

## **Western MA COVID-19 Task Force for Housing First Minutes - 4/20/21**

*In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Rep. Natalia Blais, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Office of Rep. Duffy, Manager Paul Bockelman, Town of Amherst, Kathryn Buckley-Brawner, Catholic Charities, Corinne Coryat, Office of Rep. Blais, Senator Jo Comerford, Rep. Pat Duffy, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Denise Jordan, Springfield Housing Authority, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Mayor Nicole LaChapelle, City of Easthampton, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield/Hampden CoC, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Brooke Murphy, Three County CoC, Mayor David Narkewicz, City of Northampton, Theresa Nicholson, Center for Human Development, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Mary Beth Ogulewicz, Town of Amherst, Katie O'Leary, Office of Rep. Domb, Rep. Kelly Pease, Keleigh Pereira, Three County CoC, Keith Rhone, FOH/CSO, Gabriel Quaglia, Tapestry, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Kate O'Brien Scott, City of West Springfield, Joyce Tavon, MHSA, Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless, Rose Webster Smith, Springfield No One Leaves/Homes for all MA Coalition, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, Alicia Zoeller, City of Holyoke*

**DHCD Hotel Policy and our Local Needs:** Joyce Tavon of Mass. Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA) summarized last week's meetings with DHCD (Undersecretary Maddox and others) and the Command Center (Secretary Sudders and others), which Pamela attended on behalf of Western MA. In both meetings, clarifications were made around state policy on the issue of closing hotels for shelter for individuals. They made clear that "no one will be or should be discharged to the streets." They are prepared to work with providers to ensure safety for all individuals, with everyone's shared goal of a move out to permanent housing or if necessary a move to alternative congregate shelter. If a person is requesting shelter now, a provider should reach out to DHCD to discuss new entries into hotels - this is an option if necessary.

The discussions also focused on using incoming federal resources to acquire hotels and convert them to permanent supportive housing. DHCD cannot be a developer but it can play an active role in supporting non-profit partners and housing developers to help make deals possible. MHSA will be convening all hotel and shelter providers to continue this conversation. **Note an upcoming webinar on this topic on converting hotels/motels to housing on Thursday, April 29 at 2 pm. [Read more and register here.](#)**

The question was also raised about DHCD policy on long-term use of hotels as a bridge to permanent housing for people who are unable to stay in congregate shelter. DHCD said it was not clear on that piece, concerned about creating new permanent shelter in the form of hotels (instead of ensuring the focus on permanent housing), but it also acknowledged that hotels, when used properly, could have a role to play.

DHCD agreed to hold planning meetings with MHSA and other partners bi-weekly to address the issues around individual homelessness and the best use of federal dollars. Pamela will continue to provide a conduit for regional input and feedback.

### **Regional conversations around federal housing/homelessness monies:**

Gerry McCafferty of the Hampden CoC and Keleigh Pereira of the Three County CoC both reported out that conversations with housing authorities and developers and shelter/support

service providers are underway to begin to plan for the federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act and potentially more coming down the pike and to take stock of hotel and other possible building conversions in the region. If you are interested in participating in these conversations, for Hampden County, contact Gerry at gmccafferty@springfieldcityhall.com; for Hampshire, Franklin, Berkshire Counties, contact Keleigh at kpereira@communityaction.us.

### **Eviction Crisis Update**

Rose Webster-Smith of Springfield No One Leaves/Homes for all MA Coalition reported out the following # of eviction filings since the eviction moratorium was lifted on October 17, 2020 (all cases have a non-payment component; also note the database was unable to identify addresses for 120 cases):

Hampden County - 1,432, with 900 based in Springfield

Berkshire County - 227

Hampshire County - 141

Franklin County - 85

Executions for possession: 2,000 issued statewide

Foreclosures: 413 in Western MA

Rose also reported that advocates are working on a strategy re: the [Housing Equity Bill](#) (S.891/H.1434) in relation to the state budget (Senate side). We will stay tuned on that.

**Northampton's Community Resilience Hub** - Mayor David Narkewicz reported out on next steps in the development of Northampton's Community Resilience Hub, which will serve people experiencing homelessness and other extremely at-risk populations while also providing a space for climate resiliency and mitigation. Community Action is hiring a collaboration coordinator for the project - [see job description here](#). The City secured the funding needed to purchase a site, including CDBG funding, cannabis mitigation funds and a generous gift from Smith College. Signed an option with the Roundhouse Building near City Hall, now doing due diligence on the site which will be completed in 120 days (and faces uncertainty in view of its prior coal burning heat system). We will stay posted.

**FY22 House Ways and Means Budget:** Pamela shared the Network's priorities in relation to the House Ways and Means Budget released last week ([see a comparison here](#)). She also shared the Network's [priority amendments](#) that are being considered by legislators this week for co-sponsorship. House debate on the budget begins next week.

**Announcement:** The Isolation and Quarantine Hotel in Pittsfield has closed due to lack of use (a positive sign). Anyone in need of I&Q will be transported to the remaining hotel in Everett.

**Network's Annual Gathering** - June 4 - Please join! [See the flyer and registration link here.](#)

**Meeting interval and next meeting date:** We agreed to meet monthly (as our sub-regional conversations take on greater focus). Our next meeting date will be Tuesday, May 18, 9 am - 10 am (we generally alternate Tuesdays and Thursdays but Thurs 5/20 was not an option for May - we will revisit our regular meeting date when we meet next).