

Western MA COVID-19 Task Force for Housing First Minutes - 12/7/21

In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Keith Benoit, City of Northampton, Rep. Dan Carey, Office of Rep. Pat Duffy, Laura Baker, Valley CDC, Senator Jo Comerford, Corinne Coryat, Office of Rep. Natalie Blais, Paige Dolinski, Office of Rep. Paul Mark, Rep. Mindy Domb, Rep. Patricia Duffy, Jane Edmonstone, Community Legal Aid, Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Rep. Farley-Bouvier's Office, Koby Gardner-Levine, Office of Congressman McGovern, Brad Gordon, Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority, Gina Govoni, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Rick Hart, Friends of Hampshire County Homeless, Denise Jordan, Springfield Housing Authority, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield, Jennifer Metsch, Office of Senator Eric Lesser, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Anthony Moore, Office of Senator Adam Gomez, Theresa Nicholson, Center for Human Development, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Katie O'Leary, Office of Rep. Mindy Domb, Merridith O'Leary, Northampton Health Dept., Rep. Jake Oliveira, Marissa Otero, Office of Sen. John Velis, Eileen Peltier, Berkshire Housing Development Corp., Keleigh Pereira, 3 County CoC/Community Action Pioneer Valley, Phil Ringwood, DIAL/SELF, Lionel Romain, CEDAC, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Jay Sacchetti, ServiceNet, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Joyce Tavon, Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance, Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves/Homes for All MA, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton, Susan Worgaftik, Greening Greenfield,

Winter Shelter Updates

Note: Please see this [quick summary here](#) of Western MA shelter sites and how to access. Also to **access Isolation and Quarantine** for people testing COVID-19 positive without a place to stay: **Call 617-367-5150** or [click here](#) for additional details. The state is reporting full hospitals so please do not send individuals with a positive diagnosis to Emergency Rooms.

Springfield: Friends of the Homeless is close to capacity; Catholic Charities hotel capacity is close to full at 40 individuals. Distributing housing vouchers for re-housing.

Holyoke: Center for Human Development reported Motel 6 is full at 43 beds. CHD also received a DPH grant to open low-threshold permanent supportive housing in Holyoke which will be extremely useful to house people with CORIs and other barriers to typical housing. Aiming for opening in 3-4 months.

Northampton: ServiceNet opened First Churches congregate site yesterday with 25 beds - 8 or 9 individuals moved over from the cot shelter. All tested. Grove Street continues to operate with capacity for 15.

Greenfield: ServiceNet reported Wells Street is full at 30 beds; Salvation Army will open additional warming space over the weekends.

Pittsfield: ServiceNet reported capacity ranges from 30-50 - had a big covid outbreak prior to Thanksgiving (14 positives); the state's response was efficient and effective, providing transportation to all in need of isolation and quarantine. Very positive experience.

Amherst: Craig's Doors reported new congregate shelter at Immanuel Lutheran Church is open; 23 beds and all but one is taken. One person tested positive on the weekend and I&Q help was not available until Monday.

North Adams: Louison House has opened 11 hotel rooms in Adams - all but 2 are full and the 2 remaining have people lined up to fill them. Will expand once they receive additional funding (\$75,000 earmark via Sen. Hinds). Big thanks to MHSA for providing funding (via the state) to get the hotel launched.

Other funding related to shelter: In state ARPA budget, Sen. Comerford funded \$50,000 in expanded overflow non-congregate shelter - \$25K to CHD to support Franklin County area; \$25K to Craig's Doors to support Hampshire County area. Rep. Farley-Bouvier earmarked funds for the Fenn Street Shelter as well.

Youth Shelter Update: DIAL/SELF reported that Greenfield Days Inn still working with DIAL/SELF for short term stays. Same with Quality Inn in Northampton.

Eviction/Foreclosure Updates:

Thanks to Rose Webster-Smith of Springfield No One Leaves/Homes for All MA for this update:
Foreclosures since the beginning of the pandemic:

Hampden: 253 auctions scheduled; 121 sold (72 auctions scheduled in the last 3 months alone; 70 post-foreclosure eviction filings)

Hampshire: 45 auctions scheduled; 22 sold

Franklin: 30 auctions scheduled; 21 sold

Berkshire: 99 auctions scheduled; 53 sold

For the data on Western MA auctions go

to: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BuEYc0k-54dTWnfoC_TLKzIVYlVmuqBDPxPhKJI2wCE/edit?usp=sharing

(note: yellow means bank buyback, green is chapter 13, orange is investor or 3rd party, purple means stay of ch 13 has lifted blue means homeowner worked an agreement)

For the data on Western MA petitions go to:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1x6s2eDsoBhT8gutK0T4Y-03DeDDybNF9UvjWBnfp3xE/edit?usp=sharing>

(note: purple means the petition has been refiled)

Evictions: From September to November: 69 eviction judgments for non-payment of rent; 184 executions; 45 families physically removed. 331 tenants have signed move-out agreements.

