

Western MA COVID-19 Task Force Meeting Minutes November 17, 2020

In attendance: Representative Mindy Domb, Representative Lindsay Sabadosa, Pat Duffy, Office of Representative Aaron Vega, Elena Cohen, Office of Senator Comerford, Katie O’Leary, Office of Representative Mindy Domb, Maddy Thursby, Office of Representative Farley-Bouvier, Northampton Mayor David Narkewicz,, Manager Mike Sullivan, Town of South Hadley, MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Rory Casey, City of Holyoke, Emma Dragon, Town of Amherst, Wayne Feiden, City of Northampton, Angie Ellison, City of North Adams, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, , Mary Beth Ogulewicz, Town of Amherst, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, Kathryn Buckley-Brawner, Catholic Charities, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Jeff Harness, Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Rick Hart, Hampshire County Friends of the Homeless, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Jay Levy, Eliot CHS – Homeless Services, Michele La Fleur, Three County CoC, Brooke Murphy, Three County CoC, Keleigh Pereira, Three County CoC, Jay Sacchetti, ServiceNet, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Joyce Tavon, Mass. Housing and Shelter Alliance, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves, Liz Whynott, Tapestry, Katie Allan Zobel, Community Foundation of Western MA

Community Updates

Springfield: Friends of the Homeless is opening an additional site with 40 beds. There are currently 100 people in hotel rooms (administered by Catholic Charities) – the initial surge has leveled off. There is a marked decrease in people living on the streets due to this hotel resource.

Holyoke: The City is working with MEMA to do a site evaluation for 40 beds. They are partnering with Friends of the Homeless to run the site and hope to be up and running by the first week of December. It will be in a large congregate space with 24/7 access.

Northampton: Working towards opening an additional 25-30 beds at a local church. Final decision will be made by the faith community this weekend. Current ServiceNet shelters are full.

Amherst: Hotel space (20 rooms) is almost entirely occupied – 1 room still available (1 room held for isolation or quarantine). 14 beds at the Unitarian Society have been full for the past week. The town continues to do testing prior to entry, aiming to conduct full testing of all guests every 4 weeks. The Town has leased a yoga studio very close to the UU which will be used for showers and for daytime warming center.

Greenfield: Renovation of the 2nd floor at Wells Street is underway, working towards a definitive date for opening soon. Meanwhile, working on warming center for daytime cold weather respite and has obtained temporary support from the Salvation Army for limited emergency motel rooms if freezing temperatures.

Pittsfield: Winter shelter at St. Joe’s is open with 50 beds – shelter will be open 24/7. Currently 28-35 people sleeping there now, anticipating full in the next 2-3 weeks.

North Adams: Will lease up to 10 motel rooms on a contract basis in Williamstown (only place available at appropriate cost) – will have to provide transportation from North Adams. Will provide roughly 4 hours/day staffing at the hotel when needed. Will focus on providing transportation to ServiceNet’s shelter in Pittsfield. Working in close partnership with ServiceNet.

Isolation and Quarantine Hotel update and discussion:

Jay Levy of Eliot Services reported that right now there are 6 or 7 people from Western MA staying at the one Isolation and Quarantine (I&Q) hotel in Everett. Primarily from Springfield and Holyoke. Received word that MEMA will be opening another hotel in Taunton. No word on a hotel being opened in Western MA.

There was some confusion over whether MEMA is permitting people who are in quarantine to use the hotel in Everett, or just people who have tested positive. MEMA is defining quarantine only as people who are awaiting a test result. We will obtain further clarification on that.

Preparing for Mayors and Town Managers meeting with the Command Center on Nov. 20:

Discussion points raised on why I&Q needed in Western MA:

- “Occupancy rate” of previous I&Q hotel is a false measure.
- A locally based I&Q hotel is critical to encourage people both to get tested and to enter shelter. If a shelter requires testing in advance of entry, they will not go to shelter for fear of a positive result and having no alternative but to go to Everett. A distant shelter puts individuals and communities at much greater risk.
- Transportation limitations – not available after 5 pm, e.g., - creates dangerous gaps in care and protection
- When shelters do regular health screenings and someone is identified with symptoms, a local hotel is necessary to allow for timely and effective response
- Individuals exposed to COVID-19 or testing positive can simply refuse to go to Everett. Then what? The lack of a hotel in the region puts everybody at greater risk.

Testing for flu and for COVID-19

Agreement that having mobile covid testing and flu shots at shelters and hotels is a high priority. Word from DHCD is that a mobile stop the spread site would only be dispatched by DPH if a cluster of cases was identified. This is not adequate. This issue will be raised at the Command Center meeting as well.

Pamela will follow-up with mayors off-line to further coordinate the Command Center meeting on Friday.

Next Task Force meeting date: Thursday, Dec. 3, 9 am