

Western MA COVID-19 Task Force for Housing First Minutes - 10/7/21

In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Office of Rep. Duffy, Keith Benoit, City of Northampton, Rep. Natalie Blais, Kathryn Buckley-Brawner, Catholic Charities, Kevin Chambers, Office of Senator Velis, Corinne Coryat, Office of Rep. Blais, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Ethan Flaherty, Office of Rep. Pease, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Farley-Bouvier, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Koby Gardner-Levine, Office of Congressman Jim McGovern, Jeff Harness, Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Rick Hart, Friends of Hampshire County Homeless, Claire Higgins, Community Action PV, Denise Jordan, Springfield Housing Authority, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Office of Rep. Paul Mark ("aide"), Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield, Bill Miller, Friends of the Homeless/CSO, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Anthony Moore, Office of Senator Gomez, Brooke Murphy, Three County CoC, Julia Murphy, Office of Rep. Pignatelli, Theresa Nicholson, Center for Human Development, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Katie O'Leary, Office of Rep. Domb, Merridith O'Leary, City of Northampton, Eileen Peltier, Berkshire Housing Development Corporation, Kate Preissler, City of Holyoke, Jay Sacchetti, ServiceNet, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra, City of Northampton, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Joyce Tavon, MHSA, Kelly Turley, Mass Coalition for the Homeless, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves, Alicia Zoeller, City of Holyoke

Emergency Shelter/Hotel Updates

Springfield:

Catholic Charities: 40 residents in hotels in Springfield and Chicopee; moved residents in West Springfield hotel to Motel 6 in Holyoke (under CHD's management). Re-housing efforts in general have slowed down due to the complex barriers facing many residents and lack of services to support them.

Friends of the Homeless: Sheltering approx. 150 people/night. Noted challenge of mental health/substance use issues and complexity borne of those resources not being housed within DHCD.

Holyoke: CHD is operating the Motel 6 there with 45 bed capacity. Basically full. Finding challenges in rehousing due to CORIs and SORIs.

Amherst: Craig's Doors continues to operate out of the University Motor Lodge with full capacity at 31 people. Still working towards final arrangements with a church for congregate winter shelter that will provide 23 beds. Still looking for daytime space and in conversation with local partners.

Northampton: ServiceNet: currently full at 25 (Grove Street 15, cot shelter 10). Continuing to search for additional capacity for winter shelter (enlisting broker to assist). A difficult challenge.

Greenfield - ServiceNet: at capacity with 30 shelter guests.

Pittsfield: ServiceNet: at capacity with 50 shelter guests at St. Joe's High School; continuing to work on additional capacity

North Adams - Louison House reported increased numbers of people sleeping rough (cars, tents, streets). People are not willing to go to Pittsfield for shelter (which is at capacity). Need to find more local solution. Talking with the Mayor who has engaged with DHCD to further discuss the situation.

City/town coordination meeting report:

City and town staff from across the region have been convening as a sub-group of this task force to exchange more in-depth on homelessness and housing issues, including winter shelter challenges and ARPA funding allocation processes. One out-growth of these meetings is a request to meet with DHCD and other state leaders to discuss the need for more streamlined coordination around permanent supportive housing development (a critical piece of the solution to street homelessness). That meeting will take place on October 21. We will report out at our November meeting.

FYI on Home America Initiative: This initiative is led by HUD and US Interagency Council on Homelessness. [Go here](#) for more info. It is an invitation to local leaders and governors to join in the campaign to re-house and develop new housing. Is this useful for our region? The discussion will continue in our city/town sub-group.

Evictions Update:

Thanks to Rose Webster-Smith of Springfield No One Leaves and Homes for All MA for compiling this information:

Since the lifting of the CDC moratorium:

- 89 executions have been issued; and 94 judgments. Executions are the point at which the Sheriff issues a 48 hour notice to vacate.

On foreclosures, current data shows:

- Berkshire County: 78 scheduled auctions; 42 sold
- Franklin County: 28 auctions; 17 sold
- Hampshire County: 37 auctions; 16 sold
- Hampden County: 208 auctions, 91 sold
- 62 post-foreclosure cases filed - leading to evictions

Federal funds to the state to support homeowners will not be available until November.

Rental Assistance Updates

Hampden and Hampshire County (Way Finders):

- approx 110 applications/day - 650-700/week
- utility shut-offs continue to occur, more people now seeking assistance after they are already in the dark; many with extremely high monthly pay-back payments (impossible to meet)
- application processing time is now roughly 6 weeks as a result of the new state centralized application (new training required)

Berkshire County (Berkshire Housing Development Corporation):

Noted that the state has met its 65% threshold of funds spent (doing much better than many other states); this could position the state to get additional funds. BHDC has spent roughly \$2 million in ERAP funds since the Spring.

(Note: Franklin County was unable to attend.)

Local ARPA Funding Updates:

Each community received direct federal funds through the American Rescue Plan Act and the following updates on the allocation process were provided:

Springfield: conducted a survey over the summer; Mayor is currently meeting with 17 neighborhood councils and other groups for input. There will be a series of RFPs released. Funding priorities will be in the area of nonprofits, small businesses, housing development/redevelopment, senior assistance, neighborhood/household assistance, capital projects, job creation/economic development.

Holyoke: allocated first round of \$14 million which includes a number of housing projects - new housing, rental and homeowner rehab, as well as small business infrastructure. Hired a full-time ARPA case manager to oversee contracts. Also planning to allocate CDBG funds to hire a homelessness coordinator for the city.

Chicopee: has allocated first \$1.5 million to a water/sewer project. Still in the public input process. Will issue RFP after evaluation of responses is complete.

Westfield: in public info gathering process through a web-based survey. Received 200 replies. Receiving a lot of input from public safety unions.

Northampton: Just released survey for public input:

English: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ARPA-English>;

Spanish: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ARPA-Espanola>

Amherst: holding 4 public sessions in October plus an online forum. The link to the engagement platform is here: <https://engageamherst.org/arpa> And the link to the Town Council presentation is [here](#).

Greenfield: beginning to map out public input process, stay tuned for more.

Pittsfield: went through a public hearing process, compiling findings. Will make final determinations with the next month.

Next meeting date: Thursday, November 4, 9 am (we are deviating from our usual alternating Tuesdays/Thursdays due to election day on 11/2).