The COVID-19 Eviction Legal Help program that provides assistance to tenants facing eviction for non-payment of rent ends on 12/31; remaining assistance will be far more limited. No-fault evictions are predicted to rise with minimal protection for the tenants. Foreclosures are also expected to rise precipitously in January as certain protections expire and federal program -

Homeowners Assistance Fund (HAF) - will not reach many households due to money owed prior to the pandemic.

Rose noted that the COVID-19 Housing Equity Bill (H.1434/S.891) is the only immediate response to this crisis that will protect both homeowners and tenants from COVID-19 related evictions and foreclosures. [Read more about the bill here.](#) There was some discussion among legislators in the meeting about possible next steps to advocate within the Legislature. Pamela will follow-up with them to strategize further.

Rental/Mortgage Assistance Updates:

Way Finders: there is roughly a 6 week processing time for applications with roughly 110-130 rental assistance applications each day. For homeowners seeking assistance, the state is transitioning to the new Homeowners Assistance Fund (HAF). Mass. Housing Partnership (MHP) and Mass Housing will administer the program, which will cover homeowners eligible for RAFT or ERMA and expand eligibility to households with an income less than or equal to 150% of Area Median Income. Utilities can only be paid if in conjunction with missed mortgage payments and assistance is only covered for missed payments starting January 21, 2020 (no prior money owed will be paid). Homeowners who have applied prior to 12/1 will have their applications administered by the local administering agency. Stay tuned for additional details within the month. Way Finders is the point of contact for HAF for Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin Counties.

Go to <https://massmortgagehelp.org/> for more info on the program.

Franklin County Regional: also 6 week processing time; about 110-130 applications each week. Concerned about some applications getting lost between the central office and Franklin Regional, still trying to figure this out. Working on allocating Emergency Housing Vouchers but have not yet successfully leased up due to lack of available units. Not able to meet initial goals.

Berkshire County Housing: also 6 week processing time; concerned about eventual expenditure of funds - hoping to get through 6/30/22 but we need to discuss what happens next after January. Berkshire County Regional is administering HAF for Berkshire County.

New Housing Resources Coming to our Region:

- Western MA DMH awarded Safe Havens program funding to Clinical Support Options (CSO) to create 7 Safe Havens beds in Greenfield - this is a 24/7 supported shelter for chronically homeless individuals with multiple barriers. Big thanks to our legislators for their advocacy to expand this program further in Western MA! The goal is to open this program by mid-February.
- Low-Threshold Housing: CSO has also been funded to provide 75 units of low-threshold permanent supportive housing across Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin Counties. Center for Human Development has been funded to provide 40 units of the

same housing in Holyoke. The goal is to open these programs in the next several months.

- Two New Requests for Responses from DHCD: Go here for more: [Sponsor Based Permanent Supportive Housing RFR](#) and the [State Opioid Response RFR](#).
- **EOHHS Capital Funds:** Gerry and Keleigh reported that the state has alerted its CoC youth projects that it has \$1.2-\$1.8 million to allocate statewide to support capital costs for development projects to house youth and young adults 18-24 years old. In Hampden County, will seek funds to support development of youth housing by Valley Opportunity Council in Chicopee (funded initially with Chicopee ARPA funds). In Three County, looking at 2 projects in Berkshire County. Please contact Keleigh Pereira, 3 County CoC director, with thoughts or recommendations at kpereira@communityaciton.us (must submit requests by early next week)

State ARPA Budget update: The Legislature passed its ARPA budget last week and is now in front of the Governor for possible vetoes (10 days from legislature passing) or signing. It contains \$600 million in investments in housing - [see here](#) for CHAPA's summary. Also included are housing earmarks via our state legislators for their districts (Sen. Comerford, Sen. Hinds and Rep. Farley-Bouvier). All together, the budget signals a meaningful advance to meet the region and state's housing needs (and we need much more) - big thanks to our Western MA legislators for their support.

Western MA Legislators (all 6 Senators and 17 Representatives) in the news for their joint letter to DHCD urging particular reforms to the individual shelter system. [Read all about it here.](#)

Sign on to Bring America Home Now: Please join this campaign led by the National Coalition for the Homelessness - sign on as an individual and/or organization to this campaign by going [here](#).

THANK YOU to our outgoing Northampton Mayor David Narkewicz and North Adams Mayor Tom Bernard for their incredible partnership in the effort to prevent and end homelessness in their cities and our region. We are so grateful!

Next meeting date: Thursday, January 13, 9 am