

Western MA COVID-19 Task Force for Housing First
Meeting Minutes – June 10, 2021

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In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Office of Pat Duffy, North Adams Mayor Tom Bernard, Molly Broderick, MLRI, Kathryn Buckley-Brawner, Catholic Charities, Kevin Chambers, Office of Senator Velis, Jacqueline Cleary, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Senator Jo Comerford, Angelica Core, Office of Rep. Gonzalez, Keith Fairey, Way Finders, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Koby Gardner-Levine, Office of Rep. McGovern, Caitlin Golden, MHSA, Abhi Kurve, CHAPA, Easthampton Mayor Nicole LaChapelle, Michele LaFleur, Three County CoC, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield/Hampden CoC, Steve Mendoza, Office of Rep. Sabadosa, Brooke Murphy, Three County CoC, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Katie O'Leary, Office of Rep. Domb, Rep. Jake Oliveira, Katie Reardon, Franklin County Regional Housing Authority, Phil Ringwood, DIAL/SELF, Lionel Romain, CEDAC, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Connie Scott, Pittsfield Housing Authority, Theresa Nicholson, CHD, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, Alicia Zoeller, City of Holyoke

Network Annual Event on June 4: Thanks to all 226 people who joined! It was moving and informative and you don't have to miss it! [Go here](#) to get to video highlights and the slide presentation.

FY22 Conference Committee Budget Update: The Conference Committee has been convened to reconcile the House and Senate budgets. Abhi Kurve of CHAPA presented on the housing priorities, shared by the Network, that we hope the Committee will adopt. [Go here](#) to see CHAPA's summary.

Eviction Protection Extensions: With the Governor's lifting of the state of emergency on June 15, certain eviction protections (Chapter 257) will no longer be in effect unless the legislature passes an extension. The CDC's moratorium is also expiring on June 30. The Senate Ways and Means Committee filed a bill to provide for certain extensions and included eviction protections. Two amendments had been filed by Sen. Jehlen to address some gaps in the bill – specifically extending the CDC moratorium in MA and closing a loophole that made it easier for landlords to seek eviction for non-payment of rent. Molly Broderick of Mass Law Reform Institute presented an overview of the legislation and amendments, urging support and advocacy for their adoption. Note: The Senate voted later that day to adopt the Senate Ways and Means bill as is, without the amendments. While the Network is disappointed the amendments did not pass, it is also deeply appreciative that Chapter 257 protections will continue under the Senate proposal. Next up is the a similar bill's consideration in the House. Please stay informed by [subscribing to the Network blog](#).

Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) will be coming to our communities in the next month. Brooke Murphy of the Three County CoC provided an update for Western MA. Certain local housing authorities have accepted vouchers (Springfield, Holyoke, Northampton, Greenfield, Franklin County) and DHCD is also getting close to 900 vouchers that will be distributed in coordination with the CoCs and administered by the regional administering agency (Way Finders, Franklin County Regional Housing and Berkshire Housing). They will be targeted to people who are homeless, at-risk of homeless, fleeing domestic violence or "move on" (people in permanent supportive housing who are ready to move into other housing). They will be distributed in coordination with the CoC's Coordinated Entry process. They have lower screening barriers, do not require "chronicity" which will allow for greater flexibility to address the racial equity gap. They come with flexible dollars for additional costs such as moving or furniture costs and also allow for landlord incentives. The region is engaged in landlord incentive initiatives which can be further developed with these additional resources. Gerry McCafferty of the Hampden CoC suggested considering a regionwide municipal campaign to engage landlords. We will discuss further (see item below).

Municipal coordination to maximize federal resources: Alan Wolf, Chief of Staff to Northampton Mayor Narkewicz, proposed the idea of collaborating across communities and local governments to brainstorm the best possible use of our region's collective ARPA dollars. There was unanimous support of the concept. Pamela will follow-up with all municipal leaders and representatives, and the CoCs, to continue this conversation.

Community Check-ins Re: hotel re-housing efforts

Springfield: Catholic Charities – currently sheltering 87 people at hotels. 30-40 people identified as in need of supportive services with complex mental health/addiction issues. Must have more support services to make rehousing work .

Holyoke: CHD – now at 29 individuals in hotel (capacity for 45) – facing barriers from CORI issues and lack of available housing stock.

Amherst/Hadley: Craig's Doors – 17 people in the Econo-Lodge in Hadley – slated to close on June 17 due to owner's decision. Moving people into other hotel to the extent possible; distributing tents.

Northampton: ServiceNet – no hotels – First Churches down to 10-12 people; will be closing on 6/30 and moving people to Interfaith cot shelter – capacity for 10.

Greenfield: ServiceNet – no hotels – at capacity at Wells St with 30.

Pittsfield: ServiceNet – no hotels – approx. 30 people, with additional capacity

North Adams: Louison House - 7 remaining in hotels, 1 with housing slated, the others no apparent alternative. 6 people have mental health and substance use issues and no or limited income. Advised by DHCD that must have housing plan by July in order to continue in hotel through August. Unclear how that will happen.

RAFT/ERAP Updates: Way Finders reported thus far this year it has served 4,600 families as compared to 700-800 at the same time last year. It is averaging roughly 500 applications/week - distributing \$1.5-\$2 million in rental assistance each week; turn-around time is about 4 weeks or less if utility shut-offs or other emergencies are happening. Utility shut-offs are spiking (6-8/day!) and more are expected as National Grid is sending out shut-off notices. There are the resources to respond, however, so the key is making sure people are aware that this assistance is available.

As of 6/4, federal Treasury guidance updated: ERAP extends duration of benefits from 15 mos maximum to 18 mos; tenants can be paid directly if landlord is not responding and other provisions that are helpful to tenants.

Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, July 13, 9 am.