

Western MA COVID-19 Task Force for Housing First Meeting Minutes - 3/9/21

In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Office of Rep. Pat Duffy, Paul Belsito, Irene and George Davis Foundation, Mayor Tom Bernard, City of North Adams, Rep. Natalie Blais, Kathryn Buckley-Brawner, Catholic Charities, Kevin Chambers, Office of Senator John Velis, Senator Jo Comerford, Keith Fairey, Way Finders, Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Wayne Feiden, City of Northampton, Ethan Flaherty, Office of Rep. Kelly Pease, Gina Govoni, FCRHRA, Rep. Carlos González, Jeff Harness, Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Rick Hart, Friends of Hampshire County Homeless, John Hornik, Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust, Jay Levy, Eliot CHS-Homeless Services, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield, Jennifer Metsch, Office of Senator Eric Lesser, Bill Miller, CSO/Friends of the Homeless, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Merridith O'Leary, Northampton Board of Health, Mayor David Narkewicz, City of Northampton, Rep. Jake Oliveira, Keleigh Pereira, Three County CoC, Keith Rhone, CSO/Friends of the Homeless, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Joyce Tavon, MHSA, Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves, Liz Whynott, Tapestry, Katie Allan Zobel, Community Foundation of Western MA, Alicia Zoeller, City of Holyoke

Community Reports:

Springfield:

Friends of the Homeless: sufficient capacity; vaccination process is going smoothly with great partnership with Mercy Medical; doing testing weekly and positivity rates are very low - seeing the light at the end of the tunnel! Turning attention to new housing possibilities (building purchases).

Hampden CoC: hotel population is 120 via Catholic Charities in Springfield area and 43 via CHD in Holyoke; looking at funding end-dates (currently stated to end 6/30 in Holyoke but informal word from DHCD of 9/30; Springfield will be able to continue after that) and focusing intensely on rehousing.

Holyoke:

Center for Human Development: running hotel at full capacity of 43 people in 37 hotel rooms. Eager to get more info about funding end date and will follow-up.

City of Holyoke: City Council committee is meeting tomorrow night to discuss establishment of emergency shelter - will keep us posted.

Amherst:

Craig's Doors: currently at full capacity - sheltering 57: 23 and 21 at 2 hotels, 14 at Unitarian Society; will be able to extend Amherst hotel to June 2022, but more recent hotel in Hadley is only available until mid-May. Working on re-housing efforts.

Northampton:

ServiceNet: Grove Street permanent shelter is full at 14; First Churches emergency shelter hovers at 25; in conversations with church about extension beyond 5/1 - unclear. Can be difficult to rehouse; people frequently say no, they want to wait for a better alternative.

Greenfield:

ServiceNet: full at Wells St Shelter with 30 beds; near full capacity at hotel - 14 people in 12 rooms, 3 rooms available

hotel is not committing beyond 4/30; Wells St will be open indefinitely

City of Greenfield: Warming Center fully operational; will be open through end of March

Pittsfield:

ServiceNet: capacity at roughly 35 with room for 50; have seen the most success in rehousing efforts in Pittsfield (other communities finding it challenging).

North Adams:

Louison House: Motel full, including 2 young adult beds, have 12 rooms total, sheltering 20 people; re-housing is slow, very little staffing to support the efforts, very little affordable housing. Vaccines can be tough - many guests not interested. Continuing to educate.

Evictions Update:

Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves, Homes for All MA Coalition:

Current data qualified due to problems with the Mass. Courts data system so could not track 160 cases. But with that qualifier, since the lifting of the eviction moratorium, these are the eviction case filings that are related to non-payment of rent:

Hampden County: 1,204; Springfield: 771

Hampshire County: 117

Franklin County: 72

Berkshire County: 190

The majority of eviction filings in Springfield are from the North and South Ends and Metro area, predominantly people of color.

1,200 homeowners across the state are at risk of foreclosure.

See [Network legislative priorities](#) re: [COVID-19 Housing Equity Bill](#) - a top priority of the Network - to address this housing stability crisis.

RAFT Update:

Way Finders: peak week last week of number of RAFT applications at 501 applications in one week; demographics are applicants are primarily women and people of color; making progress on application turn-around time to about 30 days and will continue to improve.

Just released [Greater Springfield Housing Study](#) which offers important data on the housing gap (estimating a gap of roughly 19,000 units by 2025) and rent burdened households (50% pay more than 30% of income in rent).

Franklin County Regional Housing Authority: Landlords are applying directly for RAFT as well and those applications are easier and quicker to process because more likely to be complete. Processing time has suffered a bit of a setback, taking more than 4 weeks, but will get back on track. Staff are undergoing training for federal rental assistance dollars that are due to be ready for distribution on 3/22.

Noted that these federal dollars will not have a cap (unlike state program that is capped at \$10,000) but must be spent by end of Dec. And federal dollars have no help for homeowners.

Legislative Update:

Pamela provided updates on the Network's [FY22 Budget Priorities](#) and [Legislative Priorities](#). The Network is convening meetings with state legislators by county this week to discuss these priorities - please contact Pamela if not already connected and interested in participating.

Other notable legislation (thank you to Clare Higgins for flagging): *An Act to Address Inequality, Promote Opportunity, and End Poverty HD3821/SD1032* Lead Sponsors: Rep. Sally Kerans, Senator Michael Moore. This bill is supported by the statewide Community Action network and a number of our local legislators

Federal funds and housing subsidies coming to MA: We will discuss this more at our next meeting but for now it was noted that federal relief dollars will include more rehousing funds in the form of various subsidies and that it would be useful to outreach to our area's housing authorities to ensure maximum information sharing and collaboration. Pamela will follow-up with other folks on this call to assist with outreach.

Announcement for Holyoke renters and homeowners: Valley Opportunity Council has CDBG funding to assist with mortgage payments (and rental assistance too). Mass Fair Housing has CDBG funding to assist with legal issues.

Next meeting date: Thursday, April 1, 9 am - 10 am, stay tuned for Zoom link