

Western MA COVID-19 Task Force Meeting Minutes - 10/20/20

In attendance: Senator Jo Comerford, Rep. Dan Carey, Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Pat Duffy, Office of Rep. Aaron Vega (and Rep-Elect), Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Ari Morton, Office of Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Katie O'Leary, Office of Rep. Mindy Domb, North Adams Mayor Tom Bernard, Northampton Mayor David Narkewicz, Wayne Feiden, City of Northampton, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Rory Casey, City of Holyoke, Leanne Cloutier, City of Westfield, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield/Hampden CoC, Dave Ziomek, Town of Amherst, Mary Beth Ogulewicz, Town of Amherst, Jeff Harness, Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Rick Hart, Hampshire County Friends of the Homeless, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Jay Levy, Eliot CHS-Homeless Services, Bill Miller, Friends of the Homeless/CSO, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Keleigh Pereira, Three County CoC/Community Action Pioneer Valley, Keith Rhone, Friends of the Homeless/CSO, Jay Sacchetti, ServiceNet, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Joyce Tavon, Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance, Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless, Liz Whynott, Tapestry Health, Katie Zobel, Community Foundation of Western MA

Community Updates

Springfield: Use of hotels for sheltering people is continuing to work well. Friends of the Homeless will be standing up a new shelter with 40 beds, including more space for women. Sheltering people off of streets into hotels

Holyoke: Working on opening a 24/7 shelter site, ideally with 40 beds. A few potential sites have been identified - working with MEMA for site support, determining whether MEMA showers and toilets will be necessary. Still working to identify a service provider.

Northampton: At capacity with 25 beds (and a wait list of roughly 17). Working with the City to identify additional winter space. Meeting with DHCD on 10/26 to discuss possible arrangements to expand at The Quality Inn, with additional space to be used for the region's isolation and quarantine sites. All preliminary conversations to be discussed further over the course of this week and next.

Amherst: Will be opening new shelter space at Unitarian Meeting House on Nov. 1 - 14-16 beds. Working out plan for COVID-19 testing with Health Care for the Homeless, and also working out shower installation. Also near closure on arrangement for 20 beds with University Lodge. These hotel rooms will be allocated based on an internal referral process for most vulnerable in Amherst.

Greenfield: Expanding 2nd floor of current shelter for an additional 11-15 beds (thanks to generous private contribution). Will have total of 31-35 beds at the shelter.

Pittsfield: Moving shelter operation back to St. Joe's High School, will have 50 beds, opening by Nov. 1.

North Adams: met with DHCD to discuss winter shelter needs. Seeking space for 20 and in local conversation to identify service provider to contract with DHCD for funds (which will be reimbursed by FEMA). MEMA support could be available for showers, etc. All in process.

Discussion re: regional coordination to advocate for Isolation and Quarantine (I&Q) space in Western MA: All agreed that a single I&Q hotel in Everett was not satisfactory to meet the public health needs of Western MA; that the distance discourages people to get tested or to acknowledge need to be quarantined for fear of having to leave their home community - and in effect discourages being sheltered. There was acknowledgment of the potential challenge in maintaining distance between people with positive diagnoses and people who need to be quarantined but it was also noted that with proper staffing and monitoring, this could be accomplished. State legislators on the call confirmed that mayors and other town leaders are in the best position to be heard by Administration re: meeting local needs. Pamela will follow-up off-line about coordinating a letter signed by our region's municipal leaders requesting a meeting with the Command Center to discuss this need.

Eviction Moratorium Ended on October 17: Pamela noted the end of the eviction moratorium and the threat of eviction now facing tens of thousands of tenants. The Governor released an Eviction Diversion Initiative which offers resources but falls drastically short of what is needed. She noted the Guaranteed Housing Stability Act which the Network and other statewide partners are pushing with the support of the State Legislators on this Task Force. We will revisit this to discuss coordinated advocacy by our region at our next meeting.

Next meeting date: Thursday, November 5, 9 am.