seeing many new faces entering shelter.

On ESG funding: still waiting on first round feedback in order to determine how to apply for 2nd round. Housing units are in short supply.

**City of Greenfield** (MJ Adams): Exploring how the city can best support sheltering efforts. Daytime encampments are happening in downtown parks. Community residents have been generous and helpful in response, and support from Eliot Services has also been key.

**Northampton Board of Health** (Merridith O'Leary): Fall and winter planning are underway with two different plans based on whether school opens or not. If school does not open, Smith Vocational School will be used for an emergency shelter space. If school is open, an alternative space is being sought (potentially Northampton Senior Center). Merridith noted the exponential growth of houseless people with many new faces. There is also an uptick in the number of calls to police and from Downtown Northampton. Since most restaurants are still closed for indoor dining, the lack of access to bathrooms and water continues. There is also an uptick in overdoses. Previously businesses were outfitted with Narcan but with so many closures this is less possible. Working on getting this back into the community. Talking with other providers around responding to this need.

**Amherst: Craig's Doors** (Kevin Noonan): Applying for ESG funds to rent hotel rooms for sheltering 20 individuals; hopefully another 12-15 individuals at First Baptist Church (prior shelter space). Also applied for ESG Rapid Rehousing funds to house 14 people over 24 months. Awaiting DHCD decision.

**Holyoke:** Alicia Zoeller, City of Holyoke, was unable to attend but provided this update by email: "Although the City has repeatedly solicited shelter and homeless service providers through the CDBG and CDBG-CV Programs, we have not had **any** interest from providers in offering shelter services. I am reviewing the ESG NOFA from the state, but am doubtful that a shelter could be operational by November. Unlike Springfield, Holyoke does not have a dedicated housing office separate from the Holyoke Housing Authority (HHA) or extensive public health services and operates with limited capacity in terms of overall department funding, staffing, and expertise in this area. The City has one public health nurse. HHA has been successful in securing vouchers to place folks directly from the streets. Community Development does fund a drop in center in partnership with Holyoke Police Dept. and will be funding Gandara for additional COVID street outreach". Will continue brainstorming with City departments.

Liz Whynott of Tapestry noted her concern for people experiencing homelessness in Holyoke in light of all public restrooms and sanitary stations being closed. She offered to be a connecting point for conversation to work on opening a shelter in Holyoke - she noted how important it was for people from Holyoke to be sheltered in Holyoke and not sent to Springfield or Northampton. Senator Velis asked to follow-up and Pamela will connect him. Gerry noted that Holyoke Housing Authority has moved roughly 15 households directly from the streets into apartments. Note: Senator Velis asked for contact info to follow-up - Pamela will provide.

**Northern Berkshires** (Kathy Keeser, Louison House): Also noted new faces in North Adams. Many will not go to Pittsfield for services because it is not their home community. Complicated because so little shelter in North Adams (the shelter there is being turned into apartments).

**Three County CoC Update** (Keleigh Pereira): Mainstream housing vouchers (for non-elderly, disabled individuals) are being issued by Northampton, Amherst, Greenfield and Franklin Regional Housing Authorities. People who are interested should be reminded to confirm that they are on wait lists so they are in the queue. Also, the vulnerability assessment tool used for the Coordinated Entry process (eligibility for permanent supportive housing placement) has been revised to account for risk of contracting COVID.

**State Policy Update** (Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless). See attached slides.

**Follow-up to-do's:**

- Pamela will connect Senator Velis to Holyoke contacts
- Senator Comerford will follow-up with Jay regarding inquiry with DHCD re: funding allocation
- We will continue to connect on ESG funding and planning via email as needed before we meet next

**Next meeting date: Tuesday, August 11, 9 am - 10 am**