

Western MA COVID-19 Task Force Meeting Minutes - 9/14/21

In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Danielle Allard, Office of Senator Gomez, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Office of Rep. Duffy, Kevin Chambers, Office of Senator Velis, Angelic Core, Office of Rep. Gonzalez, Rep. Pat Duffy, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Jared Freedman, Office of Senator Comerford, Koby Gardner-Levine, Office of Congressman McGovern, Peg Hall, Greening Greenfield, Rick Hart, Friends of Hampshire County Homeless, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Jay Levy, Eliot-CHS Homeless Services, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Lindsy Mailler, City of Easthampton, Julia Mathis, Office of Rep. Sabadosa, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield/Hampden CoC, Bill Miller, Friends of the Homeless/CSO; Theresa Nicholson, Center for Human Development, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Katie O'Leary, Office of Rep. Domb, Eileen Peltier, Berkshire Housing Development Corporation, Michael Pise, City of Chicopee, Kate Preissler, City of Holyoke, Jane Ralph, Construct, Keith Rhone, Friends of the Homeless/CSO, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Jay Sacchetti, ServiceNet, Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra, City of Northampton, Joyce Tavon, Amanda Watson, Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, Dave Ziomek, Town of Amherst and others who did not leave their name in the chat box!

Isolation and Quarantine hotel update - one hotel in use in eastern part of state - 19 beds and all recently full; state is now working to stand up an additional site. They have heard the request for Western MA site and are focusing now on getting the soonest possible site up and running. FYI: Isolation and Quarantine Intake Line for people testing positive for COVID-19 and experiencing homelessness: 617-367-5150 Hours: Monday-Friday between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm Saturdays: 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

Shelter updates:

Springfield:

- Friends of the Homeless: concern going into the winter around capacity; I&Q hotel has been working well, transportation going smoothly.
- Hotels: Catholic Charities had to close out in West Springfield (moved some guests to Holyoke); DHCD stopped funding a hotel in the Springfield area; census is down to roughly 50; hoping to keep hotels going as long as possible, waiting to see if additional state ESG funding is awarded.

Holyoke: Center for Human Development continues to run Motel 6 - 45 beds - funded through June, 2022. Full now. To discuss possible referrals, call Theresa Nicholson directly at 413-313-2237.

Amherst: Craig's Doors continues to run University Motor Lodge with 25 beds. Working on a congregate site with a church; in process re: meeting building code needs. Optimistic will be open by Nov. 15.

Northampton: ServiceNet continues to run Grove Street (15 beds) and Interfaith cot shelter (10 beds) - full.

Greenfield: Service continues to run Wells Street shelter with expanded capacity of 30 beds.

Pittsfield: ServiceNet continues to run St. Joe's shelter (old high school) - basically full (recent census at 49, total capacity for 50) - unusual and concerning.

North Adams: Louison House had funded hotel rooms through June 30 - no emergency shelter available in the community. People are sleeping outside. Even with strong landlord relationships, extremely difficult to find apartments. Very concerned about winter months.

ServiceNet also noted the pervasive lack of available housing is a huge barrier to re-housing people - even with vouchers in hand, literally no apartments available (even in Berkshire County where it formerly had been comparatively easier). CHD noted that even when apartments are located, still difficult to rent because allowable fair market rents do not match rental asking price.

It was also noted that with Afghan refugee resettlements in the area, housing will be even tighter.

Discussion:

Joyce Tavon of Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA) raised the question of Western MA coordinating to apply for state ESG funds to be used flexibly across the region, e.g., to add hotel rooms. Jay Sacchetti of ServiceNet noted that ESG funds will be used to continue the current sites in Pittsfield and Greenfield and that staffing the sites is a huge challenge as is. He also noted that DHCD advised that misc. hotel rooms will not be an option; hotel is only viable if a provider is running the entire hotel (e.g., Motel 6 in Holyoke or University Motor Lodge in Amherst).

Alan Wolf raised the question of whether communities were seeing an impact due to the loss of unemployment benefits. Jay Levy noted that if we're seeing impacts now, we have reason to be concerned about a greater increase in homelessness later since homelessness is generally a delayed impact. Gerry McCafferty noted the likely impact of the loss of mental health beds across the region as outreach workers are seeing a greater level of vulnerability on the streets (as well as the consequence of breaks in treatment due to COVID).

Several people noted that there is a decrease in tolerance in communities generally as are feeling more threatened by some behaviors.

Eviction crisis update:

Thanks to Rose Webster-Smith of Springfield No One Leaves for this latest data. Since the lifting of the state eviction moratorium in October, 2020:

Foreclosures:

Hampden: 211 petitions, 192 auctions

Hampshire - 35 petitions, 36 auctions

Franklin: 34 petitions, 27 auctions

Berkshire: 73 petitions, 78 auctions

Evictions:

Hampden: 2,182, 1,313 Springfield

Berkshire 381

Hampshire 215
Franklin 144

Levied executions in the region are up to 37 (from 20) in the last 2 weeks. Overall in Western MA, there are 243 executions outstanding and 166 judgments. when moratorium lifted, levied evictions 20.

Emergency Rental Assistance:

Way Finders and Berkshire Housing were unable to attend today but from a later-in-the-day meeting I can report from **Way Finders**: seeing 80-100 applications/day (500-600/week); processing time is approx. 5 weeks. All administering agencies are shifting to a statewide central application - Way Finders will be implementing sometime in the next week.

Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority reported that they have seen an increase in people applying for RAFT - 45-60 applications/week, processing 20-30/week, turn-around time is approx. 5 weeks. Many rental arrearage requests ranging from \$15,000-\$25,000. Also seeing an increase in homeowners seeking assistance. Amanda Watson -

HUD funding competition for Continuums of Care is underway: Gerry McCafferty of the Hampden CoC reported on behalf of both CoCs (Three County CoC, too) that HUD's annual Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is out and as part of its application, both CoCs will be issuing its Request for Proposals tomorrow (9/15). While the majority of the funds will be for renewal projects, the CoCs are encouraging funding for rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing projects and there will be NEW "bonus" funding available to fund domestic violence/homelessness work and housing projects that coordinate with health resources.

For providers interested in learning more about the DV project (NOT necessary to previously be a DV provider), Gerry is hosting a meeting on 9/20 at 3 pm for Hampden County providers. Please contact Gerry at gmccafferty@springfieldcityhall.com for more info.

Please stay tuned for the blog post by Friday, 9/17, that will provide links to each CoC's RFP and related information.

Discussion/Updates

- There is a capacity issue for organizations in view of staff shortages and the inherent demand made of chronic lack of affordable housing and gaps in the mental health/substance use treatment system.
- Some exciting permanent supportive housing developments underway: (1) in Northampton, under the leadership of Dr. Bossie from Health Care for the Homeless, creating housing in Northampton for chronically homeless people; and (2) Home City Housing is working on development with 30 units of Permanent Supportive Housing. Two exciting projects that we can use as a model to get others involved in similar projects.

- The Franklin Hampshire County Safe Havens project is out to bid! This is for 7 new beds of shelter with intensive 24/7 case management support. A huge thanks to our Western MA legislators for shepherding this to its funding fruition. See [here](#) for the RFP.

Next meeting date: Thursday, October 7, 9 am - 10 am